

**Navigating the Shifting Terrain: Teachers' Experiences  
with Queer Inclusive Education in the Ontario Catholic  
School System**

by  
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## **Abstract**

The study aimed to explore teachers' experiences with queer inclusive education within the Ontario Catholic school system using cultural historical activity theory and anti-oppressive education lenses. Phenomenological interviews, educational journey maps, and a vignette were used to document the experiences of three high school teachers. The findings revealed that queerness was not normalized in schools, despite the efforts made towards queer inclusive education; and, there is a need for institutional structures and processes to better support 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion in schools. Teachers have the power to enact change from the bottom-up. However, guidelines and resources are also necessary to aid educators and schools in fostering 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive practices. These findings underscore the need for collaboration between all levels of educational systems to work towards queer inclusive education.

**Keywords:** queer inclusive education; 2SLGBTQIA+; teacher perspectives; Ontario high schools; Catholic education

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to queer students who navigate educational environments on a daily basis, and to educators who are committed to fostering inclusivity in their classrooms and schools. Your resilience and advocacy for a more inclusive educational landscape makes a world of difference.

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# Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee.....	ii
Ethics Statement.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Figures.....	x
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Teacher Roles and 2SLGBTQIA+ Students.....	3
1.2. Queer Inclusive Education: A Historical Context .....	4
1.2.1. Canadian Context.....	4
1.2.2. Ontario Context.....	5
1.2.3. Ontario Catholic School Context.....	7
1.3. Key Terms.....	8
1.4. Theoretical Frameworks .....	9
1.4.1. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) .....	10
1.4.2. Anti-Oppressive Education.....	12
1.5. Purpose of the Study.....	15
<b>Chapter 2. Systematic Literature Review.....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1. Statement of the Problem.....	17
2.2. Literature Search and Coding Procedures .....	18
2.3. Systematic Literature Review Findings.....	21
2.3.1. Knowledge Production: Research Designs and Methods Used.....	21
2.3.2. Study Locations and Participants Involved.....	23
2.3.3. Theoretical Lenses Utilized .....	25
2.3.4. Queer Inclusive Education Research Key Findings.....	26
2.3.5. Recommendations from the Literature .....	37
2.4. Gaps in the Literature .....	40
2.5. Conclusion .....	41
<b>Chapter 3. Methodology.....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1. Research Questions and Design.....	42
3.1.1. Research Methods.....	42
3.1.2. Participants and Research Site.....	43
3.1.3. Participant Recruitment and Inclusion Criteria.....	44
3.1.4. Ethical Considerations .....	45
3.2. Researcher Positionality .....	45
3.3. Data Collection .....	46

3.3.1.	Interview Data.....	46
3.3.2.	Reflection Materials: Education Journey Maps and Vignette .....	47
3.3.3.	Teaching Artifacts.....	48
3.4.	Data Analysis: Coding and Theme Generation .....	48
3.4.1.	Phase 1: Getting Familiar with the Data .....	49
3.4.2.	Phase 2: Data Coding.....	50
3.4.3.	Phase 3: Initial Theme Generation.....	51
3.4.4.	Phase 4: Theme Development and Review .....	52
3.4.5.	Phase 5: Theme Refining, Defining, and Naming .....	54
3.4.6.	Phase 6: Writing Up.....	54
3.5.	Validity .....	54
<b>Chapter 4.</b>	<b>Findings.....</b>	<b>56</b>
4.1.	Theme 1: Queerness as Outside the Norm.....	57
4.1.1.	Ignorance towards Queer Inclusivity .....	58
4.1.2.	Parent/School Community Difficulty Accepting Queer Students .....	59
4.1.3.	Bullying due to Queerness .....	61
4.1.4.	Religious Beliefs Negatively Impacting Perceptions of Queerness .....	63
4.2.	Theme 2: Efforts Towards Queer Inclusion in Schools.....	65
4.2.1.	Representations of Queerness in Schools .....	65
4.2.2.	Student Support and Acceptance of Queerness .....	66
4.2.3.	Teachers Setting the Tone for their Classroom.....	67
4.2.4.	Queer Inclusive Education Implementation within Curriculum.....	69
4.2.5.	Teachers Navigating Their Roles to Support Queer Students .....	71
4.2.6.	Challenges with Implementing Queer Inclusive Education.....	73
4.3.	Theme 3: The Need for Institutional Structures and Processes to Support Queer Inclusive Education.....	74
4.3.1.	Backlash Surrounding Queerness in Education.....	75
4.3.2.	Call for Teacher Education and Professional Development around Queerness.....	77
4.3.3.	School Board Programs About Various Oppressed Minority Groups.....	80
<b>Chapter 5.</b>	<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>83</b>
5.1.	Normalizing Queerness in Schools.....	83
5.2.	Teachers as Agents of Change.....	88
5.3.	Systemic Efforts and Institutionalized Support .....	93
<b>Chapter 6.</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>103</b>
6.1.	Summary of Findings.....	103
6.2.	Limitations .....	105
6.3.	Recommendations.....	106
6.3.1.	Normalizing Queerness in Schools.....	106

6.3.2.	Teachers as Agents of Change .....	108
6.3.3.	Systemic Efforts and Institutionalized Support .....	109
6.4.	Future Research Considerations .....	111
6.5.	Final Thoughts/Conclusion.....	112
<b>References .....</b>		<b>113</b>
<b>Appendix A.</b>	<b>Literature Search Results and Included Articles.....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Appendix B.</b>	<b>Systematic Literature Review: Summary of Included Articles .</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Appendix C.</b>	<b>Participant Profiles .....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Appendix D.</b>	<b>Recruitment Flyer .....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Appendix E.</b>	<b>Consent Form .....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Appendix F.</b>	<b>Interview Protocol.....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>Appendix G.</b>	<b>Educational Journey Mapping .....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Appendix H.</b>	<b>Vignette .....</b>	<b>139</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1.	Cluster Visualization.....	52
Figure 2.	Clustering and Theme Development .....	53
Figure 3.	Queer Inclusive Education in Schools as An Activity System.....	57

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

Jamie Hubley loved pop music, watching the TV show *Glee*, and figure skating while he was growing up (Mauro, 2011). Like most teenagers in the early 2010s, he posted about his interests on social media, especially on Tumblr. He lived in Kanata, in the west end of Ottawa, Ontario. By grade seven, Jamie was being bullied by several students at school, including being called offensive names such as ‘fag’ in the hallways between classes. Much of this bullying stemmed from Jamie being a figure skater, and one day on the school bus that same year, he was accosted by students, who tried to stuff batteries down his throat. Jamie’s parents eventually moved him from his Catholic school to a public high school in an attempt to stop the bullying. Shortly after this, Jamie came to terms with his sexuality and told his family and friends that he was gay. He was met with acceptance and love. Jamie did not want to hide who he was, so he was also publicly out in his school and community. In his high school, Jamie started a “Rainbow Club” alliance for queer youth to advocate for acceptance in schools. However, Jamie would often find the handmade posters that he put up around the school for his program torn down by other students. Jamie was one of the few openly gay students in his school, and he was repeatedly bullied for it. Jamie was suffering from depression and was engaging in self-harming behaviours as a coping mechanism. One Saturday in October 2011, 15-year-old Jamie died by suicide. This was after he posted a goodbye note on Tumblr for his family and friends. It was entitled “you can’t break...when you’re already broken” and outlined how he felt that he could not endure depression or suffering for three more years of high school (Mauro, 2011).

Jamie’s suicide rocked the public and drew attention to the plight of mental health and depression for teenagers, especially for queer youth. Jamie’s experience was widely reported on in the media and was likely amplified by his father being a city councilman, as he used his platform to speak out about the bullying and treatment of gay youth. Pearson (2011) claims that this attention put pressure on the Ottawa school boards and educators who were involved with Jamie to examine whether they had done enough to

help Jamie when he was a student in their schools. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's director of education at the time, Jennifer Adams, spoke about how the teachers she talked with felt loss, frustration, and like they had done everything they could for Jamie (Pearson, 2011). Adams was asked about school policy related to homophobic comments, and she responded that it was treated like other bullying instances. This involved letting students know their comments were inappropriate and progressively implementing various steps of discipline such as notifying parents, recommending restorative action, etc. The Catholic school board superintendent, Tom D'Amico, who oversaw Jamie's previous school, reported that he had no knowledge of the bullying Jamie endured while he was at the school (Pearson, 2011). This included the incident when Jamie was in grade seven and students attempted to assault him with batteries on the bus. This points to the oversight and lack of attention to homophobic-based bullying at this school. While teachers may try to monitor the comments and bullying incidents they hear and observe between students, it will never be enough unless schools foster an inclusive environment, including discussing diverse gender and sexual identities positively and openly in classrooms (Campbell et al., 2021).

Jamie's story and the widespread media attention it garnered prompted scholars to conduct research into the mental health of 2SLGBTQIA+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic, plus) youth and the Ontario school climate for queer students (Government of Canada, 2023; Liboro et al., 2015). The scholarly interest in queer student mental health in Ontario schools surpassed that of previous academic research in this area following Jamie's death (Liboro et al., 2015; Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016). One example by Peter, Taylor, and Campbell (2016) explored the link between suicidality and school climate and named their article after the title of Jamie's suicide note. Research into queer students has found that queer youth experience higher rates of harassment and discrimination than their heterosexual peers (Fisher et al., 2008; Liboro et al., 2015; Meyer et al., 2015). Teachers are well-placed in school systems to advocate for inclusion and support queer students who are struggling with bullying and lack of acceptance (Luceno et al., 2022).

This introduction briefly touches on the roles of teachers and school-based difficulties for queer youth, which will be expanded on in the literature review. Next, the history of queerness in Canada is reviewed, namely regarding the legal and education system. Subsequently, the context in Ontario is catalogued, which centers around the recent political history of the sexual education curriculum. To conclude the historical context section of the introduction, Ontario Catholic schools are examined. It is important to first understand the background and context of Canada, Ontario, Ontario Catholic high schools, and the roles of teachers within them, as culture and history mediate the present environment and circumstances. Thus, it is essential to learn about the past in order to have a foundation for understanding the present (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). Next, the key terms in this study are elucidated. Subsequently, the theoretical frameworks being used to analyze this thesis are explained. Lastly, the purpose of the present study and the research questions are outlined.

## **1.1. Teacher Roles and 2SLGBTQIA+ Students**

The influential role of teachers in schools positions them to significantly impact student well-being as they observe and interact with students throughout each school day (Luceno et al., 2022). As Luceno et al. (2022) found, the majority of educators believe it is important to their roles as teachers to make schools safer and more inclusive spaces for all students. Educators can act as safe contacts for students and can buffer queer youth from potential victimization (Luceno et al., 2022). Meyer et al. (2015) conducted a survey of educators across Canada and found that 66.5% of teachers reported an awareness of verbal harassment directed towards students who their peers believed to be 2SLGBTQIA+. Studies by Fisher et al. (2008), Russell (2003), and Van Wormer and McKinney (2003) found that these students are at a higher risk of developing mental health issues as well as emotional and behavioural challenges, including substance use, absenteeism, depression, and suicide. Many of these risks have been connected to the reactions that 2SLGBTQIA+ youth receive when they come out to those closest to them (Liboro et al., 2015). Queer youth who experience rejection after coming out, such as from peers as in Jamie's case, have elevated risk levels in the above-mentioned areas.

The heightened potential for mental health, behavioural, and emotional issues make adolescence and high school a challenging period for many queer youths.

The difficulties that 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals face in schools are often rooted in discrimination and prejudices from students, teachers, policy makers, and school administrators (Fisher et al., 2008; Liboro et al., 2015). While the associated mental health and behavioural challenges of queer students have been well-documented in the United States public school system, less research on these areas has been conducted within Canada (Fisher et al., 2008; Liboro et al., 2015). For the studies that have focused on student populations in Canada, few have concentrated on supporting queer students in religious schools (Liboro et al., 2015). Teachers are the front-line workers who deal with implementing queer inclusive lessons in their classrooms and might face potential backlash for it (Luceno et al., 2022). The experiences of teachers are vital to understand the current state of queer inclusive education in Ontario Catholic high schools (Callaghan, 2015; Peter et al., 2018). This study aims to understand teacher perspectives on gender and sexual diversity inclusion and discourse in their classrooms and schools, in order to lay the groundwork for future research to establish how to support educators with integrating 2SLGBTQIA+ content into Ontario Catholic schools. It is necessary to first understand the context in Canada, Ontario, and Ontario Catholic schools around 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and queer inclusive education, as its culture and history have shaped the practices in schools (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). Thus, the historical context is examined below.

## **1.2. Queer Inclusive Education: A Historical Context**

### **1.2.1. Canadian Context**

The overall atmosphere and attitudes that contribute to the perception of diverse gender and sexual identities in schools are often set at the provincial or federal level (Liboro et al., 2015). Across the world, there are still many places where being queer is illegal and can lead to imprisonment, corporal punishment, or even the death penalty, such as in Saudi Arabia or Iran. While there are still struggles for equality, the majority of

countries in the Global North have legalized same-sex marriage (Malins, 2016). Canada was the fourth country in the world to make same-sex marriage legal with the passing of the Civil Marriage Act in 2005 (Malins, 2016). This social change in Canada led to an increase in married queer couples and same-sex parents who have school-age children. As Malins (2016) points out, it should be a right for children to be educated about their legal entitlements and see depictions of queerness within countries where same-sex marriage is legal. It is particularly important for children who have queer parents, or youth who are queer themselves, to view portrayals of families with same-sex parents in books or other educational materials as part of inclusive education (Malins, 2016). Across Canada, the past decade has seen an increase in curricular focus on inclusive education that incorporates diverse gender and sexual identities (Malins, 2016). As Tompkins et al. (2019) argue, queer inclusive education does not necessarily need to be in the form of sexual education as many protesting parents and teachers believe. Including diverse gender and sexual identities in the classroom could be as simple as reading a story where a family has two mothers. Although national guidelines in Canada promote comprehensive education, each province and territory regulates their own educational system, policies, and curricula, which has led to variations in what students in each province learn in school regarding diverse gender and sexual identities (Albert, 2022).

### **1.2.2. Ontario Context**

In 2006, the Ontario Human Rights Code was updated to make it against the law to discriminate against someone on the basis of their sexual orientation (Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC], 2006). This applies to employment, along with other areas such as services and accommodations. In 2012, gender identity and gender expression were added as protected items to the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC, 2012). The OHRC created a policy in 2014 preventing discrimination due to gender identity and expression. This also protected transgender people from harassment and discrimination in the workplace. While queer identities are covered by the law in Ontario, they have not yet been accepted and integrated into inclusive education in schools (Malins, 2016).

It was in 2010, after a two-year consultation process, that an update to the 1998 sexual education curriculum in Ontario was attempted under Dalton McGinty's Liberal provincial government (Hune-Brown, 2015). However, this effort was met with strong resistance from members of the Conservative Party, parents, and religious groups, and was ultimately shut down (Hune-Brown, 2015). In 2015, Kathleen Wynne's Liberal Ontario government proposed a revised Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum. For the first time, the curriculum would address same-sex relationships and gender identity in schools, among other topics such as the importance of mental health and maintaining a healthy body image (Hune-Brown, 2015; Thompson, 2018). These changes brought Ontario up-to-date with other provinces in Canada. For example, Ontario students would now be learning about anatomy only a year after students in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Alberta (Hune-Brown, 2015). While there were protests (from newly formed groups such as "Parents as First Educators") against teaching these concepts to students, the government successfully passed their revised curriculum (Hune-Brown, 2015).

In 2018, a new Conservative government under Doug Ford won the Ontario provincial election and rose to power; in mere months, they had repealed the modernized version of the sex education curriculum (Jones, 2019a). With this political change, the curriculum temporarily reverted to the 1998 program while they worked on revising the 2015 version, which resulted in excluding 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and content. This decision led to several protests and legal cases from students, teachers, and the public, including the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association who brought the case to court, arguing that the lack of inclusiveness put students at risk and impacted the freedom of expression for teachers (Jones, 2019a). The court ultimately dismissed the case and ruled that it was not in their jurisdiction to make legislative and policy decisions. The topic continued to be heavily debated in Ontario (Jones, 2019a).

After holding a public consultation that concluded in December 2018, the Ontario government began revising the 2015 sex education curriculum (Jones, 2019b). In August 2019, the government revealed the new curriculum, which maintained several of the

highly-debated topics from the Liberal's 2015 plan. Lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity were still mandatory, although taught at different grade levels than the original curriculum. Items like consent, sexting, and mental health were kept in the curriculum as well, with parents having the authority to choose for their children to opt out of certain lessons on topics they may not agree with or believe are not age-appropriate. The similarity between the Liberals' 2015 curriculum and the revised Conservative curriculum led to accusations aimed at the Conservative government that they had created instability in schools and classrooms for a year all for the sake of gaining more votes during the election (Jones, 2019b). For example, some of the criticism came from NDP education critic Marit Stiles and interim Liberal leader John Fraser (Jones, 2019b). The government outlined that some topics in the curriculum (e.g. masturbation) are optional and teachers may decide whether or not they will discuss it. Teachers have the flexibility to use their professional judgment to discuss concepts like gender identity earlier than mandated (Jones, 2019b). This reinforces why the present study is needed, in order to understand what discussions teachers have in their classrooms around diverse gender and sexual identities.

### **1.2.3. Ontario Catholic School Context**

In the educational system in Canada, governmental funding is provided to multiple educational bodies, rather than only to public schools (Liboro et al., 2015). In the provinces of Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, Catholic schools are publicly funded and, thus, fall under provincial and federal policies and mandates (Liboro et al., 2015). This means that the mandatory curriculum in Ontario, including lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity, must also be taught in Catholic schools. However, it is up to each school board to implement additional policies or subject matter. For example, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has developed its own policies related to providing all-gender washrooms in schools to support transgender and non-binary students. In contrast, many Catholic school boards have not taken these extra steps for gender and sexual diversity inclusive education (Liboro et al., 2015).

As Peter et al. (2018) argue, Catholicism is often discussed as being contrary to gender and sexual diversity inclusive education. For example, in 2012 the Accepting Schools Act to combat bullying was passed (Schwartz, 2012). It required all schools in Ontario to allow students to form 2SLGBTQIA+ alliance/anti-bullying groups called gay-straight alliances (GSA) (Lapointe, 2015; Schwartz, 2012). Ontario's Catholic bishops stated that while they were not supportive of bullying, they believed too much emphasis was being given to 2SLGBTQIA+ people, which was the same objection they took with the title of gay-straight alliance (Schwartz, 2012). The bishops argued that all forms of bullying needed to be addressed instead of focusing on specific populations. However, the GSA clause in Bill 13 that the Catholic bishops took issue with was included because sexual orientation was the second most common reason why students were bullied (Schwartz, 2012). The Accepting Schools Act still passed and allowed all Ontario students the right to create a GSA at their school, including Catholic schools. Peter et al. (2018) discuss how not all members of a religious group agree with every aspect of the religion, for example Catholicism in general condemning same-sex marriage yet some Catholic individuals supporting it. This is true for some Catholic educators, who use gender and sexual diversity inclusive education teaching practices (Peter et al., 2018). This added layer of religious beliefs impacts the school environment, which is why the present study examines Ontario Catholic school teachers in particular. Thinking back to Jamie Hubley's story, more research in this area and having better policies and interventions in place to foster a more inclusive environment for queer students could have made a difference for Jamie.

### **1.3. Key Terms**

Throughout this thesis, the term '*queer*' will be used as an umbrella term that includes anyone who does not identify as straight or cisgender and will be used interchangeably with the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+.

The term "queer inclusion" refers to efforts to create environments, attitudes, policies, and practices that support and welcome 2SLGBTQIA+ people (Goldstein et al.,

2021). This involves recognizing and respecting diversity while ensuring that all people feel valued and able to fully participate in society without discrimination.

Finally, the term “queer inclusive education” narrows the scope of queer inclusion to focus on school or educational settings. I operate with a similar definition of queer inclusive education that Taylor et al. (2016) outline, “to make schools safe and respectful places for sexual and gender minority students, as well as for the many heterosexual students who are directly targeted or otherwise distressed by harassment and marginalization on the basis of gender and sexuality” (pp. 118-119). 2SLGBTQIA+-inclusive practices foster queer inclusive education by transforming schools into sites with diversity-embracing classrooms and curriculum that accepts queer students (Peter et al., 2018).

#### **1.4. Theoretical Frameworks**

This research was guided by Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT; Engeström, 2000; Engeström & Sannino, 2021) and anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). CHAT is a theoretical framework that can be used to analyze the connection between what people think and feel, and the activities they do (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). CHAT allows us to understand the relationships between individuals – students, educators, families, schools, researchers – and the tools they use to achieve desirable outcomes (e.g., in this case, queer inclusive education research and practices) (Engeström, 2000; Engeström & Sannino, 2021). At its core, CHAT situates human activity and tools within history and culture to determine how they might shape an activity’s outcome and its participants (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). In addition to CHAT, the anti-oppressive education framework will be used in this study. Anti-oppressive education strives to understand the dynamics of all forms of oppression and find avenues to address and actively work against it in schools (Kumashiro, 2000). I will discuss each in turn.

### **1.4.1. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)**

CHAT was initially developed drawing on Lev Vygotsky's work. CHAT employs Vygotsky's concept of action being object-oriented and artifact-mediated (Engeström & Sannino, 2021; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). Object-oriented action refers to direct engagement towards achieving a goal, e.g., focusing on composing paragraphs to write an essay. Artifact-mediated action involves using tools to mediate the activity, e.g., using the spell check software on Microsoft Word to facilitate writing an essay. In CHAT's next evolution, the influence of Leontiev became prominent with the concept of activity as a unit of analysis (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). CHAT was further developed by Engeström (2000) and focused on the idea of interacting activity systems pointed at partially shared objects (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). CHAT is used to study complex social environments (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). Due to this aptness for complexity, Waitoller and Kozleski (2013) illustrate how the theory is well-suited for application in educational fields. This theory is a tool for analyzing social structures and the interactions between the various components that work towards achieving a certain objective (Engeström & Sannino, 2021; Pearson, 2009).

There are six elements in CHAT. These are features of the activity system that mediate the learning and actions of people (Engeström & Sannino, 2021; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). The activity system involves a subject, community, artifacts/mediating tools, object, division of labor, and rules (Engeström & Sannino, 2021; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). In the case of this thesis, the subjects were teachers, and the object was the goal of implementing queer inclusive education. The communities involve the educator's subject level team, school, student body, school board, and the neighborhood they operate in. The division of labor is who is doing what to work towards the object (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). The rules include school policies, teaching regulations, and provincial educational guidelines. Finally, the artifacts are any factors or tools that mediate teachers' experiences with queer inclusive education implementation. The activity system is the dynamic network of interconnected elements that collectively shape the outcome of the goal of advancing queer inclusion in schools (Engeström, 2000). The object provides the activity with a direction and identity, which are constantly evolving

(Engeström & Sannino, 2021). The activity elements are interconnected and interdependent because they mutually influence and shape each other (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). Subjects interact with tools, are guided by rules, and interact within a division of labour, which are all impacted by the broader community and cultural context (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). The activity is shaped by the culture and history that surrounds it. Ideally, the elements must work together to achieve the goal, otherwise there will be a misalignment, which results in contradictions that prevent the goal from being achieved (Engeström, 2000). Contradictions refer to tensions that arise within elements of an activity system when the elements are working in contrast to each other (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). Through the process of addressing contradictions, activity systems can evolve and lead to new practices and tools (Engeström & Sannino, 2021).

CHAT was employed as the lens through which I examined the dynamics of the activity elements and the ways in which culture and history shaped teachers' work in queer inclusive education implementation in Ontario Catholic schools. Earlier in this chapter, I reviewed the cultural historical context for queer inclusion in Canada, including the ties to the legal and educational systems. CHAT allowed me to examine the studied phenomena and how it evolved over time. This involved analyzing the context in Ontario for 2SLGBTQIA+ identities. Specifically, the OHRC (2012) which evolved to protect queer people from discrimination by law, as well as the Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum that was officially updated in 2019 after a decade-long public debate (Hune-Brown, 2015; Jones, 2019b). I also applied CHAT to understand the context for Ontario Catholic schools, by looking at the publicly funded educational system and the tensions between provincial rules and Catholicism, e.g., the Accepting Schools Act and backlash from Ontario's Catholic Bishops (Schwartz, 2012). The lenses of culture and history within CHAT were vital as they provided insights to the broader socio-cultural context within which people and activities are situated (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). Culture has shaped the attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to queer identities, and the history provided insights into the roots of discrimination and marginalization towards 2SLGBTQIA+ people over time. CHAT allowed me to map out the context in which educators work and understand the ways it might shape educators' perspectives on queer inclusive education.

Due to the complex nature of educational systems, CHAT is a useful lens for analyzing and interpreting the Ontario Catholic school context around queer inclusive education. As Hancock and Miller (2018) argued, CHAT is well-suited for inclusive education research as it allows for a recognition of context and various influences, an exploration of opportunities and challenges, a refinement of practices, and a discovery of areas for change. Thus, CHAT will be utilized to determine teachers' experiences and perspectives with queer inclusive education and its activity system. This theoretical framework will help to understand what teachers do to implement queer inclusive education in their practice.

### **1.4.2. Anti-Oppressive Education**

This research was also shaped by Kumashiro's (2000, 2002) conceptualization of anti-oppressive education. Oppression in education refers to a range of issues that impact groups, including racism, ableism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism, with a particular emphasis on groups who are historically marginalized in society. Kumashiro's 2002 book titled *Troubling Education: 'Queer' Activism and Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy* discusses anti-oppressive pedagogy coupled with queer activism, and was vital in framing the present study because the subject matter sits at the intersection of this research. The book offers a resource to both educators and researchers to engage in anti-oppressive education and activism with an emphasis on queerness (Kumashiro, 2002). Below, I review the elements of anti-oppressive education and how each relates to this study.

#### ***Education for the Other***

Kumashiro (2000, 2002) articulates the four main ways of thinking about and working against oppression. Each approach has its own way of defining the nature of oppression and the strategies needed in education to propel change. The first approach to anti-oppressive education is education for the Other. The term 'Other' means groups that are historically marginalized in society, who are perceived as other than the norm (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). For example, this includes students of colour or students who are queer. Within this approach, addressing oppression means to concentrate on the students who are Othered or oppressed and working to improve their experiences

(Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). Oppression in education is conceptualized as schools being spaces where the Other is treated with harm, both through the actions of some people (such as bullying) and through the inactions of others (including educators and administrators) (Kumashiro, 2000). Additionally, Kumashiro (2000, 2002) outlines how oppression comes from the expectations of the Other—whether conscious or unconscious—that impact how they are treated (e.g., racial stereotypes). In this approach, there are two main avenues to address oppression: (1) schools needing to be helpful and affirming for all students while providing spaces specifically designated for Othered students where they can receive support; and (2) educators acknowledging and embracing the diversity of students, instead of ignoring it in their classrooms (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002).

### ***Education About the Other***

The next approach is education about the Other, which focuses on curriculum (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). This approach rests on an assumption that to disrupt oppression, all students should know about the Other. My study benefits from this lens as I discuss the curriculum related to diverse gender and sexual identities and how educators navigate these discussions in their classrooms. Oppression is approached as a knowledge shortage or distortion that many students have about the Other because of exclusion and marginalization (Kumashiro, 2000). To combat oppression, there should be lessons in the curriculum about the Other, as well as integrating this knowledge throughout the curriculum (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). This could be manifested as dedicated units about queer identities, in addition to intertwining queer representation into lessons, such as discussing the gay resistance movement when learning about civil rights movements. This integration can help lead to queer-inclusive and gender-expansive education.

### ***Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering***

The third approach to anti-oppressive education is education that is critical of privileging and Othering. This element emphasizes how schools privilege certain societal groups, while marginalizing others, thus further legitimizing and upholding social structures and ideologies (Kumashiro, 2000). We must look past the outward

manifestations of homophobia when it comes to the oppression of queer students, and instead look at heteronormativity and how cisgender and heterosexual identities are treated as the default norm in society (Kumashiro, 2000), an assumption that schools continue to uphold (Bain & Podmore, 2020). Therefore, to work against oppression, a deep critique of dominant structures and ideologies in society and schools must be enacted (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). The education system is called to work against its own complicity with oppression (Kumashiro, 2000). This critique and transformation starts with knowledge about oppression and being able to recognize and understand the inequities in society (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). Educators can then teach about the processes through which groups are Othered, as well as about normalcy as a social construct that controls who and what people are supposed to be (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). There must also be a process of self-reflection and unlearning, to dispel the ingrained privileging that most people learn from a young age (Kumashiro, 2000). Overall, this approach to anti-oppressive education starts with critical thinking that propels students towards action and challenging oppression (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002).

### ***Education that Changes Students and Society***

Finally, the fourth approach views oppression as being produced discursively, and helps to inform understandings of how oppression can manifest and thus be transformed in a variety of contexts (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). Oppression, in this view, originates in discourse that forms how people think, feel, and act, particularly by repeating harmful discourses and continuing the cycle of damaging histories (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). Education that changes students and society, as Kumashiro (2000) argues, includes understanding that the ways people think are framed by both what is said and what is not said. Kumashiro (2000, 2002) used the word ‘queer’ to illustrate a change that has been made. The term was originally spoken by people to denote that someone was strange, criminal, or mentally ill because they were not cisgender or heterosexual. However, community members began to reclaim the word ‘queer’ and use it as a positive and empowering representation of their identity under the LGBTQ2SIA+ umbrella. Kumashiro (2000) argues that educators and education researchers must use a combination of the above four approaches to fight against social oppression that impacts

students. Additionally, it is necessary to alter our conceptualizations of oppression, teaching and learning, and the purpose of school itself (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002).

Anti-oppressive education, as conceptualized by Kumashiro (2000, 2002), is applicable to the present study that focuses on queerness in school settings. The framework allows extraction and critical analysis of Ontario Catholic school educators' perspectives. It focuses on exposing forms of oppression, like homophobia, and proposes methods for disrupting discrimination in schools (Callaghan, 2016). As a form of anti-oppressive education, queer inclusive education involves curricular, pedagogical, policy, program, and regulatory changes to challenge oppression and privilege in schools and educational systems (Kumashiro, 2002; Meyer et al., 2015). Combining the lenses of CHAT and anti-oppressive pedagogy offers a way to identify and critically examine the experiences of teachers working in Ontario Catholic high schools regarding queer inclusive education.

## **1.5. Purpose of the Study**

Positioned at the center of the debate on what to include in school-based discussions around diverse gender and sexual identities are the teachers, as they are the ones implementing the material with students and dealing with potential backlash from parents or community groups if they disagree with the content (Luceno et al., 2022). In the academic literature from Ontario regarding diverse gender and sexual identity curriculum, the voices of teachers are missing, particularly from the Catholic schools (Callaghan, 2015; Peter et al., 2018). This thesis aimed to understand the experiences of high school teachers in navigating discussions of diverse gender and sexual identities in classrooms in the Ontario Catholic school system. It is necessary to first hear from teachers about their experiences in order to lay the foundation on how to support educators in integrating queer inclusive education into their schools. Two research questions guide this study:

1. What are the perspectives and experiences of teachers working in Catholic high schools in Ontario on 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education?

2. To what degree are diverse gender and sexual identities being taught in Catholic high schools in Ontario?

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Systematic Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to systematically review research within the field of education that examines diverse gender and sexual identities in schools within Canada. This review was guided by the following question: What are the key themes in educational research focusing on queer inclusion, discourse, and approaches in Canadian secondary school environments? In my research, I found 33 qualifying studies that illuminated the current state of gender and sexual diversity inclusive education in Canada. Below, I outline my search and coding procedures that were used to identify the articles included in this review. Next, I examine the common methods of data collection, populations, and research framing in the articles. I then summarize the reviewed articles through the eight themes of educator positionality, heteronormativity, harassment of queer students, queer youth mental health, queer educator experiences, intersectionality, supporting queerness in schools, and barriers to queer inclusive education. I conclude by discussing the gaps and recommendations from the articles around bullying prevention, professional development for teachers, and inclusive spaces and visibility.

#### **2.1. Statement of the Problem**

As I discussed in the introductory chapter above, queer youth experience higher rates of harassment than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Liboro et al., 2015; Meyer et al., 2015). The discrimination these students encounter can negatively impact their mental health and overall well-being (Fisher et al., 2008). Approximately two-thirds of teachers in Canada were found to be aware of verbal harassment directed at queer students (Meyer et al., 2015). This points to the position that teachers have in observing the dynamics of homophobia and transphobia in school settings. Teachers have the ability to set the tone in their classrooms and integrate inclusivity into their teaching practices if they so choose (Malins, 2016). Educators' firsthand experiences with the current climate in school systems grant them a unique viewpoint regarding queer inclusion. Understanding educators' perspectives on the presence and navigation of diverse gender

and sexuality inclusive education will contribute to how queer inclusive education is understood and approached in Ontario Catholic schools.

When diverse gender and sexual identities are discussed openly and positively in classrooms, there is potential for it to benefit the mental health and well-being of students (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017; Liboro et al., 2015; Van Wormer & McKinney, 2003). For individuals who may be questioning their gender or sexual identity, the classroom has the potential to be a secure space to learn and explore these subjects, if the student feels safe to do so (Fisher et al., 2008; Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017; Liboro et al., 2015). To create a queer-inclusive atmosphere in classrooms, educators must navigate the stigma associated with queerness and generate conversations in which students and staff members feel comfortable partaking (Malins, 2016). Highlighting educator experiences with queer inclusive education will lay the foundation for future changes as to how sexual and gender diversity is approached in Ontario Catholic schools.

## **2.2. Literature Search and Coding Procedures**

This section outlines the procedures utilized in the literature search to determine which articles would be used in the review. The articles that met the inclusion criteria were coded for further analysis to determine the current state of diverse gender and sexual identity inclusive education in Canada. Prior to conducting this literature search, I identified the inclusion and exclusion criteria that would be used to search and select relevant studies. Articles were included in the review if they: (a) were an empirical study related to diverse gender and sexual identity inclusion in schools; (b) focused on publicly funded and provincially regulated schools in Canada; (c) involved grade 9 to 12 students, educators, and/or settings; (d) were written in the English language; and (e) were published in a peer-reviewed journal between 2010 and 2023. This range of years was selected due to the political debate around the sexual education curriculum in Ontario in 2010, and in order to capture the academic response to this social discourse. The focus on grades nine to twelve was chosen to match the high school teacher population that comprised the participants for the present thesis research. Studies that took place with both elementary and secondary school populations were included due to the frequent

focus on secondary schools, however, this review examined the results specific to secondary schools if the author differentiated them. For example, Meyer et al. (2015) conducted a large-scale online survey of kindergarten to grade 12 educators which was included in the review. Articles were excluded from this literature review if they: (a) were opinion papers, literature reviews, or conceptual papers; (b) involved privately funded schools; (c) took place solely in an elementary, preschool, or post-secondary context; (d) were written in a language other than English; or (e) described gender and sexual diversity inclusive education in a country other than Canada.

Online searches were employed to identify relevant studies. The three electronic databases that were used were ERIC (EBSCO), Education Source, and Google Scholar. Five searches were conducted on the three databases, each starting with the key search terms ‘educat\*’ or ‘school’ and ‘queer’ or ‘lgb\*’ and ‘Canada’. The search strings varied based on the last term, which in order were (1) ‘curricul\*’, (2) ‘high school’ or ‘secondary’, (3) ‘sex\* ed\*’ or ‘inclusive sex\* ed\*’, (4) ‘inclusive ed\*’, and (5) ‘teacher’ or ‘educator’. When a term that was longer than one word was used, quotation marks were utilized around that phrase to ensure the key term was kept together. For example, the second search string ended with “high school” or ‘secondary’.

The searches on all three databases were conducted in March 2023. For the ERIC (EBSCO) database, the advanced search option was utilized on Boolean/Phrase mode, with the Peer Reviewed, Full Text, and Apply Equivalent Subjects boxes checked. Education Level, Intended Audience, Journal or Document, and What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Reviewed sections were set to ‘All’, the Language selected was ‘English’, and Publication Type was ‘Journal Articles’. For the Education Source database, the advanced search option was set to Boolean/Phrase mode, and the boxes were checked for the Peer Reviewed, Full Text, and Apply Equivalent Subjects sections. The Document Type section was set to ‘All’, the Language selected was ‘English’, and Publication Type was ‘Academic Journal’. The Google Scholar searches were conducted via the Advanced Search Option. The search phrases described in the above paragraph were inputted into the ‘with all of the words’ line, with the box ticked for the words to occur ‘anywhere in the article’. The articles were sorted by relevance, and ‘Any type’ of

result was selected rather than ‘Review articles’, as the latter option mainly returned results for literature reviews. Finally, for all three databases, the date range was set to 2010 to 2023.

The five searches outlined earlier produced a total of 100 results in the ERIC (EBSCO) database. Thirty-one of these met my inclusion criteria, and once the duplicates were removed, I was left with 16 articles from this database for my review. For the Education Source searches, there were 131 total results and 21 of them met my inclusion criteria. After removing the duplicates, there were 12 articles remaining for inclusion in my review. In total, the searches in Google Scholar yielded approximately 34,560 results. I stopped reviewing the results after the point of saturation was hit and the results were deemed no longer relevant; this occurred on pages 17 and 21 for the second and fifth search strings. Forty of these results from Google Scholar fit my inclusion criteria, and after duplicate articles were removed, I was left with 26 articles to be included in my review. Between the three databases, there were 92 articles included, and once duplicates were extracted, 33 articles remained for this review (see Appendix A).

The articles included in the literature review were coded using NVivo 12 software. A codebook was developed prior to the coding process. As Saldaña (2021) outlines, a codebook is a record of the codes or themes being used during qualitative coding to keep track of each code, their description, and possibly an example to guide the researcher. Maintaining a codebook allows for revisiting the content and organizing the codes as necessary (Saldaña, 2021). The codebook determined what information from the articles would be useful to examine for the literature review, particularly items that could point to larger themes and trends across the field. A total of 19 codes were created to understand the current state of diverse gender and sexual identity inclusive education in Canada: (1) Abstract, (2) Author’s Focus for Queer Inclusion, (3) Conceptual/Theoretical Framing, (4) Data Analysis, (5) Data Collection, (6) Design of Research (qualitative, quantitative, mixed), (7) Findings, (8) Grade Level, (9) Intersections, (10) Journal, (11) Location, (12) Participants, (13) Purpose, (14) Recommendations for Future Research, (15) Research Questions, (16) Sampling Procedure, (17) School Type, (18) Timeline, and (19) Title, author(s), and publication year. The definition of each code was defined before

commencing coding and was kept in a reference book to ensure the understanding of each item was clear throughout the process. For example, the definition of the ‘Author’s Focus for Queer Inclusion’ code described how the authors defined queer inclusive education and what aspect of it they directed their attention towards, such as the role of GSAs in schools. The ‘Intersections’ code examined if the study intersected with other areas, e.g. racial identities and queerness. The same researcher coded all of the articles to ensure consistency throughout the process. However, an additional researcher reviewed preliminary coding to establish reliability (Saldaña, 2021). The articles were coded and analyzed to understand the key themes in education research focusing on queer inclusive education in high schools in Canada.

## **2.3. Systematic Literature Review Findings**

### **2.3.1. Knowledge Production: Research Designs and Methods Used**

The 33 articles that I examined in this literature review were organized thematically (see the Literature Review Findings section) as well as based on their research designs. 19 of the 33 articles in this review used a qualitative design (see Appendix B). Eight articles had a mixed methods format, and six studies utilized a quantitative model. In examining gender and sexual diversity in high schools across Canada, the data collection methods employed in the included articles were interviews (Bortolin, 2010; Goldstein et al., 2021), surveys and questionnaires (Campbell et al., 2021; Peter et al., 2018), observations (Lapointe, 2014), case studies (Harriot et al., 2018), focus groups (Bain & Podmore, 2020; Ingrey, 2012), workshops (Burkholder et al., 2021), and interventions (Burk et al., 2018).

Out of the 33 total articles included in this review, 18 studies employed interviews (Bain & Podmore, 2020; Bortolin, 2010; Broom, 2013; Ferfolja, 2013; Goldstein et al., 2021; Liboro et al., 2015; Ng et al., 2019). This indicates that interviews are a common method for investigating gender and sexual diversity inclusive education in Canada. A prevalent purpose of the studies using interviews was to understand the experiences and opinions of their participants, as interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of the

subject matter (Broom, 2013; Callaghan, 2015, Callaghan, 2016; Surette, 2019; Tompkins et al., 2019). The participants were frequently stakeholders in schools; educators (Bain & Podmore, 2020; Callaghan, 2015; Campbell et al., 2021), students (Bortolin, 2010; Lapointe, 2014), course developers (Broom, 2013), queer families (Goldstein et al., 2021), and school administrators (Liboro et al., 2015). The interviews often sought to understand participants' and their experiences, practices, approaches, and views around diverse gender and sexual inclusive education (Callaghan, 2015; Callaghan, 2016; Goldstein et al., 2021; Ingrey, 2012; Lapointe, 2016). Interviews were a prominent method to conduct research on diverse gender and sexual inclusive education in Canada. Employing interviews allowed researchers to gather nuanced information directly from participants and gain insight into the perspectives and experiences of participants (Seidman, 2019). Interviews also offered flexibility in adapting questions and approaches for individuals, as well as built rapport and trust between the interviewer and participants to encourage honest, open dialogue (Seidman, 2019).

The interviews that were used for data collection in the reviewed articles embodied a range of formats, including semi-structured (Bain & Podmore, 2020; Callaghan, 2015; Ferfolja, 2013), open-ended (Lapointe, 2014), one-on-one (Ingrey, 2012), group interviews (Ferfolja, 2013), narrative interviewing (Surette, 2019), and video interviews (Goldstein et al., 2021). Out of all the interview approaches employed, individual semi-structured interviews were the most frequently used (Lapointe, 2015; Lapointe, 2016; Liboro et al., 2015; Short, 2010). This indicates that interviews allowed participants to shape the content with their unique experiences, resulting in rich data about queer inclusive education. Eleven articles employed interviews as the sole data collection method (such as Bortolin, 2010; Goldstein et al., 2021; Lapointe, 2016; Liboro et al., 2015, Ng et al., 2019). The other seven articles using interviews combined them with focus groups (Bain & Podmore, 2020; Ingrey, 2012), surveys (Broom, 2013; Cavanaugh, 2016; Luceno et al., 2022), or observations (Cavanaugh, 2016; Lapointe, 2014; Short, 2010). Depending on the research questions and aims, employing multiple data collection sources can aid in gathering a wider range of data. Surveys and questionnaires were the second most frequently used data collection method after interviews, as they were employed in sixteen of the articles (including Burk et al., 2018;

Campbell et al., 2021; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Meyer et al., 2015; Morrison et al., 2014).

### **2.3.2. Study Locations and Participants Involved**

The articles included in this review focused on a range of locations and populations across Canada. 13 of the 33 studies were conducted in Ontario (see Appendix B). This can partially be attributed to Ontario housing the largest provincial population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022). The political and educational debates around queer sexual education in the province of Ontario may have also drawn the attention of scholars (Jones, 2019). This academic focus denotes a significance to the region of Ontario, which contributes to my choice to study Ontario schools in my present research. After Ontario, British Columbia (B.C.) is the next most frequently studied province, with six studies from the included articles taking place with a B.C. population. Alberta falls closely behind with five studies, and Saskatchewan, Quebec, and New Brunswick were examined with one study each.

Many of the studies surveyed educators and stakeholders across Canada, with nine of the included studies focusing nation-wide. The studies that encompassed all of Canada employed quantitative (Campbell et al., 2021; Peter et al., 2018) or mixed method designs (Meyer et al., 2015; Taylor & Peter, 2011). This was because the favoured data collection source from cross-Canada populations was online surveys (Campbell et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2015; Peter et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2016). The use of surveys allowed the researchers to reach a wide participant pool, as school boards and teacher organizations helped to recruit educators as participants and distribute survey materials (Campbell et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2015). This was particularly used for research that examined the social climate of schools (Morrison et al., 2014; Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016; Taylor & Peter, 2011). The participants for such studies spanned several groups, including students and teachers (Morrison et al., 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011).

Educators and students are the groups studied most often when it comes to researching diverse gender and sexual identity inclusive education in Canada. Out of the

33 articles 15 focused on students as their sole participants (see Appendix B). In several cases, these students were widely surveyed. Studies that included large numbers of student participants often surveyed nationwide homophobia and transphobia in schools, school climates, or links between school environment and other factors such as location (Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015; Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Alternatively, some studies narrowed their participant group to queer students (Burkholder et al., 2021; Callaghan, 2016) or students who were part of a gay-straight alliance (GSA) (Lapointe, 2014, 2015, 2016). The studies that narrowed the student participants to specific groups had purposes that reflected this. For example, Lapointe's (2014) study sought to generate knowledge of the participation of straight allies in both GSAs and sex education to challenge queer stereotypes. Students were selected as participants as they were able to provide researchers with up-to-date school-related insights and information (Peter, Taylor, Ristock, & Edkins, 2015; Surette, 2019; Taylor & Peter, 2011). These unique perspectives shed light on student experiences. For example, Callaghan (2016) interviewed lesbian students about their interactions with and resistance against religious-based homophobia in their school. Similarly, educators were also able to provide researchers with insights into queerness in schools.

Three articles had both student and educator participants, exploring safety and queer-affirming interventions in schools, such as GSAs. Five studies had a range of participants, including queer families (Goldstein et al., 2021), public community members (Harriot et al., 2018), and a mix of course developers, principals, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders (Broom, 2013; Ferfolja, 2013; Liboro et al., 2015).

Educators were the second most studied population in the reviewed articles. Nine of the studies focused solely on educators as their participants. Four of these articles used The Every Teacher Project to supply their research data (Campbell et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2015; Peter et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2016). The Every Teacher Project surveyed over 3,400 Kindergarten through Grade 12 educators to gather data regarding their experiences with and perspectives on gender and sexual diversity inclusive education in their schools (Meyer et al., 2015). Each of the articles that drew on this data examined it from a different angle. Campbell et al. (2021) examined teacher reasoning for not

addressing 2SLGBTQIA+ topics. Peter et al. (2018) focused on the impact of religion on how teachers intervene in and address queerness. The other studies with educator participants had smaller numbers of participants than those with The Every Teacher Project, for example, Kitchen and Bellini (2013) examined queer safety and inclusion in schools from the viewpoint of 41 GSA advisors. Tompkins et al. (2019) interviewed four queer educators to uncover their experiences with queer inclusion and exclusion. Additionally, Callaghan (2015) interviewed six queer educators to report on their experiences and struggles teaching in Canadian Catholic schools. While Callaghan's (2015) study focused on educators in Canadian Catholic schools, and Peter et al. (2018) examined the intersection between religion and queerness in schools from the perspective of teachers, none of the studies that met my inclusion criteria focused on educators in Ontario Catholic schools. My present study will add to this conversation by including the experiences of Ontario Catholic school teachers. This is relevant to providing a thorough understanding of the current state of gender and sexual diversity inclusive education in Canada, including the publicly funded Catholic schools.

### **2.3.3. Theoretical Lenses Utilized**

Theoretical frameworks are integral to designing, conducting, and interpreting research (Luft et al., 2022). They shape how a phenomenon is explored, which impacts the types of research questions asked, data collection methods and data analysis used, informs the discussion of results, and clarifies researcher subjectivity (Luft et al., 2022). The theoretical lens is also used to challenge existing knowledge that falls within the sphere of research (Luft et al., 2022). The articles included utilized a range of theories to guide their analysis and framing of data. Anti-oppressive education was utilized the most frequently in the included studies. Eight of the 33 articles employed an anti-oppressive lens (Callaghan, 2015, 2016; Lapointe, 2014; Meyer et al., 2015; Short, 2010; Taylor & Peter, 2011; Taylor et al., 2016; Tompkins et al., 2019). An anti-oppressive framework in education exposes how forms of oppression, such as racism and heterosexism, operate in schools (Callaghan, 2016). This lens encourages the dismantling of discrimination in school settings and promotes the idea that human agency can alter oppressive structures and result in new systems that value diversity (Callaghan, 2016). The other reviewed

articles shared some theoretical frameworks, although none were as prominent as anti-oppressive education.

Four articles utilized queer theory (Burkholder et al., 2021; Lapointe, 2014, 2015, 2016). Lapointe (2016) propels that queer theory can be used to bring attention to systemic queer oppression in schools and examine how to address and combat institutional hetero/cis-normativity, homophobia, and transphobia. Critical pedagogy was another recurring theory (Broom, 2013; Callaghan, 2016; Short, 2010). In critical pedagogy, knowledge is co-constructed through society and culture (Broom, 2013). With this framework, critical thinking is encouraged, as is social justice and gathering an array of voices and perspectives (Broom, 2013). Foucault's work was also referred to in multiple articles, with his concepts of disciplinary power and technologies of self (Ingrey, 2012), discourse analytic approach (Ng et al., 2019), and theory of the micro-physics of power (Callaghan, 2015, 2016). Foucault's work is rooted in the belief that human experience is structured by discourse systems that propel social inequalities in institutions, including schools (Peter et al., 2016). Foucault's theory of the micro-physics of power, as explained by Callaghan (2015), centers around the dynamics of power that can occur between individuals and levels of systems, e.g., in a school environment. Finally, intersectionality was used as a theoretical framework. Goldstein et al. (2021) and Meyer et al. (2015) applied a lens of intersectionality in their research on queerness in schools. Burkholder et al. (2021) employed intersectional feminism to study zine production as activism. Intersectionality speaks to the need to discuss race, gender, sexuality, and other forms of oppression and discrimination together (Goldstein et al., 2021). This lens can aid in understanding queer youth engagement with concepts of social conditions and ideals (Burkholder et al., 2021).

#### **2.3.4. Queer Inclusive Education Research Key Findings**

In this section I will review the major themes in the research literature around gender and sexual diversity inclusive education in Canadian high schools. After the coding process concluded, as outlined in the Literature Search and Coding Procedures section, another researcher reviewed the coded content to establish intercoder reliability

(Saldaña, 2021). The themes were established by reviewing the coded data within and across codes. From there, connections were made between articles and codes after several rounds of becoming familiar with the coded content for each node. Patterns were then identified in response to the literature review's purpose, which was to find the key themes in education research focusing on queer inclusion, discourse, and approaches in Canadian secondary school environments (Saldaña, 2021). These patterns had to have appeared in multiple articles and be repeated throughout the content to be included as a theme. After the major themes were developed, the coded content was reviewed again to ensure all central ideas were captured (Saldaña, 2021). This led to identifying and finalizing eight themes in the literature around queer inclusive education in Canada.

These eight central themes are educator positionality and responsibility to students, heteronormativity in school settings, the harassment and discrimination that queer students face, the mental health of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, the experiences of queer educators, the importance of intersectionality, evidence-based methods for supporting queerness in schools, and the barriers to queer inclusive education.

### ***Educator Positionality and Responsibilities***

Educators play important roles in the lives of their students. They have a significant impact on these youth through their teaching approaches, classroom , and extra-curricular activities (Luceno et al., 2022). One such avenue for educators to support youth is by sponsoring clubs like Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA). Bain and Podmore (2020) found that teachers who head GSAs in their schools engage in an array of socio-spatial practices that function to increase queer visibility and create inclusive spaces in schools. This is affirmed by Luceno et al. (2022), who posit that teachers can take on supportive roles by building relationships with queer youth and leading inclusive school groups. This support widens when teachers incorporate queer-affirming content into their teaching and advocate within the school for queer youth (Luceno et al., 2022). These actions can result in teachers producing and fostering spaces of belonging for queer students (Luceno et al., 2022).

The position of teachers in school environments makes them privy to the dynamics between students. Teachers observe and listen to students in their classrooms, within school hallways, and on breaks between classes. Students often confide in teachers they feel comfortable with or have a connection with and may come to them for advice or with issues to discuss (Luceno et al., 2022). Teachers may also overhear conversations between students, including negative comments or bullying. A study conducted by Meyer et al. (2015) surveyed educators across Canada and found that 66.5% of the teachers had heard verbal harassment directed toward students who were thought to be 2SLGBTQIA+. Over two-thirds of the educators in Meyer et al.'s (2015) study had observed discriminatory behaviours towards queer students, which indicates that these youth need extra support and care from their teachers.

Teachers have a responsibility to their students to keep them safe, including the vulnerable populations (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013). Among the most vulnerable student groups in Canada is 2SLGBTQIA+ students (Burk et al., 2018; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Morrison et al., 2014; Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015). Homophobia and transphobia are dominant forces in school environments (Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015). Homonegativity, which means possessing and expressing negative attitudes towards homosexuality, is prominent (Morrison et al., 2014). This is reinforced by language usages that indicate that being queer is inherently negative. For example, the phrase 'that's so gay' is commonly used to express that something is 'stupid' or 'lame'. In a survey to gauge homophobia in Canadian schools, approximately 70% of students claimed that they heard 'that's so gay' used daily (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Some students may see no harm in using this type of language, as they do not think of diverse sexual or gender identities when using this phrase. However, this common expression in schools leads to queer students repeatedly hearing their identity be used as an insult or as something that is 'bad' (Morrison et al., 2014; Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015). This results in an idea being reinforced within the school environment that people should not want to be gay. As Peter, Taylor, and Chamberland (2015) state, regardless of the intention behind homonegative language, the common use of these terms and expressions sends a message that school cultures do not support queer identities. This can also contribute to queer youth hiding their identity and staying in the 'closet', as they believe

they will be treated poorly if they are openly queer at school (Morrison et al., 2014). The frequency of homonegative language used in a school can lead to higher rates of bullying and physical violence (Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015).

### ***Heteronormativity in Schools***

School cultures are saturated with homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity (Burkholder et al., 2021; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Morrison et al., 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011). A core principle in Queer Theory asserts that heteronormativity is understood as the presumption and privileging of heterosexuality and mainstream gender conformity (Oswald et al., 2009; Pollitt et al., 2019). Specifically, straight and cisgender identities are prioritized and privileged over sexual and gender minorities (Pollitt et al., 2019). Heteronormativity and cisnormativity infiltrate how students perceive and interpret themselves, others around them, and the world. The assumption of heterosexual cisgenderism as the default for humans is represented in the views of students in Surette's (2019) study, who unanimously reported that discussions of diverse genders and sexualities are largely absent from classroom discourse. This can then lead to youth being confused when their feelings, attractions, or sense of self do not correspond with what society is telling them they should be.

Western society centers around heteronormativity, resulting in it being internalized by community members (Pollitt et al., 2019). This is particularly prominent in schools, as the educational system and social experiences teach students to envision their futures through a heteronormative lens (Ng et al., 2019; Pollitt et al., 2019). Heteronormativity and cisnormativity in schools can be as simple as sorting boys and girls into different groups or using gendered language in the classroom (Burkholder et al., 2021). Heteronormativity in schools, and the privileging of cisgender heterosexuality, impacts how youth express themselves (Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016). Peter, Taylor, and Campbell (2016) argue that the discourse of heteronormativity in schools positions gender-conforming heterosexuality as the required form of sexuality and gender expression, while youth outside of this norm are viewed as 'strange' or 'wrong'. The heteronormative and homonegative culture of schools is reinforced when educators do

not stand up against it, resulting in the growth of bullying (Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Taylor & Peter, 2011).

### ***Harassment of Queer Youth***

Queer youth experience higher rates of harassment and victimization than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Burkholder et al., 2021; Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015). Taylor and Peter (2011) found that 64% of queer students and 61% of students with queer parents felt unsafe in their schools. The increased amount of bullying and violence from peers often results in social isolation, lower self-esteem, and diminished academic performance for queer youth (Burk et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2008; Liboro et al., 2015). Queer students also face a range of negative social, psychological, and health issues, partially due to the verbal and physical abuse they experience at school (Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015). The negative treatment and harassment of queer students affects nearly every facet of their lives, especially at this formative point in their lives.

Since schools are a frequent location for bullying, academic performance is another area in which queer youth may struggle. Morrison et al. (2014) found that students who were victimized for being or appearing to be queer were negatively impacted via their school attendance, participation, and concentration. Students cited homonegative language and bullying as detracting from their ability to concentrate on academic tasks (Morrison et al., 2014). The prevalent homonegativity in school climates can lead to an aversion to school (Morrison et al., 2014). Some queer students in Morrison et al.'s (2014) research reported that they skipped school to avoid bullying and even missed class as a coping strategy for the harassment they were receiving. These areas of life that are impacted can hold long-lasting implications for queer youth. For example, school avoidance and a decline in academic performance can increase the difficulty of pursuing higher education and career opportunities for youth (Morrison et al., 2014). It is important to note that it is not only queer students who are impacted by homonegativity and the related bullying of sexual or gender minorities (Morrison et al., 2014). In some situations, students whose peers incorrectly perceived them to be queer, perhaps due to stereotypes and social factors such as their gender expression, were also bullied and verbally harassed (Morrison et al., 2014). This type of harassment relates

back to Jamie Hubley's experience with bullying and eventual suicide, as mental health is often adversely affected for queer youth.

### ***Mental Health of Queer Youth***

Kitchen and Bellini (2013) and Peter, Taylor, and Campbell (2016) discuss the increase in suicide rates related to homophobic bullying in North America. This rise was found to be linked to the social environment for queer students, including stigmatization and discrimination (Kitchen & Bellini, 2013). The relationship between bullying and suicide was stronger for queer youth than heterosexual youth, which indicates the harmful impact that harassment can have on queer youth (Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016). Peter, Taylor, and Campbell (2016) demonstrate that depression is the most common risk factor for queer and heterosexual youth when it comes to suicidal ideation and suicidality. Additionally for queer youth, anxiety, substance abuse, and low self-esteem factor into their risk of dying or trying to die by suicide (Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016). Burk et al. (2018) explain that the prevalence of depression, suicidal ideation, and self-harm is higher for LGB youth than for their heterosexual peers. Burk et al. (2018) detail the link between the mental health issues mentioned above and homophobic bullying that often takes place in schools and among youth. The influence of homo/transphobic bullying in schools has been reported to have a lasting effect on students, as it can increase risk-taking behaviours and lead to negative impacts on the ability to adjust to their environment throughout their life (Burk et al., 2018). Queer educators also face some of the same barriers and discrimination in schools that queer students do.

### ***Queer Educator Experiences***

The heteronormative culture of schools in Canada impacts queer educators as well as students (Tompkins et al., 2019). Ontario's Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act of 2012 policy has aided in improving school climates for queer students. However, less action has been taken for queer educators (Callaghan, 2015; Tompkins et al., 2019). The empathy and action that has been extended to queer students due to the increase in awareness of their vulnerability in schools is often forgotten when it comes to queer

teachers (Callaghan, 2015; Tompkins et al., 2019). Taylor et al.'s (2016) large-scale survey of educators across Canada found that queer educators were more likely to be 'out' to their colleagues than to the administration. Additionally, one-third of queer educators had been warned not to come out at school for fear of backlash (Taylor et al., 2016).

Similar to Taylor et al.'s (2016) findings, Callaghan (2015) conducted a study with six educators in Ontario and Alberta to investigate the experiences of queer teachers in publicly funded Canadian Catholic schools. All participants experienced homophobia in their schools and did not believe it was an accepting environment for queerness (Callaghan, 2015). Four of these six educators stopped working for their Catholic school board, with three of them having been fired for behaving contrary to Catholic values by way of their queerness (Callaghan, 2015). Another teacher from this study quit teaching after being harassed about her sexual identity (Callaghan, 2015). The remaining two participants who held their positions at the time of Callaghan's (2015) study were 'in the closet' at their schools and felt as if they needed to continue hiding their sexuality at work. Callaghan's (2015) research provided a voice for queer educators in Catholic schools that had previously been absent in Canada. However, 2SLGBTQIA+ rights have progressed in Canada in the years since that research was conducted. It is against the law for educators to be fired based on their sexual orientation or gender. In Ontario, the Ontario Human Rights Code prevents discrimination at work based on gender or sexual identity (OHRC, 2014). It is important to consider the year of the research when attempting to understand the current state of inclusive education in Canadian schools. In the case of Callaghan's 2015 article, it was published nine years ago at the time of writing this thesis. Thus, society and schools may no longer reflect the same landscape that was depicted in the articles.

More recently, Tompkins et al. (2019) followed the experiences of four queer educators beginning their teaching careers in Canada. The teachers felt accepted in their school environments and thus felt confident to be able to address queer education in their schools and to engage in queer advocacy (Tompkins et al., 2019). For example, one participant championed for gender-neutral washrooms (Tompkins et al., 2019). However,

the experiences varied among the participants. Some of them felt unable to be publicly out in their school, often due to the unwelcome climate created by the administration being lukewarm or hesitant around queerness (Tompkins et al., 2019). It is yet to be addressed whether heterosexual and cisgender teachers observe this same uncertainty from the administration when it comes to diverse gender and sexual identities. A necessary addition to the field would be to ascertain the perspectives of administrators and other school board employees around queer inclusive education. The studies reviewed in this section speak to the type of systemic change that needs to occur in school systems with both queer youth and educators in mind (Tompkins et al., 2019).

### ***The Importance of Intersectionality***

The reviewed literature on queer inclusive education in Canadian high schools highlights the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding and supporting queer students (Burkholder et al., 2021; Callaghan, 2016; Goldstein et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2015). Queer students' identities intersect with various factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status, shaping their unique experiences and needs within educational environments. For example, a Black, immigrant queer student may have different support needs compared to a queer student with dis/abilities from Canada (Kozleski et al., 2020). Tailoring support to address students' intersectional experiences can foster a more inclusive and affirming educational environment.

The identities of queer students are shaped by a complex interplay of various social, economic, historical, and political factors (Burkholder et al., 2021; Goldstein et al., 2021). Historically, queer students of color have experienced compounded discrimination that stems from both their sexual orientation and racial background (Burkholder et al., 2021; Goldstein et al., 2021). This layered experience can exacerbate feelings of marginalization and isolation within the school setting (Burkholder et al., 2021; Goldstein et al., 2021). Burkholder et al. (2021) examined how intersecting power structures produce unequal impacts on queer youth. Their study stressed the need to incorporate critical race-informed approaches to address the predominance of whiteness in their context, thereby recognizing the compounded effects of racism, colonialism, and capitalism on queer students (Burkholder et al., 2021). Similarly, Callaghan (2016)

highlighted the activism of queer students in Catholic schools, challenging the perception that these students are passive victims. Intersectionality is crucial, since homophobia and transphobia are seldom isolated issues as they intersect with other forms of oppression (Meyer et al., 2015). A comprehensive approach to anti-oppressive education is necessary to address these interconnected challenges and create an inclusive environment for all students. Researchers advocate for an intersectional approach to queer inclusive education, recognizing the diverse and overlapping identities of queer students (Burkholder et al., 2021; Callaghan, 2016; Goldstein et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2015). This approach acknowledges the complexity of queer students' identities as well as seeks to dismantle the various forms of discrimination that affect their educational experiences.

### ***Supporting Queerness in Schools***

In response to the increased risk of mental health, behavioural, and emotional issues for queer students, studies in the United States have evaluated a range of strategies to support 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in public schools (Liboro et al., 2015). Liboro et al. (2015) conducted a study to determine if programs that have been successful in supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ students in the United States would have a similar effect in Canadian schools, due to the similar educational structures and social climates. Specifically, Liboro et al. (2015) tested these strategies in Canadian Catholic schools. For example, having school-based Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or conducting staff training around inclusion were found to have the potential for success in Canadian Catholic schools (Liboro et al., 2015). A GSA is a school club with teacher advisors and students who want to challenge homophobia in their schools (Kitchen & Bellini, 2013). The club is based on what the members need and want. Common purposes include supporting queer students, advocating for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, and educating members and others within the school environment about queer issues and inclusion (Lapointe, 2015). They also provide a secure space for 2SLGBTQIA+ students where they can feel a sense of belonging, community, and social support within their school (Lapointe, 2015). Lapointe (2015) reported that students with access to a GSA viewed their schools as being supportive of queer individuals and tended to be more open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Educators have the potential to make a positive difference in their school climate and in the lives of queer students (Kitchen & Bellini, 2013). This occurs when educators address instances of homophobic and transphobic bullying and harassment in schools. This also includes incorporating diverse gender and sexual identities into classroom lessons and discussions. Kitchen and Bellini (2013) argue that many educators are not fulfilling their responsibility to protect vulnerable students, as Taylor and Peter's (2011) Canadian-wide survey found that 75% of queer students believed that teachers and administrators did not take action when homophobic comments, bullying, and harassment were reported. Morrison et al. (2014) similarly claimed that their surveyed students rarely saw teachers intervene in instances of homonegative speech at school. Taylor and Peter (2011) also reported that 58% of straight students saw teachers ignore homophobic bullying in their presence.

Tompkins et al. (2019) discussed the movement in Canadian teacher education programs to include content about inclusion and equity in their training. When I mention teacher training, I refer to reflective models of teacher education (Shawer, 2017). Received knowledge training is an aspect of this model, where content and pedagogical information are communicated to educators (Shawer, 2017). A reflective model also encompasses experiential knowledge training involving teachers reflecting on their experiences, observing the practices of experienced teachers, and refining their teaching approaches (Shawer, 2017). Teacher training can be for pre- and in-service educators, such as teacher education programs as well as professional development within a school board. Tompkins et al. (2019) believe that while some teacher education programs have raised awareness of discrimination in schools against 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and families, other programs fall short of covering these topics. The preparation new teachers undergo in training impacted their likelihood to feel comfortable intervening and including queer identities in their teaching practices (Tompkins et al., 2019). In-service teachers also benefited from the gender and sexual diversity inclusive education training (Campbell et al., 2021; Richard, 2015). Studies examining the state of diverse gender and sexual inclusivity in education within Canada have found that educators' beliefs and perceptions vary in terms of queer-inclusive education (Peter et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2016). Some educators were in support of incorporating this content in the classroom, while others felt

they lacked training and resources, or were fearful of repercussions, or believed it had no place in the school environment (Campbell et al., 2021).

### ***Barriers to Queer Inclusion***

Lack of training, fear of job loss, backlash from parents, a lack of resources, and insufficient guidance from the administration were the barriers that deterred educators from supporting queer youth in schools (Campbell et al., 2021; Surette, 2019). Religious affiliation also influenced queer inclusive education practices; however, this varied across religious groups (Peter et al., 2018). For example, the Catholic Church does not support same-sex marriage. Thus, Catholic educators were less likely to incorporate queerness into their curriculum (Peter et al., 2018). Peter et al. (2018) found that these educators also identified barriers to diverse gender and sexual inclusive education more frequently than non-religiously affiliated educators. Alternatively, Richard (2015) found that educators who had personal connections to the queer community, whether they were queer or knew someone who was, were more likely to have supported 2SLGBTQIA+ students and discussed related content in their classrooms. Additionally, when educators received training on sexual and gender diversity, it increased their likelihood of discussing queer identities with their students (Richard, 2015). However, these barriers were deeply embedded in education on a systematic level and were reinforced over time. Therefore, changes must also occur at the policy and administrative levels.

The strategies for supporting queer youth in school environments were considered on a curricular level. When school systems lacked policies or curriculum materials that covered the inclusion of queer identities, it acted as microaggressions that prevented queer students from engaging in schools and with their peers (Surette, 2019). Homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism, heteronormativity, and heterosexual privilege need to be addressed and disrupted in school systems (Surette, 2019). Surette (2019) claims that discussing and teaching about the above issues can create a more accepting and secure school climate for students. However, the focus must be on the educational system and all of its levels to maintain these ideals. Meyer et al. (2015) suggested the concept of gender and sexual diversity (GSD)-inclusive education. GSD incorporates issues related to gender and sexuality into the curriculum to challenge hetero- and

gender-normative school cultures (Meyer et al., 2015). Surette (2019) adds that GSD-inclusive education promotes knowledge about empathy and acceptance while reducing queer based discrimination and bullying. However, in Meyer et al.'s (2015) study, while 84.9% of surveyed educators claimed that they approved of GSD-inclusive education, only 61.8% reported implementing those ideals in their practice. This gap between educators' beliefs and practices demonstrates the importance of understanding teacher experiences with these topics in schools. It is necessary to explore the degree to which teachers incorporate and accomplish GSD-inclusive education in their classrooms.

Shedding light on how educators include diverse gender and sexual identity content in their classrooms can pave the way for other teachers. Researching queer inclusion in schools is vital in promoting GSD-inclusive education and ultimately improving the school experience for queer youth. If queer students see and hear themselves being represented in their school environment, it will improve their mental health, social inclusion, and overall well-being (Cavanaugh, 2016; Burk et al., 2018; Surette, 2019). Therefore, this thesis research aims to increase understanding around the ways in which teachers include queer identities in Ontario Catholic schools.

### **2.3.5. Recommendations from the Literature**

This section discusses the recommendations that the reviewed literature suggests for the field and future research of queer inclusive education in Canada. The suggestions largely center around bullying prevention, teacher training and professional development, and establishing 2SLGBTQIA+ visibility and inclusive spaces in schools.

#### ***Bullying Prevention***

Bullying prevention is a tactic that school boards and educators can use to make improvements. This could make a difference in how sexual and gender minority youth experience their school environment. Morrison et al. (2014) introduce the idea that existing anti-bullying interventions do not need to be fully redesigned to accomplish a reduction in school-based homophobia and transphobia. Rather, strategies for preventing homonegativity can be incorporated into current bullying interventions (Morrison et al.,

2014). This approach might prevent the ‘Othering’ of queer identities (Morrison et al., 2014), who are marginalized based on what is considered to be ‘normal’ in society (Kumashiro, 2002). Anti-homonegativity interventions would be grouped with more traditional bullying topics (Morrison et al., 2014). Incorporating queer pedagogy and perspectives in formal education is another route for intervening before bullying occurs instead of acting reactively (Lapointe, 2015). Several studies suggest that anti-homophobia policies in schools are effective and can operate as a form of bullying prevention and intervention, although this will require further research (Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Morrison et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2019; Peter, Taylor, & Edkins, 2016; Peter, Taylor, Ristock, & Edkins, 2015; Taylor & Peter, 2011). For bullying intervention programs to work, teachers must also be trained to deal with homophobic and transphobic incidents (Richard, 2015). Richard (2015) argues that educators need to be trained in how to respond to queer-based bullying and how to lead school discussions and support for 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

### ***Professional Development for Educators***

The majority of studies discussed professional development. Professional development opportunities for educators are integrated throughout the school year with the aim of teaching educators a new skill or sharing knowledge that they can utilize to enhance their teaching. These professional learning opportunities can be employed to increase educator knowledge around sexual and gender diversity, offer examples of how to integrate queer inclusion in their classrooms, and educate teachers on how they can support queer youth (Lapointe, 2016; Luceno et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2015; Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016; Taylor & Peter, 2011; Taylor et al., 2016). Lapointe (2016) suggests that professional development is an opportunity to reach a large number of teachers to establish a baseline of knowledge and understanding of diverse gender and sexuality. This would then lead teachers to feel comfortable discussing queerness and integrating queer inclusive education into their practices (Lapointe, 2016). The professional development can include the application of strategies to promote acceptance and address queer-based discrimination (Luceno et al., 2022). Meyer et al. (2015) advocate for educators to receive support in implementing queer inclusion in the

curriculum. Educators can receive supports that include sample lesson plans, resources on incorporating queer histories, perspectives, and voices into teaching materials, guidance on gender-inclusive language, ideas of how to challenge stereotypes, and suggestions on promoting positive representations of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in class discussions (Meyer et al., 2015). Luceno et al. (2022) argue that it is not only teachers who should be trained in how to support 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in schools, but also administrators and school staff who should be equipped with the skills and knowledge to support their student populations. This idea has merit as all school staff members encounter queer youth and should be prepared to incorporate queer inclusive education into their work.

### ***2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusive Spaces and Visibility***

The literature emphasizes the importance of establishing queer visibility and inclusive spaces in schools. Bortolin (2010) points to the significance of GSAs as they provide queer students a space where their voices can be heard and valued. Kitchen and Bellini (2013) take a similar stance. They found that the presence of GSAs was a key factor in increasing the safety of queer students in Ontario schools, although transgender student safety requires further research<sup>1</sup> (Kitchen & Bellini, 2013). However, more recently, Bain and Podmore (2020) argue that while GSAs are a good starting point, they are not enough. For true inclusion, there must be more than one supportive space in a school (Bain & Podmore, 2020). Bain and Podmore (2020) found that further research needs to be conducted to find other avenues for queer visibility and inclusive spaces in both public and faith-based schools. Part of this visibility involves creating curricula that feature queer families (Goldstein et al., 2021). By mentioning same-sex parents in a story, queer identities are being normalized at school. Burk et al. (2018) believe that further exploration is required to examine the impacts of multiple school-based interventions, including GSAs, on queer students. Campbell et al.'s (2021) study discovered that queer supports reduce the factors that teachers cite as reasons for them not practicing 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education; however, this needs to be investigated

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<sup>1</sup>At the time of writing this thesis, three Canadian provinces (New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Alberta) have passed legislation limiting the rights of trans youth to gender affirming care in schools (Dubé, 2023).

further. Overall, queer visibility and inclusive spaces are vital to foster supportive schools and benefit queer students.

These recommendations from the literature aim to create safer and more inclusive climates in schools, while equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to create affirming educational environments for 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

## **2.4. Gaps in the Literature**

The current body of literature reviewed throughout this chapter explored various aspects of queer inclusion, discourse, and approaches in Canadian secondary school environments. School climate around queerness, perspectives on queer inclusive education, and homophobia and transphobia in schools were well-studied areas (see Bortolin, 2010; Campbell et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2015; Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland, 2015; Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016; Peter et al., 2018; Taylor & Peter, 2011; Taylor et al., 2016). GSAs were another topic related to queer inclusive education that was repeatedly covered in the literature (see Bain & Podmore, 2020; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Lapointe, 2014, 2016;). However, upon review, a noticeable gap emerged concerning the voices of teachers when it came to diverse gender and sexual identities, specifically in Ontario Catholic schools (Callaghan, 2015; Peter et al., 2018). Educators were the second most frequently studied group in the reviewed articles in terms of diverse gender and sexual identity inclusive education in Canada. Nine of the 33 studies had educators as the sole participants. Four of the studies that focused on educators drew from The Every Teacher Project, which surveyed over 3,400 educators across Canada to gather their perspectives on gender and sexual diversity inclusive education in their schools (Campbell et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2015; Peter et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2016). While Callaghan's (2015) study focused on educators in Canadian Catholic schools, and Peter et al. (2018) examined the intersection between religion and queerness in schools from the perspective of teachers, none of the studies that met my inclusion criteria focused on educators in Ontario Catholic schools. My present study will add to this conversation by including the experiences of Ontario Catholic school teachers.

While existing literature in the field has provided valuable insights into the state of queer inclusive education in Canada, there remains a lack of research focusing on the perspectives of teachers in Ontario Catholic high schools. This gap is significant because educators are the ones who potentially implement queer inclusivity in their classrooms, and thus can provide vital first-hand accounts of the current state of 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion education in their schools. Furthermore, the presence of religion in publicly funded Catholic schools adds an additional layer to the dynamics of queer inclusion and acceptance in schools. Understanding the current landscape of queer inclusive education in Ontario Catholic schools will pave the way for future practical recommendations for the field. Therefore, my research aims to fill this gap in the literature by interviewing high school teachers in Catholic schools in Ontario to gain an understanding of their experiences with navigating queer inclusive education in their classrooms and schools.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

This literature review systematically sorted through the research that has been conducted in Canada to explore the current state of queer inclusive education. Of the 33 qualifying studies, qualitative designs, particularly using interviews as a data collection method, emerged as the most commonly employed research approach. Students and educators were the most frequent participant populations in the research. The theoretical framework that appeared most frequently in the reviewed studies was anti-oppressive education. The eight major themes that are important to note in this field of research are: (1) teacher roles with students; (2) the prevalence of heteronormativity in schools; (3) the harassment that queer students endure; (4) the state of queer youth mental health; (5) the experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ educators; (6) the importance of intersectionality; (7) evidence-based strategies for supporting gender and sexual diversity in schools; and (8) the barriers to GSD-inclusive education. Finally, I reported on the recommendations from the research to implement bullying prevention programs around queerness, improve professional development opportunities for all educators, and increase queer inclusive spaces and visibility in schools.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Methodology**

In this chapter, I detail my research design and methods of inquiry for the present study, beginning with reiterating my research aims. I introduce a phenomenological approach and describe its value to this research. I then outline the methodology for this study, including participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The methodological choices for this study are explained and justified. Additionally, I address issues related to study validity, ethical considerations, and my researcher positionality.

#### **3.1. Research Questions and Design**

This study examined how high school teachers engage with and navigate diverse gender and sexual identity discourse in Ontario Catholic schools. Specifically, the purpose of the study was twofold: (1) to determine the perspectives and experiences of teachers working within Catholic high schools in Ontario on 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education; and (2) to understand the degree to which diverse gender and sexual identities are taught in Catholic high schools in Ontario.

##### **3.1.1. Research Methods**

To understand teacher perspectives on queer inclusive education, I employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design. Qualitative research involves collecting data and conducting data analysis, resulting in establishing patterns or themes (Creswell, 2013). This research centers around the voices of participants and interprets phenomena through the meaning participants bring to it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Kozleski (2017) outlines how a qualitative research design is well-suited for inclusive education studies. It allows for careful understanding of stakeholder experiences in educational systems (Kozleski, 2017). Specifically, I utilized a phenomenological approach for this study, which entails concentrating on a shared meaning for multiple individuals around a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is conducive to my

research as the phenomenon at the center of this study is teacher experiences with queer inclusive education and the ways in which they navigate discussions of diverse gender and sexual identities in their classrooms. With the object of human experience identified, a phenomenological methodology then leads into a researcher collecting data from those who have experienced it and developing a description of the phenomenon's essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By interviewing teachers to explore the extent of their experiences teaching 2SLGBTQIA+ topics, it allows for better understanding of the meaning that they may hold regarding school inclusivity of gender and sexual diversity.

### **3.1.2. Participants and Research Site**

The research context for this study was Ontario Catholic high schools. This choice was made partially due to the history in Ontario around sexual education (described earlier). Additionally, as demonstrated in the literature review, there is a gap in research around teacher perspectives on queer inclusive education in Ontario Catholic schools (Campbell et al., 2021; Liboro et al., 2015; Peter et al., 2018). The other factors that impacted the choice of the research site were the religious affiliation of the publicly funded school boards in Ontario, as well as my personal experience attending and substitute teaching in Catholic schools in Ontario.

The participant sample consisted of three high school teachers in Ontario Catholic schools (see participant profiles in Appendix C). Since I collected data largely through in-depth interviews with my participants, a small sample size allowed for in-depth conversations with participants. The sample size was also influenced by studies such as Callaghan (2015) and Tompkins et al. (2019) who used small sample sizes to allow room for deeper insights with their participants.

When asked to introduce themselves and discuss their experiences, the participants did not disclose their social positioning other than describing their roles and responsibilities as educators within the school system. They spoke about their teaching experiences with and perspectives on queer inclusive education without acknowledging the intersectional nature of the subject.

### **3.1.3. Participant Recruitment and Inclusion Criteria**

Once I received ethical approval from Simon Fraser University's Research Ethics Board (REB), I began recruiting my participants. This was done through snowball sampling via my connections with teachers in Ontario Catholic schools. Snowball sampling is a type of purposeful sampling that involves locating a couple of key participants who meet the established criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My key participants were teachers that I had a pre-existing connection with from my time in the Ontario Catholic school system. From there, snowball sampling entailed asking the early participants to refer me to other potential participants, and thus the chain continued with finding additional information-rich participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Since queer inclusion is a controversial topic in Catholic schools (Hune-Brown, 2015; Jones, 2019a; Liboro et al., 2015; Schwartz, 2012), snowball sampling allowed me to recruit participants for my study. I asked a key participant to refer me to other teachers that they knew in Ontario Catholic schools. Once I received permission to reach out to those individuals, I sent them the recruitment flyer (see Appendix D). The recruitment flyer described the research intent and provided details on participant involvement, expectations, and confidentiality. The teachers who responded expressing their interest in the study were evaluated to ensure they met my participant inclusion criteria. One of the inclusion criteria for the participants was that they must have been teaching in the Ontario Catholic school system since at least 2015. This level of experience was chosen to encompass the curriculum changes enacted by the provincial government that were discussed in the introduction. This allowed any alterations or progressions in school content and environment over time to be captured by the participants. Additionally, the teachers were required to have a valid provincial teaching certificate in order to participate. The study sought diversity in the participants' recruitment; however, the sexual orientation, gender expression, and race of the teachers were not specified as criteria to participate in the study. After I confirmed the teachers were interested and met the criteria, any questions they had about the study were answered and they were sent the consent form (see Appendix E).

### **3.1.4. Ethical Considerations**

Prior to conducting my research, I submitted my research plans and materials to Simon Fraser University's Research Ethics Board (REB) to ensure that my research complied with ethical standards. The teachers who agreed to take part were given consent forms to sign for permission to be interviewed and audio/video recorded for this study. The rights of each participant were reiterated at this time, including a reminder about their right to withdraw their participation from the study at any point. The interviews took place online through a secured, password protected Zoom room. The data from the interviews was stored in a password protected SFU supported secure storage facility and the participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. Since I have personal experience in this area, I attempted to bracket myself out of the study to ensure the focus was on participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Bracketing is when researchers set aside their preconceived thoughts and experiences, to the best of their ability, to focus on and understand the perspectives of participants (Creswell & Poth).

## **3.2. Researcher Positionality**

Part of what drew me to this area of research was my own experience as a queer student growing up in Ontario and attending a Catholic School from Kindergarten through Grade 12. I have felt firsthand the impact that teachers and school environments can have on young students who may be queer or questioning their sexual or gender identity. This personal experience and a preliminary literature review exposed me to the difficulties that queer students face in schools, which drove my interest to understand teacher experiences in these areas. Both the provincially set curriculum and school board policies in Ontario have changed since I was a student, as it was after I graduated high school that the provincial government altered the modernized sexual education curriculum. However, sexual education and diverse gender and sexual identity discourse have continued to be heavily debated topics in Ontario (Hune-Brown, 2015). This manifests as some educators, parents, and community groups, such as the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, calling for inclusive sexual education to be included in the curriculum (Hune-Brown, 2015; Jones, 2019). However, they have met resistance from

some conservatives, religious groups, and parents who argue that including these topics would be immoral and dangerous (Hune-Brown, 2015; Jones, 2019). By conducting this study to explore teacher perspectives on navigating gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms and schools, the groundwork is being laid for future research to establish how to support educators in integrating 2SLGBTQIA+ content in Catholic Ontario schools.

### **3.3. Data Collection**

The data sources for this study included interviews with three participants, educational journey timelines, and vignette responses from participants.

#### **3.3.1. Interview Data**

Interviews were the primary data source. The semi-structured interviews took place during October to November 2023. This portion of data collection was conducted via one-on-one interviews to allow the participants to guide the discussion with their experiences. I employed in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2019). Utilizing interviews allowed me to delve into what the participants had experienced surrounding the phenomenon at hand, queer inclusive education, and how they interpreted it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of teachers with the flexibility to follow up on various points that were mentioned. I conducted three interviews per participant (see interview protocol in Appendix F). The first functioned to build rapport, review expectations of the research, and discover the context and relevant educational journey history of each participant. The second interview delved into the present experiences of my participants with queer inclusive education. The third interview entailed the participants reflecting on the meaning of the experiences they shared and closing the participant-researcher relationship (Seidman, 2019). Each interview was approximately 60 to 90 minutes long (Seidman, 2019). Each set of interviews was scheduled approximately one week apart, or as the participants' schedules allowed, to give participants time to reflect between interviews, but not so long that they felt distanced from the topic (Seidman, 2019).

### **3.3.2. Reflection Materials: Education Journey Maps and Vignette**

Educational journey maps and a vignette were supplementary data collection methods. The participants were asked to prepare both items prior to their interviews. The educational journey mapping activity (see Appendix G) asked participants to draw a map of the events that they thought had impacted their path to becoming an educator. Participants were asked to send in their timeline and a short explanation of it at least two days prior to the first interview. This allowed me to examine the timeline and develop related questions to delve into with each participant during their initial interview. This activity provided me with insights about participants and how they viewed their journey as an educator. This also allowed the discussion to center around the relevant history and context for each participant (Seidman, 2019). This then paved the way for the subsequent interviews to focus on participant experiences with queer inclusion.

A vignette was also employed to prompt participant reflection before the second interview. The second phenomenological interview focused on participant experiences and perspectives on the chosen topic (Seidman, 2019). To prompt thinking around queer inclusive education, I sent participants a vignette I had created describing a scenario where a teacher noticed a few students in their class bullying a queer student (Appendix H). The vignette and related questions about teacher reactions to the fictional scenario were emailed to participants following the first interview to grant them enough time to read the vignette before the next interview. Participants were given the choice to read the vignette and record their answers to the questions via email or to wait and discuss their answers during the second interview. This option was offered to participants to be mindful of their time and availability. All participants chose to wait and share their answers during the interview. The vignette and reflection questions prompted the participants to think about queer inclusion in schools and their perspectives on it. This functioned to encourage participants' thinking and prepare them to discuss diverse gender and sexual identities in education.

### **3.3.3. Teaching Artifacts**

Document analysis was attempted to provide further context of school environments by examining teacher lesson plans and materials in their classrooms related to diverse gender and sexual identities. I asked the participants for copies of two to three lesson plans or other materials that they used to support classroom discussions around queerness, if they had any. In the end, none of the participants had any original lesson plans to share around diverse gender and sexual identities. It turned out that discussions my participants had regarding queerness arose organically in classroom discussions rather than via specific lesson plans.

The data collection took place virtually through Zoom, which I recorded with participant consent for transcription purposes. Educational journey maps were sent to me via email. For triangulation purposes, referring to multiple sources being used to provide evidence of the validity and accuracy of a study, I kept a journal of memos as I navigated through the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This functioned to help me remember my observations of the shared materials and my reactions during and after each interview. These notes also guided me in developing questions for the subsequent interviews with participants.

### **3.4. Data Analysis: Coding and Theme Generation**

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim following the sessions. NVivo 14 software was used to code the interview data using a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Thematic analysis is the study of patterns to uncover meaning (Saldaña, 2021). This approach focuses on identifying, examining, interpreting, and reporting trends within data that may hold meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). Using a thematic approach means combing through a data set to generate themes that relate to the research questions and topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). As Saldaña (2021) outlines, thematic analysis is particularly applicable for research questions around people's perspectives. A thematic approach allowed me to analyze patterns within the data set to identify the

meaning. This framework also enabled me to keep my attention on the subjective experiences of my participants. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) argue for a rigorous and standardized application of thematic analysis. I employed the six-phase model of reflexive thematic analysis that Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest. The six phases are as follows: (1) data familiarization; (2) data coding; (3) initial theme generation; (4) theme development and review; (5) theme refining, defining, and naming; and (6) writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021).

Prior to conducting the data analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) encourage researchers to make decisions about what counts as a theme, if the analysis will be inductive or theoretical, and what level of content will be used for the analysis. I define a theme as a common meaning formed across the data, specifically from clusters of codes that were present across all participants. This mode of thematic analysis aimed to provide a rich description of major themes. To align with the phenomenological interviews, I utilized an inductive approach to keep the themes grounded in the voices of my participants. An inductive approach meant producing themes without preconceptions. I entered the data set with the intention of identifying and extracting codes and generating patterns from there (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). This suited my exploratory research well, as there was little existing research on queer inclusive education in Ontario Catholic schools. Additionally, a semantic level focus was used for analysis. Concentrating on the semantic level meant generating themes based on what was overtly stated or written, rather than using interpretation to find underlying meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). This suited my needs as my research aimed to analyze the explicit experiences and perspectives of the participants. Below, I outline each phase of my data analysis.

### **3.4.1. Phase 1: Getting Familiar with the Data**

Phase one of reflexive thematic analysis involves transcribing data, reviewing data and transcripts, and writing memos to record initial thoughts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). At this stage of the data analysis process, I focused on getting a feel for the data. Firstly, I reviewed the recordings of each interview and began transcribing them. I listened to each recording multiple times while reading the transcriptions, to maximize

my familiarity with the data and check for accuracy in the transcripts. I also reviewed the educational journey maps and vignette responses from each participant. I then removed identifiers from the documents, such as names, school titles, and locations. I revisited my research topic frequently throughout this process to keep my objectives at the forefront of my mind. As well, I wrote memos to track my thoughts throughout this undertaking. This involved reading the transcriptions multiple times and writing down initial ideas, thoughts, and reactions. Writing memos enabled me to have an extra step of reliability checks throughout the data collection and analysis process, as I was able to refer back to my memos to ensure that no observations were missed.

### **3.4.2. Phase 2: Data Coding**

The second phase of data analysis revolves around coding the data across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). I began this process by focusing on one item of my data at a time. Using NVivo, I uploaded each of my interview transcripts and supplementary documents to the software and started reading them one by one. I employed line-by-line coding, which meant that I stopped after each line of the text and considered what code label I could use to accurately describe the content (Saldaña, 2021). For each line, I developed a code to categorize the participants' thoughts, or I considered if an existing code could be applied to the item (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For example, one participant stated that "I do have my religion specialist", which I coded as 'justification of teacher expert knowledge'. As Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasize, code labels are working tools utilized to capture meaning in the data, and they should continuously be refined throughout this phase.

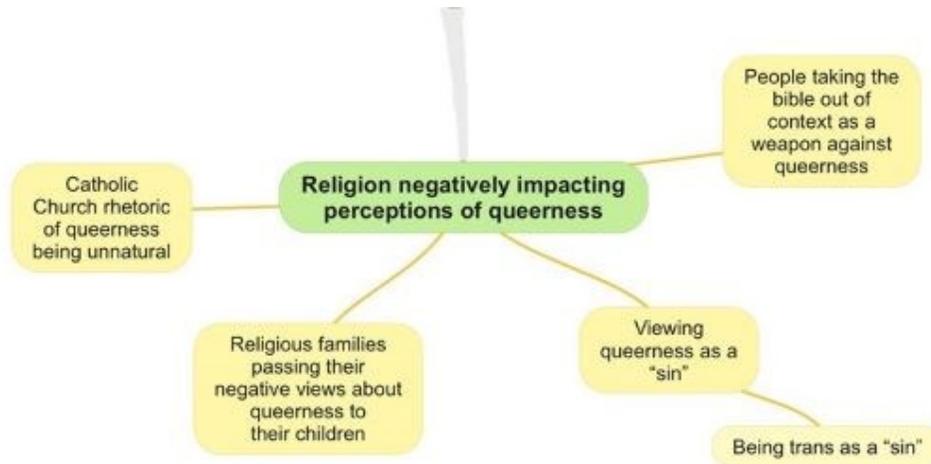
The reliability checks that I had with two other researchers secured data rigor and validity. The second researcher was chosen due to their position in the same graduate program as me; thus, they were well positioned with comparable levels of knowledge and training to conduct the reliability check. The third researcher was my academic supervisor, who was experienced with coding and was familiar enough with the study to offer an alternative perspective and insights into the data. These two researchers separately read different interview excerpts from each participant and coded them line-

by-line. Following this, I reviewed each excerpt with the researcher to check them against the codes I had developed. Any differences in codes were discussed in order to calibrate the coding. Coding the data was an iterative process, where I cycled back to the data sets to ensure relevant information was captured in the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This was improved by the feedback I gained from the other researchers, as I incorporated their suggestions during my second round of coding. I worked through my dataset multiple times during this phase. Braun and Clarke (2021) stated that analytical meanings in the data evolve through the coding process, hence it is vital to be rigorous and thorough during coding. Thus, I approached the subsequent rounds of coding in a different order than my first time, as a change in pace can allow for alternative observations to emerge and prevent an unevenly coded dataset. Once I had reviewed my dataset multiple times, refined my code labels, and checked for coding consistency, I moved to the next phase of data analysis. In preparation for this, I collated all of my codes and related data into a spreadsheet for accessible analysis. Throughout this whole process, I frequently added to my memos to track my decision making and thoughts.

### **3.4.3. Phase 3: Initial Theme Generation**

Step three in the reflexive thematic analysis process involves organization of codes from phase two into potential themes. The relevant coded data was brought together to identify meaning patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This was carried out by reviewing the codes across the dataset that were developed in the previous phase, to find connections between them. These connections contributed to a central meaning. I drew a mind map with lines running between connected codes. Once I was able to visualize the linked codes, I considered the common meaning that they held and summarized it in a few words. These became my categories or clusters of codes. Developing a cluster required all connected codes to contribute to a core organizing concept, as these were the basis for potential themes. In order for a cluster to be formed, it had to contain data from multiple participants or interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, not all codes were shared across interviews and participants, which meant that they did not contribute to patterned meaning. Thus, these outliers were organized into a miscellaneous category.

Creating these clusters took multiple renditions to produce a coherent map that encompassed most codes (see Figure 1 below a sample visualization of a cluster).



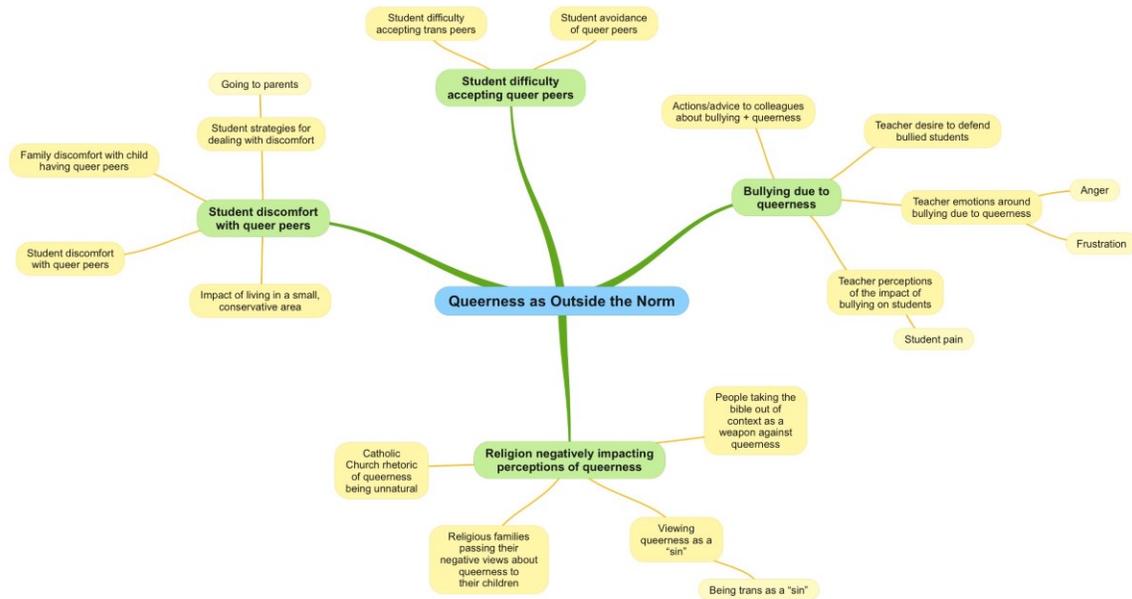
**Figure 1. Cluster Visualization**

Phase three was also where I began to think about the relationships between clusters and if any fit together to form a theme. Themes are meant to encompass multiple elements of a concept which all contribute to one core idea (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thus, at this stage, clusters were categorized into larger patterns that convey meaning about the topic. I approached this process by considering each cluster and what it indicated about queer inclusive education in cohesion with the other clusters. Every time I grouped clusters of codes together into a potential theme, I thought about what story it was telling about the data. I evaluated the potential themes by contemplating if they captured something meaningful about the topic, if they had a core idea that encompassed the clusters and codes underneath them, and if they had clear boundaries (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

#### **3.4.4. Phase 4: Theme Development and Review**

This fourth phase centered around reviewing themes against the coded data and across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Here, researchers re-engage with the data to check the viability of the initial clusters and determine if the scope of the potential themes accurately represents the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thus, I read my collated

document for each potential theme to test if the extracts and codes represented that idea. This resulted in some themes needing to be refined, merged with others due to overlaps, and extracts and codes being re-assigned to other topics to fit accurately under the umbrella. I repeated this process multiple times to ensure that the themes were distinct from each other while also being coherent. Once the themes were aligned, I created a mind map to organize the relationship between the codes, clusters, and themes. After this was established, I considered the validity of the potential themes within the greater data set. To achieve this, I re-read the data set and my memos with the thematic mind map beside me. Through this process, I ensured that the themes fit the data and formed an overarching story. This iterative cycle secured data rigor. Similarly, I also consulted another researcher to discuss the code clusters and potential themes. I gained feedback from the other researcher to refine my themes and check for reliability. Once this was complete, I solidified my potential themes into definitive themes and refined my mind maps (see Figure 2 for an example of the mind map for the first theme).



**Figure 2. Clustering and Theme Development**

### **3.4.5. Phase 5: Theme Refining, Defining, and Naming**

The fifth phase of thematic analysis focused on identifying the center of each theme and exploring how it fit into both the larger story of the data and the flow of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). At this stage, researchers suggest writing theme definitions to clarify the central organizing concept and test whether the theme requires further refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I approached this by analyzing each theme individually. I considered how each theme captured the data and defined this via memo writing. I kept track of the criteria for each theme in terms of what would qualify a cluster of codes to fit within it. For example, one criterion for the theme of queerness not being a recognized norm was that each cluster illustrated why or how queerness was othered within schools. I consulted with another researcher to review the memos, criteria, and included clusters for each theme to ensure that they were representative of the data. Finally, I pondered each theme name and made adjustments to make them clear and succinct.

### **3.4.6. Phase 6: Writing Up**

The sixth and final stage of reflexive thematic analysis is writing up the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). I wrote a compelling analytical narrative about each theme utilizing extracts and quotes from the participants.

## **3.5. Validity**

I took multiple steps to ensure the validity of my findings. Firstly, as I conducted three interviews with each participant, this provided me with the opportunity to frequently use member checks. Member checking entails seeking participant feedback through a critical lens on the credibility of the interpretations of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At each subsequent interview, I was able to re-visit prior statements of the participants to clarify their meaning and make certain I understood what they were trying to convey. I regularly checked my interpretations of statements with the participants to ensure accuracy. I also used this opportunity to delve deeper into answers from previous interviews for items that may have been overlooked in the moment. This aided me in

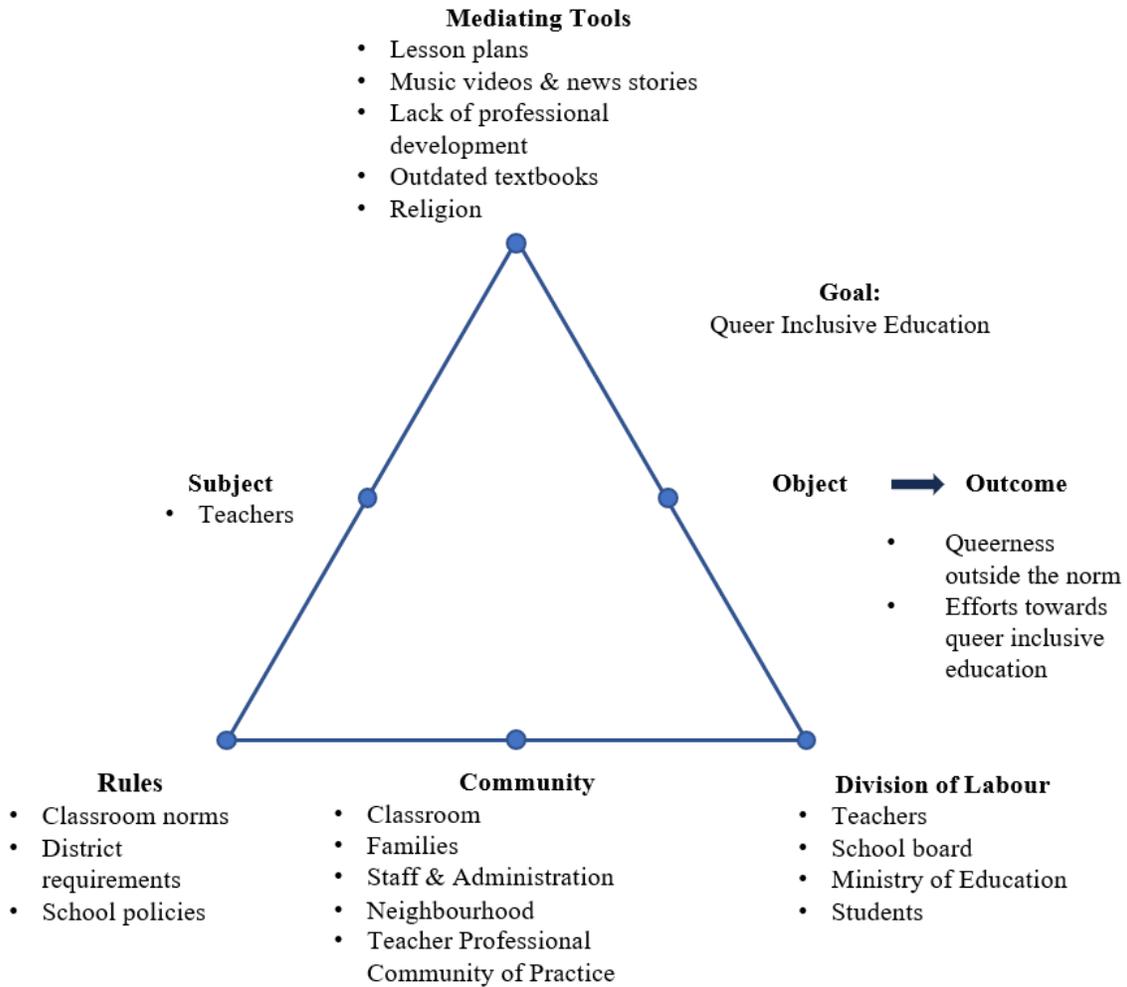
gaining a deeper understanding of participants' comments. Another tactic I employed was having a second and third researcher review the data. Selected excerpts from the transcriptions of each participant were analyzed by two researchers to ensure validity and involved cross verification and validation of interviewee responses for data triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, I offered each participant the opportunity to view the themes I generated before they were included in my thesis. The participants reviewed and approved the themes and their selected quotes. This allowed participants to confirm if the interpretations were correct or alter any aspects they felt were misrepresented before it was published.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Findings**

In this chapter, I share the themes that were generated based on the analysis of the educational journey maps, vignette responses, and nine interviews. The themes represent the perspectives and experiences of the three teachers regarding 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education in their respective Ontario Catholic high schools. The three overarching themes were (1) queerness as outside the norm in schools; (2) efforts towards queer inclusion in schools; and (3) the need for institutional processes and structures to support queer inclusive education.

Following the CHAT framework, the findings are represented as an activity system. The teachers aimed to implement queer inclusive education (i.e. the activity goal) through the ways in which they conceptualized their roles in schools (i.e. division of labor), the tools they utilized (i.e. mediating artifacts), and the practices (i.e. norms, policies) that governed their actions (see Figure 3). In the following paragraphs, I describe the findings as elements of the activity system.



**Figure 3. Queer Inclusive Education in Schools as An Activity System**

### **4.1. Theme 1: Queerness as Outside the Norm**

The first theme that I identified was that being queer has not been normalized in school settings. While queer identities are more accepted than they were a decade or two ago, they are still seen by many as a departure from the standard (Malins, 2016). While queer people can be found in most places, cisgender and heterosexual people are viewed as the ‘default’ (Pollitt et al., 2019). Heteronormativity prevails in the school system and environment as queerness has not been recognized as a norm. In schools, parents and students struggled to accept 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Additionally, there was bullying of queer students.

#### **4.1.1. Ignorance towards Queer Inclusivity (Activity Outcome)**

During the interviews, the participants spoke about the ignorance towards queerness that they had observed in their schools and the educational system. A lack of knowledge about queerness can be thought of as an outcome of the current school environments for gender and sexual diversity. When reflecting on queer inclusive education in his school, Joseph explained:

To be honest, I would say it would be the opposite of queerness being overtly included. I think we're still probably burying our heads in the sand sadly and trying to ignore it (Joseph, Interview 2).

As evidenced in this quote, Joseph attributed the lack of 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusivity in his school to willful ignorance. The image that he shared of school staff 'burying their heads in the sand' when it came to queerness demonstrates that educators were aware of the importance of addressing queer inclusive education, yet often opted to ignore the queer inclusivity needs rather than deal with them. The idea that educators may not know how to handle issues of diverse gender and sexuality inclusion came up in other interviews. For example, Elizabeth shared an instance of a student who came out as transgender in her class, and then had one of their close friends start avoiding them. Elizabeth struggled to figure out how to approach the situation:

How do I navigate this? Right? Because the student wasn't like, bullying, she wasn't saying it to her face, like you are wrong, you should not be doing this. She was saying it to me that like, this makes me really uncomfortable (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

As Elizabeth suggested, educators have experience dealing with bullying among youth. However, discomfort around queerness is a newer hurdle that many teachers have not encountered before, and thus may not know how to respond.

The participants' reflections on their school environments showcased that discomfort and ignorance about queer identities existed in schools. Joseph explained why a lack of awareness of 2SLGBTQIA+ issues was prominent:

And so, what happens when you negate or deny just a certain extension of dignity and acceptance. And it's too bad, because a lot of it is fueled by just

sheer ignorance and a lack of understanding. I truly think that if more people understood people who weren't like them, they would probably have a better understanding of themselves, but they don't see it that way. But what it does is that it entrenches them and closes into a closed-mindedness that just keeps them entrenched and not seeking the wisdom perhaps to change their behaviour. Because in order to change someone's behavior, you must first change their means of thinking. You've got to change their mind (Joseph, Interview 2).

Joseph believed that people who are against queer inclusive education were driven by ignorance. He offered a solution to anti-2SLGBTQIA+ behaviour, which is founded on learning about and understanding people who are different from themselves. He also made the connection that a change in mindset is necessary to alter behaviour. Ignorance towards those (such as queer people) who are perceived as 'different' from what constitutes the norm manifests in a lack of acceptance towards others.

#### **4.1.2. Parent/School Community Difficulty Accepting Queer Students (Community)**

Another area that was apparent in the data was that members of the school community sometimes struggled to accept queer students. Students and their families are part of a larger community with teachers in the system. The actions and attitudes of students and their parents had a negative impact on the implementation of queer inclusive education. During the interviews, participants shared several examples of students and their families having issues with queerness. Ruth offered an instance of observing disapproval towards queer inclusive classroom content from a parent of one of her students:

There is one boy in my class right now, whose dad is a preacher. And I know a few times I've said things, especially when it comes to something queer, like if I say no matter who you love or anything like that, I feel like I'm waiting for a phone call from the dad, the preacher. Because I feel like it's not being received well (Ruth, Interview 2).

Even though in the above situation the student's father did not expressly state his displeasure towards the inclusive messaging, Ruth was nervous about receiving complaints from him. Another example of school community members having difficulty

with queer acceptance was outlined by Elizabeth, who had a student and their parent request for the daughter to not be grouped with a queer student in class:

Her mom sent me a message too, saying that ‘my daughter is having a really hard time accepting the changes that this other student is going through,’ and basically asking me to not put them in group work, like groups together and stuff (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

The student was uncomfortable with her transgender classmate and involved her mother in her pursuit of avoiding interactions with her peer. Elizabeth talked to this student about the situation; however, the parental attitude influenced how the student interacted with her peer:

I had a conversation with her, and we talked. You could still see that there was a pretty strong influence there, in terms of like, no, my parents said that I’m not allowed to be friends with this person anymore (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

This suggests that parents can significantly impact the attitudes and beliefs of their children. Elizabeth spoke further about the notion of parental influence and how she, as a teacher, strived to have a positive impact on ingrained views of hate:

You hear kids spouting things, and you think, that is directly from the mouth of one of their parents. And it was ignorant and bigoted, and it’s just like, you are spreading misinformation and hate and it’s not right. It’s not welcome in my classroom (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

I feel like I would have more of a breakthrough if I was able to have an impact on the students who have been raised with that sort of cycle of hate towards people (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

In the above quotes, Elizabeth referred to how prejudiced opinions can be passed down from parents to their children. She took a stand against hate in her classroom, which the other participants also shared. Elizabeth strove to break familial cycles of hate in students by spreading messages of kindness and acceptance.

Not accepting queer students contributes to 2SLGBTQIA+ people being seen as ‘different’ from the norm. Social rejection, such as classmates refusing to engage in group work together, can eventually lead to bullying.

### 4.1.3. Bullying due to Queerness (Activity Outcome)

The bullying of students due to diverse gender and sexual identities was a common thread in the vignette responses and interviews with the participants. During one of her interviews, Elizabeth shared that the bullying of queer students was especially personal to her, as her son is queer and has been harassed because of it:

My own son is bisexual, and he was picked on in grade nine a lot. And it was hard on him...The one kid who kind of picked on him when they were in grade nine, was someone who he had known like, forever...he was, I think, more hurt about it because they had been friends...And it was like, the kid was trying to out him essentially (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

The above example demonstrates that bullying can center around sexual or gender identity, particularly if it is seen as a departure from the norm. And, as in this case, the bully was someone who used to be friends with their victim, and perhaps turned on them once they discovered they were queer. However, Elizabeth also went on to say about her son:

But if you'd ask him now, I think he would say that no one from his community stands out at school as being ostracized for their sexual orientation (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

This indicates that, at least in this case, the bullying environment at schools could be disrupted as queer acceptance grows and becomes more normalized. Similarly, the participants expressed that they did not often witness bullying related to queerness. However, they partly attributed this to students being adept at hiding bullying behaviours from adults:

Well, it's happening all the time. And we don't see it either, like we see some of it, but we don't see a lot of it. It's almost impossible to catch really. If they're doing it blatantly, then yeah, but it's rare for students to be blatant with it. It's so under the radar, they would never do or say anything in front of a teacher. (Ruth, Interview 2)

Based on Ruth's statement, and similar experiences shared by other participants, students rarely bullied their peers in front of school staff. Rather, they bullied in underhanded ways that were difficult for adults to catch. However, if a teacher witnessed bullying, all

three of the participants expressed that they would never ignore it. When responding to the vignette, the participants said that they had a hard time imagining any teacher not addressing bullying, even if they were not supportive of 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education. Joseph elaborated:

You can't just pick and choose who you're going to take care of. And professionally, in my opinion, everyone deserves equal care. I don't think I could ever ignore bullying (Joseph, Interview 2).

The statement that all students 'deserve equal care' speaks to the responsibility of teachers to ensure the safety of all students. Student safety and well-being can be put at risk by bullying. The participants spoke about the pain that bullying caused students, and the long-term impact it can have. Joseph shared his feelings of responsibility regarding looking out for the welfare of students, and how crucial it is for teachers to intervene:

It's the point that the victim is never without pain, and I really don't think the old adage of just ignore it, I really don't think that that helps any, nor do I think it's a valid way of coping, to ignore it. That doesn't negate the pain and I just think you always reach a point, a tipping point. Whatever the hell the rules are, and the laws are, I just think, as a moral human being with a sense of compassion for humans, you have to be able to say enough. I think we tend to trivialize or forgive some of what some could perceive to be small little cuts. But if it's a death by 10,000 cuts, and you were there when they delivered the ten thousandth cut. Well, that death is on you, isn't it? (Joseph, Interview 2).

Joseph explained that ignoring issues such as bullying is harmful in the long run because bullying takes a toll on students and that pain continues to build up over time if it is never addressed. Joseph argued that bullying can push a student over the edge with suicide. He believed that the suicide of a student who was being bullied would partially be the responsibility of educators if they had seen the issue and ignored it. Joseph used this example to explain that harassment and bullying can leave invisible wounds which must be addressed. Bullying based on gender and sexual identity is a byproduct of queerness not being recognized as a norm.

#### **4.1.4. Religious Beliefs Negatively Impacting Perceptions of Queerness (Mediating Tool)**

Participants considered the factors that influenced peoples' perceptions or adoption of a negative view of queerness. A common thread of reasoning involved religion, specifically how the Bible and rhetoric from the Catholic Church can be used to view being queer as a sin. Intolerant attitudes rooted in religion were factors that mediated teacher experiences in striving for queer inclusive education. The Catholic Church also has a set of doctrines and rules it imposes upon followers, including guidelines for behavior and beliefs (Peter et al., 2018). Some doctrines involve treating others with kindness, whereas others exclude queer identities, such as by not sanctioning marriage between same-sex couples. Elizabeth shared an example of a time a parent had a negative reaction to a pride message and confronted it through religion:

We shared the school board's pride message on our school Facebook page. And then someone, a parent, lost their mind in a message. Just saying that, 'this is unbelievable, like this is so anti-Christian. This goes against what the Bible says like, how can you be promoting this to our children?' (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

The post about inclusion that was shared on Elizabeth's school's social media page was met with disgust by a parent. They used Christianity to justify their opinion and claimed that the school was promoting anti-Christian beliefs to students by spreading a message of pride and acceptance. The intersection of religion and queerness can drive a wedge between some people and the Church. Ruth spoke about how certain anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Catholic beliefs and rules led to a colleague in her school leaving the Catholic Church altogether:

Catholics can be pretty excluding, which is what I struggle with. He's now Anglican because of the Catholic Church stance on LGBTQ+ people. They say they're accepting, yet they don't sanctify marriage and things like that (Ruth, Interview 1).

Ruth's colleague converted from Catholicism to Anglicanism. His solution to the misalignment of beliefs was to leave Catholicism as he saw no other way around the deeply ingrained traditions of the Catholic Church. Ruth understood her colleague's reasoning for leaving Catholicism and thought he was valid in his choice.

Elizabeth offered an alternative view of religion, suggesting that it came down to how people choose to interpret the Bible. She saw Catholic values as primarily focused on accepting and loving everyone. It is certain people who attempt to weaponize the Bible to further their own beliefs that Elizabeth took issue with:

What I hate the most is when people try to use the Bible as like, “well, it says in the Bible that homosexuality is wrong”. And it's just like, yeah, but it also says in the Bible, that if you wear two different fabrics, you should be stoned to death. There are some things in the Bible that are considered archaic now. And I believe the hate wasn't the message in there. People will take things out of context too. In terms of using the Bible as like a weapon, I'm totally against that...it's always the people who are from super Christian families, and I'm just like, it's actually extremely un-Christian, what you're doing or what you're saying right now. But again, they're going to customize the Bible to make their argument stronger (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

Weaponizing the Bible refers to when people manipulate religious texts or teachings to justify their own biases or actions, often in a way that uses the Bible as a weapon to harm and discriminate against others (Levine, 2021). This includes saying that being gay is a sin while ignoring the overarching Biblical message of loving and accepting everyone (Peter et al., 2018). It is this type of behaviour that Elizabeth believed was the root of religion being used to further hate, instead of spreading love. Joseph also reflected on the Catholic Church when it came to inclusion. Similarly to Elizabeth, he made the distinction between Christian values of love and acceptance and the nature of the Catholic Church:

I do think there's a general observation that I can make, and be fair in making, in saying that there are a few certain things about the nature of the relationship between the Church and a queer individual. And I think they see, and rightly so, that perhaps the Catholic Church sometimes isn't quite as Christian as it could be when you're talking about inclusion, and you're talking about participation and belonging and the way in which it's done in church...I mean, education changes slowly, but now we have to consider the slow turning ship of the Church, and not just the expectation that it will change, but being mindful that for some things, maybe it won't change. There is a certain permanence and there are certain building blocks that it was founded upon, that perhaps could not be changed (Joseph, Interview 2).

In the above quote, Joseph critiqued the resistance to change that is present within religious institutions. He noted that the Catholic Church is even slower to change than

educational systems. Further, certain aspects of the Church may never change. Therefore, education, especially when paired with religion as in Catholic schools, needs to determine how to balance the unwillingness to change with their responsibility to students in areas such as queer inclusivity.

The theme of queerness not yet being recognized as a norm in Catholic high schools in Ontario demonstrates that negative attitudes towards 2SLGBTQIA+ people are prominent in some schools.

## **4.2. Theme 2: Efforts Towards Queer Inclusion in Schools**

The second theme captures that the teachers in this study shared efforts towards the implementation of queer inclusive education. These attempts included representations of queerness in schools, teachers setting the tone for their classroom, educators incorporating diverse gender and sexual identities in lessons, and teachers supporting queer students. The participants also made observations of students and schools making inroads toward queer inclusion.

### **4.2.1. Representations of Queerness in Schools (Activity Outcome)**

The participants noticed school-wide attempts towards inclusion. Efforts involved schools having clubs that fostered belonging such as GSAs, as well as displaying rainbow flags inside the school. Elizabeth and Joseph both shared examples:

I think that this school does a pretty good job of it, like you see people who have signage up and ‘you are safe here’ posters. You see them everywhere. We have pride flags and the 2SLGBTQIA+ flags hanging in our front hallway and stuff (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

I do know that our Catholic School Board has a theme of ‘I belong here’, and there is the Gay Straight Alliance Club, there is a pride flag also in our school, so, there are visible signs of acceptance in our school environment (Joseph, Interview 3).

Rainbow flags are symbols of inclusion and 2SLGBTQIA+ pride. The participants thought this symbolism being publicly posted in the school sent a message of acceptance

and representation to queer students. Joseph and Ruth both made note of GSAs that exist in their schools as additional forms of queer representation and potential spaces of belonging for students.

From the perspective of the participants, school efforts to incorporate queer inclusion into their environment promoted some students to feel comfortable with being openly queer at school. Elizabeth reflected on the school community for queer students:

I know there's a lot of kids who identify, you know, as gay or bi or queer, or whatever. And they all have a place where they fit in at school. I think they all feel like they're part of the school community (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

From her viewpoint, Elizabeth saw her school as a place where queer students fit in. She also touched on a sense of belonging that she believed most students were able to find at her school, regardless of their gender or sexual identity.

#### **4.2.2. Student Support and Acceptance of Queerness (Community; Division of Labor)**

The participants all believed that for the most part, the student population at their schools accepted their queer classmates. Students being inclusive of queer peers contributed to the labor towards fostering queer inclusive education in the school community. Elizabeth shared stories of students she knew who were passionate about defending 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals:

With these students, if someone were to use the f-word that's pertaining to sexual orientation, people would lose it on them. I feel that it is like there is a strong sense of like of equality, and people sort of fiercely defending people from LGBTQ communities. I feel like even people who wouldn't necessarily put themselves as a member of those communities, there's more allies that are present, and people know just not to cross those lines, which I think is really healthy (Elizabeth, Interview 1).

The above quote spoke to a strong sense of equality that Elizabeth saw as becoming prominent amongst youth and a healthy sense of boundaries that should not be crossed, such as bullying someone for being queer. Elizabeth also shared that her students were

curious about 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and were able to have productive conversations about it in her classroom:

Today, in my grade nine class I was talking about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. And then, one kid was like, were there some additional letters added in there? What does the A stand for? And then again another kid put their hand up, and they said, this is what it stands for. And then they said, thank you for asking, because that's how people learn about it, right? Like, you're not going to know if you don't ask the questions. And I was just like that's right, that's awesome (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

In the example Elizabeth shared from her classroom, a student had a question about the additional letters in the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ and a classmate volunteered to educate them. The student who shared their knowledge thanked the student for asking and Elizabeth acknowledged that it can be hard to ask questions in areas one is unsure about. Elizabeth found the discourse to be encouraging and thought it demonstrated the openness that was needed for discussing queer inclusion in education. The openness and acceptance that was demonstrated in the example from Elizabeth's class is something that Joseph touched on when considering the current high school generation:

I really do think that they do have a level of awareness that many adults lack, and perhaps a level of acceptance, too...I will say that I do think that their ability to be accepting of people, the capacity for them to accept has greatly improved over past generations (Joseph, Interview 2).

The above insight from Joseph was also echoed by the other participants. Teachers observed that high school students were more accepting of others than past generations were. When comparing youth with adults, Joseph was encouraged about what the shift in attitudes and behaviours meant for the future of inclusion in society.

#### **4.2.3. Teachers Setting the Tone for their Classroom (Rules)**

Teachers had the ability to set the tone for their classroom, as their words and actions strongly influenced the overall classroom environment (Alter & Haydon, 2017). Classroom norms acted as rules set by teachers that governed the interactions of their students (Alter & Haydon, 2017). The participants shared that they attempted to use their

roles in a classroom to exemplify inclusive education. For example, Joseph set classroom expectations in every course at the start of the semester:

My classroom environment expectations are on the first page of every syllabus for each of my courses...some of the key words that I use include words like aware, inclusive, empathetic, analytical, creative, resourceful, proactive, and accountable. So that's what I expect of students. That's what I expect of myself. To be honest with you, I think that's why my classroom is a productive environment, because people know they can say things in my classroom, probably without jeers, or with a sense of confidence, or knowing that their thoughts, if they are articulately and thoughtfully expressed, are going to get respect and attention (Joseph, Interview 3).

The above principles were foundational in Joseph's classroom. They cultivated a culture of respect amongst individuals in his class. Joseph has utilized this tactic for years and believed it contributed to creating a positive classroom environment. A similar way that Elizabeth accomplished this was through posting positive visuals and messaging around the classroom:

I have four different visuals in my classroom that say things like "you're safe here, Everyone is welcome here, Everyone belongs and is celebrated" or something like that. Some of them are school board materials, like the "you are safe here" poster with a rainbow throughout it. So it's geared towards, the rainbows are a symbol of the LGBTQIA+ community (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

Elizabeth displayed the materials in her classroom that were geared towards spreading a message of acceptance and belonging for all. Those can be considered all-encompassing phrases of inclusion, but the 'you are safe here' poster specifically has a rainbow for queer individuals to feel seen and supported. Elizabeth viewed these tactics as avenues for setting up her classroom to be a space of positivity and acceptance.

The participants reflected on the importance of setting a positive tone in their classroom toward inclusive education. Joseph made an argument regarding the impact of not including diverse gender and sexual identities in classrooms:

I would say you run the risk of marginalizing students in front of you. And when you're trying to build a relationship, you don't want students feeling left out. You need to speak to the people in front of you, and that's everyone.

And it's all about being dismissive, either by omission or commission. It's still wrong (Joseph, Interview 3).

Joseph emphasized the importance of including all students in the classroom. This contributed to building relationships with students and ensured no one felt left out or disconnected from school. Elizabeth also placed her focus on including all students in the classroom, however she put more weight on providing positive representation:

If there's something in the material that's sort of comparable in their life where they can be like, okay, this person has two moms. Well, I have a brother who's gay. Right? Then it's a way that shows this character, like it gives them representation. Whether it's they themselves who identifies as being LGBTQ+ or if it's someone they know who is, it helps develop empathy, it helps to develop the resilience. And I think it helps to, I don't want to say normalize it, but like, celebrate it. It's sort of stifling the discrimination (Elizabeth, Interview 2).

Elizabeth tried to include material in her lessons that showcased diverse identities, so that students in the class could see characters they may relate to. An example of this is elaborated on in the following section, as Elizabeth featured a novel study where the main character had two moms. Elizabeth also pointed out that viewing diverse identities in class content can build student empathy towards others and normalize queerness. All the participants reiterated this point and connected it to their attempts to include queer content in their classrooms.

#### **4.2.4. Queer Inclusive Education Implementation within Curriculum (Mediating Tools)**

The most prominent effort from teachers to create inclusive spaces came from taking the initiative to incorporate queer identities or perspectives into their lessons. Each participant shared examples of including queerness in a lesson. As an English teacher, Elizabeth included books or short stories that featured queer characters in her courses. She shared an example of a novel study she taught with her grade nine students, where the main character had two moms:

We talk about the main character and her risk factors and her protective factors and stuff like that. So the fact that she comes from a family with two moms is one of the things that our students have sort of said, well, that's a

risk factor, because it's something that someone could get bullied for, it might make her feel vulnerable. So, there were some good discussions there. But also, they kind of acted like, “yeah, that's not a big deal. Some people have two moms, so what” (Elizabeth, Interview 1).

In this example, Elizabeth touched on two main points. Her students were aware of 2SLGBTQIA+ issues. They believed that youth could be bullied for having two moms. However, some students dismissed having two moms as a regular occurrence that should be considered normal. Joseph also shared an instance of him including a discussion about queerness in his classroom. 2SLGBTQIA+ identities were not originally in the curriculum for his Grade 12 Law class, but he felt it was important to include the discussion:

The point came up about having Canada's first female Supreme Court justice on board...And so, I mentioned that a woman's voice and perception of things was not historically in place. So, the end result was, white men deciding the laws for all. And I brought up the point that there are various groups that could feel marginalized by that. And I did include the LGBTQ+ population, the queer population. And so for that reason, I try to be perhaps more inclusive than our older textbooks would suggest. I thought it was important to include other groups (Joseph, Interview 3).

Joseph discussed marginalized voices in his example, with women and queer individuals as two major groups that have historically been oppressed. Joseph commented on the importance of including a variety of viewpoints in his courses. In considering the lack of queer voices in law-making in Canada, Joseph fostered conversations about queer inclusive education in his classroom, which was not originally in the textbook or curriculum. He shared that since the textbooks often did not mention diverse identities, he tended to find inspiration for his courses through listening to the news and incorporating related topical subjects.

Ruth practiced queer inclusive education in the Grade 9 Religion classes she taught. She shared that diverse gender and sexual identities were not explicitly included in her religion curriculum, but she believed it was important to include them as part of a lesson about acceptance and loving everyone. She showed the music video for the song *Same Love* by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis (2012) to her class. This music video

promoted a message of marriage equality and featured two men falling in love and getting married, against the backdrop of struggles with homophobic elements of society.

I showed the video 'same love' by Macklemore. I think it's a good topic to talk about, because we are promoting equity, inclusion, diversity. Just like we talk about cross-curricular marking for like teaching, for spelling and grammar, so that kids will be ready to be literate, I think you still have to teach cross-curricular about equity, inclusion, and diversity as well (Ruth, Interview 2).

Similar to Joseph's example of using the news to incorporate inclusive education into his class, Ruth used media to encourage students to discuss inclusion. Ruth also emphasized the importance of cross-curricular teaching for diversity, no matter what the course content was.

All the participants expressed that while they had included queer discussions in their courses, there was room to improve and practice queer inclusive education to a greater extent. Specifically, after reflecting on her participation in this study, Ruth shared:

I feel like now I want to include more queer topics in my classroom. I feel like I'm more inclined now to openly talk about it, and add it to my diversity and inclusion efforts (Ruth, Interview 2).

Ruth's statement demonstrated that stimulative open conversations about queerness might increase educators' comfort in discussing and including 2SLGBTQIA+ topics in their classes.

#### **4.2.5. Teachers Navigating Their Roles to Support Queer Students (Division of Labor)**

The participants worked to support queer youth where they could. This involved being willing to speak up for queer students and create welcoming classroom environments. Teachers acknowledged that they had to take on various roles to support students. Teacher endeavors to support queer youth demonstrated the majority of the labor that teachers have had to take on in working towards queer inclusive education. Elizabeth spoke about her efforts to create an inclusive space where all students were accepted:

I had to adjust and find new resources that did support what I felt was an accepting and safe classroom, then I kind of had to do a little extra research and work to find something that I felt was conducive to the kind of environment I was trying to create. I would say that I strive to make sure that every student in my class feels like they're welcomed, and that they can be who they want to be without feeling judged. I think that's a priority in my eyes, making sure everyone feels safe to be who they are (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

To support the students in her classroom, Elizabeth took the time to conduct extra research to identify resources for fostering inclusivity. By doing this, she took on the roles of being a researcher and a learner. Elizabeth placed a focus on ensuring that all students in her classroom were free to be who they were and feel safe doing so.

When speaking about fellow educators who may be uncomfortable with queerness and not want to practice gender and sexual diversity inclusion, Joseph shared that he would encourage them towards queer inclusion:

I would have to say something for sure, or you run the risk of marginalizing and not speaking to a segment of the population of your class, and as a teacher, I don't know why you'd want to take that risk. Because they're hard to reach sometimes anyway (Joseph, Interview 3).

Joseph claimed that he would stand up for queer students to other teachers if needed, acting as a leader and an advocate. He emphasized that a priority of educators should be to connect with all of their students. Elizabeth also stated that she would be an advocate and say something to a colleague if she believed they were making a queer student feel badly about themselves:

I think if a student came up to me and said that a teacher said this, and it made me feel bad about my sexuality, or it made me feel like my gender isn't valid, I would probably one-on-one have a discussion with that teacher and ask them if there's anything I can do to sort of support them or come up with a plan to make sure these students feel comfortable. If a student is showing that they're genuinely upset about something that one of my colleagues has said, I couldn't leave it unaddressed (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

If a fellow educator invalidated a queer student or talked down to them, Elizabeth highlighted the importance of having a conversation about it. Her focus would be on helping the teacher figure out a more inclusive plan for their classroom going forward.

This would involve Elizabeth acting as a support for her colleague and collaborating to generate ideas for how to develop inclusive educational practices. The desire to support all students was a common thread among the participants.

#### **4.2.6. Challenges with Implementing Queer Inclusive Education**

While there have been efforts made towards queer inclusive education in schools, teachers also recognized challenges with outdated curriculum, differences of opinions with religious families, and determining the ‘right thing to do’. These barriers mediated teachers’ abilities to implement 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion in education. One area of challenge was outdated curriculum and materials:

I remember in the curriculum reading something and it was just like, ‘it’s okay to be homosexual, but it is not okay to act on this’. And talking about the way that homosexuals have sexual intercourse does not fertilize an egg and how it has nothing to do with reproduction, so therefore, it’s a sin. I think that text was published in like 1998 or 1997 or something. I just remember being like, I’m not okay with this, I’m not comfortable saying this, because there are queer kids in my class, and I don’t want them to think that anything that they’re doing or thinking about is wrong (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

In the above situation, Elizabeth had clear boundaries and did not teach the lesson the way the curriculum originally laid it out. Elizabeth did not believe in the messaging about queerness being a sin. She did not want to alienate any students by making them feel that their identity was wrong. This consideration and insight showcased Elizabeth’s reflective approach to being an educator. Joseph iterated a similar fact about the textbooks for his courses also being outdated and not including queer identities in them.

Another challenge that teachers experienced were difficulties communicating with some religious families. Ruth recalled experiences where parents expressed their displeasure with the inclusive content she blended into her classroom:

Their father is a preacher, and I get a little nervous about it. I get a little nervous, and I’m almost expecting a phone call at some point, because my way of teaching and some of the content I show, like the music videos I told you about, they are not the strict literal interpretation of the Bible (Ruth, Interview 3).

Ruth shared that she was wary of some religious families in her school who believe only the literal interpretation of the Bible should be taught. Despite her nervousness about receiving backlash for her lessons, Ruth continued to advocate for equity and inclusion in her classroom. The other participants also shared similar stories of negative reactions they have received with regards to their course content.

Finally, the participants reported that it was challenging to determine what the ‘right thing to do’ was in various situations. Ruth discussed this in the context of students who changed their names and/or pronouns:

A challenge for me is if somebody declares that they're not Christine and are now Chris, and you might think, well should I be calling them Chris or Christine like, what's the right thing to do? Because I don't want to call home in case their parents are really angry about that and get them in trouble, but am I legally allowed to call them Chris instead of Christine? Is this okay, that I'm calling them this? It's me wanting to do the right thing (Ruth, Interview 2).

Ruth recounted a delicate issue that she struggled with, which was finding the balance between honoring students and their identities while making sure that she was following the policies set by her school board or government. This speaks to the clear need for institutions to set guidelines so that educators are aware of how to respond in specific situations.

### **4.3. Theme 3: The Need for Institutional Structures and Processes to Support Queer Inclusive Education**

Participants advocated for a need for further formal recognition and guidance from the school systems and administration around queer inclusive education. While the participants have made individual efforts to include queer identities in their classrooms, there was still a nervousness or hesitancy that held some educators back from fully incorporating queer inclusive education into their classrooms. One factor that contributed to teacher hesitancy to implement queer inclusive education was potential backlash from community members (e.g., parents). The participants called for professional development activities around queerness. They also shared examples of school board programs that

educate about minority groups, which they suggested serve as proof that 2SLGBTQIA+ focused activities could be implemented.

#### **4.3.1. Backlash Surrounding Queerness in Education (Community; Rules)**

All participants spoke about the backlash they have experienced from some students and families when they discussed queer identities in the classroom. Students and their families are part of the wider community. Some parents believed they should have control over what their children learn in schools. There were also unspoken rules that teachers have to abide by in terms of classroom content, otherwise their position could be at risk (Callaghan, 2015; Campbell et al., 2021). Ruth elaborated on backlash she has experienced by discussing an incident where a student requested to leave her class due to queer positive content she displayed:

Somebody was asked to come out of my classroom once because of showing that *Same Love* music video. Two years ago I think, a parent wanted their son out of my class because he didn't agree with the topic. It was actually a parent who is also a teacher. He wanted to have a meeting with me about it, and he told me that he didn't appreciate what I was doing (Ruth, Interview 2).

Ruth had a meeting with the parent who disagreed with the queer inclusive video she showed to her class. The parent did not like his son being exposed to the gay couple that was featured in the music video. Due to instances like this, Ruth specifically expressed that she considered whether she could lose her job over sharing certain materials during a lesson. When talking about why she continued to show the *Same Love* music video despite the backlash, Ruth stated:

Because I think it's important to show kids the whole picture. I don't think they need to be limited by conservative perspectives, and I think it's a good topic to talk about, because we are promoting equity, inclusion, diversity. And I was willing to take the risk. There was a teacher fired for showing the *Same Love* music video in the States. I don't know what state it was. I did think about it carefully, I thought carefully before I showed the video again after that. But I said to my husband, I'm just going to show it because I can say it's not a Catholic-sanctioned marriage. But it is a marriage that's legal, and again, it's very painful to be excluded. And that video very much shows that (Ruth, Interview 2).

In her rationale for continuing to incorporate queer inclusive content in her classroom despite pushback from some parents, Ruth emphasized the importance of inclusion. She thought her students deserved to be given a well-rounded education where they were exposed to a variety of perspectives, so that they could develop their critical thinking skills and make their own informed decisions. However, Ruth did consider the implications of showing the *Same Love* video, including potentially losing her job. She ultimately decided it was more important to demonstrate equity in her classroom, but she did have the justification prepared that she could touch on same-sex marriages not being sanctioned by the Catholic Church during the lesson.

The participants also ruminated on the overall attitudes of uncertainty around 2SLGBTQIA+ content integration that they have observed from educators in their respective schools. Joseph mused that:

I don't know where it comes from, but I sense that there is a guarded feeling among many teachers that they might stick their neck out to do the right thing and teach very, very relevant topics, but run the risk of having something misrepresented, misconstrued, misinformed, ill-informed, disinformed, and turned into a great big dumpster fire type situation that was meant to be only a good intention and led to that road to hell (Joseph, Interview 2).

Joseph stated that while educators may feel that teaching about queerness is the 'right thing to do', they are nervous about the implications it could have. Specifically, some teachers were guarded as they worried that their words and actions could be twisted and used against them as ammunition from people who were against queer inclusive education. When asked about why this may be, Joseph stated:

I think there are hostilities, I will say. There are angry people out there, for various reasons, and I think there would be some poised to pounce on something that might be relatively benign (Joseph, Interview 2).

Joseph shared that these attitudes were largely referencing members of the public with conservative beliefs. This includes parents who claimed that teachers who discussed queerness in the classroom were trying to convert or corrupt youth for their own agenda, going so far as to call some teachers groomers or perverts (Demopoulos, 2023). Joseph emphasized that there were always going to be people who were ready to attack innocent

comments in the classroom, when, in reality, educators were simply being inclusive. Ruth echoed Joseph's feeling of being cautious about what they say in the classroom:

I think I'm a bit more guarded here because I'm always wondering. You know, parents send their kids here for a reason, for maybe a bit more of a conservative, Catholic-based education. And you do kind of watch how you cross your t's and dot your I's a bit more with everything. You have to be very conservative and careful, especially until you get to know the curriculum well and know the Catholic view on things well (Ruth, Interview 3).

Ruth shared that she often played it safe and was careful about what she said in the classroom. Her strategy was to ensure that content and discussion followed Catholic values, which could act as a defense if she was ever questioned about her material. Despite the preventative measures that she has taken, Ruth still tended to be uncertain about which content could land her in trouble:

I don't even know when I put the gay pride rainbow images on my PowerPoints, if that's going to cause me to get a phone call. I don't even know...personally that, selfishly, I should maybe be more on it, for one thing. Yeah, there should be more. It would be nice to have more guidance on it (Ruth, Interview 3).

Ruth expressed her worry that actions such as having a pride flag on her lesson slides could cause her to receive an unhappy phone call from a parent. She went on to say that she felt she should be doing more to include diverse gender and sexual identities in her courses. However, she thought getting guidance from the school board was vital for educators to feel confident in practicing queer inclusive education. The call for institutionalized recognition of queerness in education could help assuage these concerns.

#### **4.3.2. Call for Teacher Education and Professional Development around Queerness (Rules; Mediating Tools)**

Institutionalized recognition of queer inclusive education would mainly include professional development for teachers. Queer specific training for educators could act as mediating tools to enhance teacher actions and help them towards the goal of queer inclusive education. Professional development would also provide a baseline of rules that

could protect teachers and give them explicit permission to discuss queerness in their classrooms. As Ruth stated, teachers need to be educated about 2SLGBTQIA+ topics:

I know I feel a little nervous about showing videos or discussing queerness in the classroom, and I'm still not where I'd like to be myself. Personally, I'm not where I want to be education-wise on it (Ruth, Interview 3).

Ruth believed that she had a lack of knowledge about queerness, which needed to be updated so she could be properly equipped to include diverse gender and sexual identities in her courses. Joseph suggested that 2SLGBTQIA+ terminology was a good starting point for teacher education:

I would probably start with some basic terminology. I think there is an unwillingness to speak on certain topics because of the fear of offending. And I think a comfortable environment with the correct terminology and understanding would probably help. Because, in order to understand something, I think it's important that you understand proper terms (Joseph, Interview 3).

Joseph established that he believed understanding terminology was the first step to helping teachers understand queerness and feel comfortable incorporating it in the classroom.

The participants also stated that it was important for educators to learn how to navigate classroom discussions around queerness and know how to answer questions if they arose. Elizabeth explained:

We could use some in-service PD on how to facilitate conversations around LGBTQ+ and keep them safe and productive. I feel like teachers kind of need to have a bit of a tool kit, or some discussion points, I guess, up their sleeves, so they know how to handle those situations (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

Elizabeth's focus was on facilitating safe and productive conversations in the classroom around queerness. She believed teachers should be given the resources and training to navigate such discussions. Elizabeth went into further detail about the necessity of addressing questions in the classroom when they arise:

Teachers should be prepared because the conversations happen, whether it's part of your lesson or whether it comes up organically, there are discussions

that are going to be had and shooting it down, like just saying, we're not talking about this, I think that that is also problematic, right? Because then it sort of is indicative of shame. That it's something to be ashamed of, that we don't talk about this, we sweep it under the rug. So yeah, I think when the conversations come up, they should be addressed in a positive way. We need to talk about how to harness positivity while keeping those discussions productive and not diminishing anyone's feelings, whether it's someone who just wants more information, and maybe doesn't know how to tactfully ask for it. Or if it's someone who's part of that community, and they want to feel more accepted or represented in the classroom (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

Elizabeth stated that students asked questions, so the topic of queerness was likely to come up in the classroom, even if it was not part of a teacher's lesson plan. For this reason, educators should be prepared to answer questions about 2SLGBTQIA+ terminology and issues in their classes. This was exemplified by Elizabeth's example earlier in this chapter, where a student asked about the meaning of each letter in the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym and Elizabeth fostered a positive classroom discussion around the topic. Elizabeth emphasized that shutting down student questions was not a solution, as that may signal to students that there is stigma around the topic. Elizabeth's goal was for all students to feel heard and represented in her classroom.

Another area of teacher education and school guidelines that participants felt was lacking was knowing how to handle student pronoun changes. All three participants mentioned pronoun changes as an issue they saw arising more often in their schools. Ruth spoke to the uncertainty that surrounds knowing the proper way to handle such instances, and how education around this is necessary:

We definitely need to teach where the school stands on things like, what if somebody now wants to be called he/him instead of she/her? Or where do you stand as far as what's expected of you as a teacher? Is it okay to do something? When should you call home? When is it okay not to call home? You know, does a name or gender have to be legally changed first? People just wonder that, they don't know what's right and wrong as far as their teaching practice goes. I don't even know. So working on educating and increasing awareness and knowledge for what to do in all of those areas (Ruth, Interview 3).

Ruth's concerns centered around attempting to balance what a student wanted, what their parents wanted, and what the school allowed. The confusion and uncertainty in this area indicated the need for professional development and setting forth clear guidelines on dealing with pronoun changes. The participants suggested that such professional development and teacher education could involve workshops, speakers, and providing resources and materials for teachers. Joseph also suggested learning from queer people to understand their perspectives and the challenges they face:

You need to perhaps understand their viewpoint, how they're viewed if they do not have a position of privilege. I think it needs to be defined in a way so that teachers understand this is an issue of privilege and marginalization that might occur. If they're not inclusive and understanding of these topics in a way that is either, whether it's dismissive by accident or on purpose, it is still dismissive, and being unaware, I think, is a failed excuse. And I just think we would benefit from an understanding of that perspective, to understand challenges and obstacles. I think I don't even know if a lot of people really are aware of maybe even subtle things that we may not even know, that could be ill-received perhaps. Small little nuance things (Joseph, Interview 3).

Joseph spoke to the multiple facets that contributed to the lack of awareness and dismissiveness that occurred around queerness in education. He pointed out that numerous small behaviours and attitudes could push away queer students. Joseph believed that teachers should be equipped with the knowledge to understand the challenges that queer individuals face.

#### **4.3.3. School Board Programs About Various Oppressed Minority Groups (Mediating Tools)**

Participants recalled school programs that addressed and recognized various oppressed groups. For example, Elizabeth discussed the months dedicated to education and awareness about certain marginalized groups:

I would say in terms of marginalized groups, I think the policymakers do a great job of ensuring that there's Black history month, and now we see, like Asian Canadian month as well, and we're just seeing more of those sorts of months where it's like there's board initiatives that come down through our administrators. And they're like, okay, show this video or talk about this

topic, we're going to go to this assembly. We see a lot of that for other sorts of marginalized groups (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

The participants echoed that their school boards had initiatives in place to educate school population about various oppressed groups. However, while some participants felt this was useful, Joseph offered a critique on the monthly nature of this awareness:

It just seems like it's always about a group of marginalized people. And whether it is women or perhaps a racialized group, or whatever it is. I don't mean it to sound glib like this, but it's almost like we take our turns looking at each marginalized group. It's almost like a Baskin-Robbins flavor of the month thing. And I don't mean to be glib, like I said, but it seems like we have seasons or months, that we sometimes use to commemorate groups of people. And while I know it's important that it be acknowledged, it just seems like, I don't know, the way it's segmented or packaged, or meant to be seasonal, I think. I think there has to be a different approach to it...I just hope people don't see it as kind of a seasonal rotation of reminders of who people are (Joseph, Interview 2).

Joseph shared that dedicating a month to various groups and then moving on felt shallow to him. He argued for a different, more meaningful approach in schools to acknowledging and learning about oppressed groups of people.

The participants observed that while their schools dedicated time and resources to educating students about various minority groups, 2SLGBTQIA+ identities were one group that was often not focused on. Ruth explained that:

Our school board is very much promoting diversity, equity and inclusion. Though they mostly talk about cultures, and they mostly talk about races. They don't talk a lot about LGBTQ+. They don't not include it, but they don't, that's not one of the things we're always talking about, so it's not singled out specifically. No, the overarching message is to promote everyone to feel safe here. That everyone belongs here. We're all about equity and inclusion. But there's no...I feel like it mostly relates to race and color. Nobody ever talks about LGBT (Ruth, Interview 2).

Ruth brought up concerns that queer identities were not discussed in schools. She argued that while there were overarching messages of belonging and inclusion, 2SLGBTQIA+ identities were often left behind. Participants felt that if programs for other minority groups existed, gender and sexual minorities should also be given care and attention.

Elizabeth reflected on what her school board has done for education about queerness, and where they could improve:

Last year, I do know that during pride month, there was material from the board that came down to our classrooms as well. And I think I'd like it, yeah, I'd just like to see more of that just again for the same, for the same reason that other marginalized groups need representation, and students need education about these groups. It's no different for the LGBTQ+ community as well. I feel like it should be taught, it should be supported (Elizabeth, Interview 3).

Elizabeth acknowledged that during pride month, her school board provided classroom materials about queerness. However, she believed that more representation for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in education was necessary. Similarly, Ruth suggested:

I would say that they should emphasize queer topics just as much as they do for equity and inclusion of different racial minorities. Overemphasize it right now, because I don't think it's represented as well as it could be, and there's still a bit of a hush hush around it. Really bring it out into the open and have people feel accepted. Make it known that we accept every type of equity and inclusion. We have the LGBTQ+ club or whatever it is called right now, but we don't emphasize it in our materials or lessons. So far there's not really been an effort with gender, as far as I see. But just yeah, there should be more. It would be nice to have more guidance on it (Ruth, Interview 3).

Ruth drew attention to the gaps in education when it came to diverse gender and sexual identities. While there was some representation in schools, such as the formation of GSAs, Ruth still picked up on silence around 2SLGBTQIA+ education and inclusivity. Ruth argued for open discussions and school inclusion around queerness to increase the sense of belonging for queer students. The participants emphasized that, in order to expand queer inclusive education, they need guidance from the school board. As shared by the participants, having institutionalized guidelines from school boards or the Ministry of Education for queer inclusive education could support teachers to feel confident and well-equipped to foster a positive environment in schools for inclusion.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Discussion**

The study aimed to understand educators' perspectives regarding queer inclusive education in Ontario Catholic schools. The introduction describes the two theoretical frameworks through which I approached this thesis. The first was CHAT, which situates human activity and tools used within history and culture to determine how they might shape an activity's outcome and its participants (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). The second theory was anti-oppressive education that strives to understand the dynamics of all forms of oppression and find avenues to address and actively work against it in schools (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). In the following sections, I discuss participants' perspectives and shared experiences through CHAT and anti-oppressive education while drawing on existing literature in the field.

#### **5.1. Normalizing Queerness in Schools**

By examining the activity system for queer inclusive education, the study findings suggested that queerness was not normalized in schools, even though teachers strived to implement queer inclusive education. Hancock and Miller (2018) shared rationale for the usefulness of CHAT in increasing inclusive education. They argued that defining and identifying activity systems, exploring teaching tools, and examining tensions provides valuable insights for researchers and educators in implementing inclusive education (Hancock & Miller, 2018). The dynamics present in schools have been culturally and historically mediated (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). There is a history of stigma around queerness and 2SLGBTQIA+ people being rejected from society and education, which shaped the school environments (Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Morrison et al., 2014).

CHAT introduces the notion of contradictions (Engeström & Sannino, 2021), which can be used as powerful analytical tools to understand factors shaping teachers' work towards implementing queer inclusive education. In the following paragraphs, I discuss contradictions that were identified within the activity system that precluded

teachers from fully practising queer inclusive education. Among those contradictions were (a) conservative religious beliefs and rules being incompatible with queer inclusive education, and (b) participant concerns about the backlash for discussing 2SLGBTQIA+ content, particularly from parents.

Intolerant attitudes rooted in religious beliefs in Catholic schools was a factor mediating participants' efforts towards 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education. The conservative beliefs tied to religion impacted teacher experiences in achieving queer inclusive education. Peter et al. (2018) found that religious affiliation significantly impacted the likelihood of educators practicing queer inclusive education. Religious beliefs about queerness being a sin also contributed to queerness not being recognized as a norm in educational environments. This finding was also reflected in Callaghan's (2015) study. The queer teachers who were interviewed did not believe queerness was accepted in their Catholic schools (Callaghan, 2015). One of the observed contradictions within the activity system was between the teachers and the rules of the Catholic Church. These rules are long-standing and have been reinforced over time (Callaghan, 2015). The participants individually included discussions of queerness in their classroom lessons and were open to further incorporation of 2SLGBTQIA+ content in their courses. While the participants may have said that they were fully on board with queer inclusive education, there was a disconnect because they were part of a community that was governed by conservative religious principles. As participants recalled, the Catholic Church believes that being gay is a sin and they do not sanction same-sex marriage, which functions to Other 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and people (Kumashiro, 2002). Ruth in particular shared her concerns of receiving backlash from the parents of her students when she discussed topics in her Religion class that were outside of literal Bible interpretations. This caused Ruth to be careful of how she discussed 2SLGBTQIA+ content in her classroom, and she had a defense prepared in case she was confronted about it. For example, when she showed the *Same Love* music video, Ruth mentioned to her class that same-sex marriage was not sanctioned by the Catholic Church. Ruth believed that this disclaimer could act as a justification for her choice to show the video, as well as provide her with a degree of protection if she was reprimanded for the display. The rules and attitudes that are prominent within Catholicism impacted the perception of queerness in education and the

actions of participating educators (Peter et al., 2018; Callaghan, 2015). The root of this contradiction was that participants wanted to implement queer inclusive education, however, their desire conflicted with the Catholic school setting that they were in. The tone of their school environments was set by the Catholic Church, which has not accepted queer identities as normal (Peter et al., 2018; Callaghan, 2015).

Another contradiction precluding educators from fostering queer inclusion was surrounding backlash for queerness in education, where parents of students criticized teachers for mentioning diverse gender and sexual identities in the classroom. Participants felt unsure about potential ramifications of 2SLGBTQIA+ content integration. Some participants had previously been on the receiving end of negative attention from parents after they discussed queer positive content in the classroom. Ruth had been nervous about parental backlash and disapproval over her sharing queer inclusive content and had concerns about the possibility of losing her job over it. Joseph spoke to the overall attitudes of uncertainty around queer inclusive education that he observed in fellow teachers. He specifically suggested that teachers may feel guarded, particularly in regard to their efforts towards 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion in the classroom possibly being misconstrued by parents and having their words turned against them. These fears were validated by instances such as Callaghan's (2015) study of queer educators in Canadian Catholic schools, where multiple teachers were fired for behaving in ways that were deemed contradictory to Catholic doctrine. Concerns of backlash prevented some teachers from fully incorporating queer inclusive education, which in turn contributed to queerness being considered "outside of the norm" in schools. However, teacher worries around receiving backlash for discussing queerness in their classrooms theoretically should not be surrounded by uncertainty. In the Ontario Context section of the Introduction, I outlined that lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity are included in the Ontario curriculum. In several instances, topics (e.g., masturbation) are left up to the discretion of the teacher as to whether they will discuss them (Jones, 2019b). Under these same guidelines, parents can choose for their children to opt out of certain lessons that they do not want them exposed to (Jones, 2019b). Thus, in theory, teachers should be able to incorporate queer inclusive education, and parents can pull their children out for any lessons they do not agree with. Nevertheless, the

participants felt insecure as there were attitudes of uncertainty amongst their fellow educators. This speaks to the contradiction and tensions between the curriculum and rules set by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the reality of the environment in Catholic schools in Ontario, which contributes to queerness not being normalized. As CHAT outlines, contradictions hold power as they can serve as opportunities and driving forces for change, which I will discuss in the Recommendations section (Hancock & Miller, 2018). There is a need to resolve the contradictions/tensions between the elements of the activity system to achieve the goal of queer inclusive education (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). When combined with an individual's actions (e.g., an educator's attempt to have 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive lessons), systemic efforts could help to improve the activity system aimed at queer inclusive education, including lessening the tension between the elements causing this mismatch of guidelines and practice (Engeström & Sannino, 2021).

Further, Kumashiro's (2000, 2002) approach to education for the Other is applicable. With education for the Other, oppression is combated through focusing on students who are Othered and oppressed by trying to improve their experience (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). The study revealed that queer students were seen as Other than the norm of cisgender and heterosexual identities. The oppression occurred through actions, (i.e., bullying queer students), as well as the inactions of people, (i.e., educators or school administrators who continued operating as "business as usual" in schools). Elizabeth shared an example of her son, who is bisexual. He attended a Catholic school in Ontario and was bullied for his sexuality when he was in grade nine. The literature review suggested similar findings: bullying and harassment of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth still occurred in schools (Burk et al., 2018; Burkholder et al., 2021; Liboro et al., 2015). The oppression of queer youth was reinforced through bullying (Kumashiro, 2000). However, Elizabeth also expressed that she believed the environment of bullying students for being queer was on the decline. Her son was not bullied in his subsequent years in high school, and, as a teacher, Elizabeth saw more students who were willing to stand up for their 2SLGBTQIA+ peers against bullying and discrimination. This could indicate a "positive turn" in accepting and normalizing queerness in high schools.

Historically, 2SLGBTQIA+ people have been treated as a departure from 'normal', which has contributed to the stigma associated with queerness (Pollitt et al., 2019). The stigma around queerness was reinforced by education that is critical of privileging and Othering (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). This approach outlined by Kumashiro (2000; 2002) focuses on examining and challenging the ways in which educational systems reinforce and perpetuate systems of privilege and oppression. Schools privileged certain societal groups, like cisgender and heterosexual people, and marginalized others, such as queer people (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). These structures continue to uphold dominant social ideologies (Kumashiro, 2000). The study findings of queerness not being a norm in schools, evidenced through ignorance towards queer inclusivity, parental resistance, bullying, and religious beliefs negatively impacting attitudes towards queerness, is consistent with findings by other scholars in queer studies and education. For example, Kitchen and Bellini (2013) found that harassment and bullying of queer youth was prominent, although GSAs served as advocates for social acceptance and improved the overall school climate for queerness. The prevalence of heteronormativity as a cultural practice was a factor in the oppression of queer students and contributed to schools continuing to uphold the view and treatment of cisgender and heterosexual identities as the default norm in society (Morrison et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2019). In the systematic literature review, the ubiquitousness of heteronormativity in schools was a prominent finding (Burkholder et al., 2021; Kitchen & Bellini, 2013; Morrison et al., 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Both heteronormativity and homonegativity were present in schools, and homonegative speech had scholastic consequences for students (Morrison et al., 2014). Additionally, Ng et al. (2019) found that while the current generation claimed to be accepting, many youth aligned their views with heteronormative beliefs, which continued to prevent queer identities from being normalized. The study findings provide a snapshot of the landscape for queerness in Ontario Catholic high schools, from the perspectives of teachers. They align with others in the field, suggesting that queerness is still considered outside the norm in schools (Ng et al., 2019; Pollitt et al., 2019; Surette, 2019). It is necessary to contemplate the ways in which queer students and their identities can be normalized and supported in schools.

## 5.2. Teachers as Agents of Change

One of the study findings suggests that the participants themselves made efforts to implement queer inclusive education in their classrooms. The teachers (a) set inclusive discourse in their classroom environments, (b) implemented 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive content within the curriculum, and (c) navigated their roles to support queer students. These individual efforts demonstrate that teachers strived to implement queer inclusive education. They conceptualized their role as agents of change. An agent of change refers to someone who actively attempts to bring significant transformations to systems, initiates positive change, advocates for progress, and often challenges the status quo (Watson, 2014). Teachers have the power to be agents of change, as they are in the position to influence and shape the lives of their students and their school community (Watson, 2014). They have the capacity to impart knowledge, instill values, and inspire growth in education, thereby contributing to positive changes within the educational system. When it comes to queer inclusive education, educators are key actors in its implementation (Taylor et al., 2016).

Change is a dynamic process that is influenced by both top-down and bottom-up factors (Fullan, 2010). Top-down changes are often initiated by institutions, such as the Ontario Ministry of Education, and can take the form of governmental policies and curriculum guidelines to initiate changes within the school system (Fullan, 2010). While top-down initiatives provide overarching direction, they frequently lack the depth of understanding and grassroots support that is necessary for successful implementation (Fullan, 2010). On the other hand, bottom-up changes emerge from individual efforts and collective community actions (Fullan, 2010). For example, leading grassroots initiatives in schools, such as student-led clubs or activist groups advocating for 2SLGBTQIA+ awareness and support. Teachers also play a key role in bottom-up changes by incorporating inclusive practices into their teaching methods and classroom environments (Fullan, 2010). Bottom-up approaches often foster innovation and local ownership, however they may lack the systemic reach and resources to enact widespread change (Fullan, 2010). Thus, sustainable, lasting change occurs through interplay between top-

down and bottom-up elements (e.g., Ministerial policies and advocacy groups) as it leverages the strengths of both approaches to address complex challenges (Fullan, 2010).

Educators hold power in their classrooms in their ability to shape the environment, make decisions about their lessons, and lead the discussions (Watson, 2014). There is no teaching that is neutral; choosing to avoid mentioning gender and sexuality in one's classroom does not showcase impartiality, rather, it sends a message to students that these topics are forbidden or shameful (Surette, 2019). By including discussions of 2SLGBTQIA+ topics in the classroom, teachers foster environment in which queer students are accepted and welcomed (Surette, 2019). The participants in this study explained how they influenced their classrooms, including Joseph sharing how he established classroom environment expectations with the purpose of developing mutual respect and acceptance in each class at the start of the semester. Teachers make decisions in their classrooms daily that might include or exclude diverse identities in their lessons and discussion topics (Kozleski et al., 2020). Elizabeth consistently made the choice to include queer identities in her classroom by inserting 2SLGBTQIA+ materials into her lessons and fostering open discussions about queerness. This presumably had a positive impact on her students as she recounted instances where students felt comfortable having conversations about queerness, such as when a student asked about the meaning of each letter in the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+, or when a student (who "was in the closet") came out to Elizabeth about their sexuality. External factors - religious beliefs from school families or having outdated curricular materials - were challenges for teachers in implementing queer inclusive education. As Campbell et al. (2021) reported, barriers for teachers not practising queer inclusive education can broadly be categorized as: (a) a lack of training and resources (i.e., no professional development and a scarcity of curriculum guidelines); (b) an absence of support from colleagues or administrators (e.g., a shortage of 2SLGBTQIA+ mentions in policy documents or staff meetings); and (c) concern of opposition (e.g., from religious groups, parents, administration). However, while these elements may hinder educators, teachers still hold power through their classroom choices (Campbell et al., 2021).

Educators can be agents of change to enact bottom-up actions by making choices to challenge oppression and implement queer inclusive education in their classrooms (Watson, 2014). One method to address oppression in education for the Other that Kumashiro (2000, 2002) outlined is educators' acknowledgement of student diversity and embracing it rather than ignoring it in their classrooms. This approach to challenging oppression can be utilized on an individual level by educators, as they make decisions and design practices. Based on the participants' recounting of their experiences, they made concerted efforts to incorporate gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms. One example was when Elizabeth implemented a novel study where the main character had two moms. This echoes Luceno et al.'s (2022) findings, suggesting that educators can play a vital role in mitigating potential discrimination against queer students. By choosing to include diverse sexual and gender identities in their classrooms daily, educators mediate queer inclusive education implementation in their classrooms (Luceno et al., 2022).

It is necessary for teachers to make consistent, individual efforts towards implementing queer inclusive education rather than that to anticipate policy and systemic changes occurring (Luceno et al., 2022). Due to the number of hours that students spend at school during their developmental years, teachers have a critical influence on students' perceptions and beliefs about themselves and others (Surette, 2019). Since students look up to teachers as role models (Sampermans & Claes, 2018), educators talking about queerness and incorporating diverse identities into their lessons can have a positive impact on students. There are several research-based resources that have been created for educators in Canada to use for queer inclusive education efforts. One example is from Egale, a Canadian organization with the purpose of improving the lives of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in Canada (Egale, 2023). Egale offers a range of resources with varied target audiences, including students, teachers, parents, and administrators. They have an *Inclusive Schools* section on their website with a tab of resources for educators, which offers items like introductions to 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion, guidebooks, downloadable queer inclusive posters for schools, educational webinars, and toolkits that are aligned with the Ontario curriculum (Egale, 2023). Similarly, the RISE Project is a Canadian organization that was developed by Dr. Taylor and her large-scale research on queer

inclusive education in Canada (RISE, 2022). They have a webpage entitled *K-12 Methods Modules* that offers suggestions of how educators can expand lessons to incorporate queer content (RISE, 2022). For example, they have a module on Mathematics where they review the meaning of queering math courses, why it is important, how to do it, teaching activity examples, and suggesting further readings (RISE, 2022). Resources from organizations like Egale and RISE offer educators practical and accessible methods for learning how to incorporate queer inclusive education into their classrooms on an individual level.

Examining the complexity of school systems from a CHAT lens has allowed for the discovery of factors that were not evident when elements of schools were evaluated in isolation from each other (Engeström & Sannino, 2021; Pearson, 2009). One of the elements of CHAT is the division of labour, which looks at who is doing what within the activity system to influence the object. According to the participants, the division of labour in this case demonstrated that not everyone was doing the same amount of work towards queer inclusive education. Specifically, the participants were working to influence their schools towards queer inclusive education, but they believed that not everyone was contributing. From the perspective of the participants, they did not feel support from above when it came to queer inclusive education efforts, namely from the higher ups in the educational system like school board personnel (e.g., superintendents, directors) and the policymakers in the Ontario Ministry of Education. This lack of support was felt by the participants in their school board's silence around 2SLGBTQIA+ issues and the absence of queer inclusive education materials being circulated to teachers. The queer inclusion efforts in schools mainly originated from teachers. The participants supported queer students where they could. This was evidenced in the Findings when Elizabeth shared that when she was uncomfortable with teaching outdated curriculum that excluded queer identities, she devoted her time to finding new resources and materials that she could use in her classroom to include queer students. Thus, for Elizabeth to implement queer inclusive education in her classroom, she had to take on an additional portion of labour and the role of a researcher, by finding new resources to compensate for outdated curriculum. This demonstrates the conflict within the division of labour as the larger school system was not as involved as teachers expected it to be.

Another potential issue related to educators taking on the majority of the labour for queer inclusive education is that teachers already have a demanding workload. In a survey conducted by the National Education Association, 55% of surveyed educators reported that they were ready to leave their profession earlier than planned, most often due to burnout (Jotkoff, 2022). Burnout refers to a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, frequently resulting from chronic work stress (García-Carmona et al., 2019). Secondary school teachers are one of the groups with the highest levels of sick leave due to workplace stress and are at a high risk of burnout syndrome (García-Carmona et al., 2019). An excessive workload can lead to burnout amongst educators, which can negatively affect their health, job satisfaction, and ability to effectively teach and help students (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; García-Carmona et al., 2019). Teachers who are overwhelmed with items like administrative tasks, lesson planning, and finding extra resources may struggle to give students the attention and support they need to succeed in school (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). There are numerous areas that educators might see as important to focus on in their classrooms aside from queer inclusion (e.g., student mental health, at-risk youth, Indigeneity). Educators are busy addressing student needs as it is, thus many do not have the time to research and find resources on their own for additional topics to include in their classrooms. While some teachers, such as the participants in this study, took on the extra role of a researcher, others may not be able to. Not all educators have the same amount of spare time, access to materials, or supportive school/home environments (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Expecting teachers to spend their own time and resources researching extra initiatives can exacerbate inequities and create disparities in the implementation of inclusive education practices (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; García-Carmona et al., 2019). Some of the groups contributing to the pressure that teachers feel to constantly “do more” for their job includes educational governing bodies, school administrators, advocacy groups, parental expectations, and community members (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). This can contribute to teacher burnout, specifically among those who feel overwhelmed or unsupported by additional demands (García-Carmona et al., 2019; Jotkoff, 2022). The responsibility of researching, learning about, and implementing queer inclusive education in schools

cannot be placed solely on educators. Teachers hold power to create change, but they should not be expected to do it alone (Fullan, 2010).

The contradiction within the uneven division of labour for incorporating diverse gender and sexual identities in schools undermined teachers' efforts to implement queer inclusive education. However, tension among elements of an activity system offers the opportunity for learning and the potential for new practices to develop (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). For lasting change to occur, all levels of education must be involved and work in unison towards the common goal (Fullan, 2010). Several of the studies included in the literature review also emphasized the need for all elements of school systems to work together to achieve queer inclusion (Campbell et al., 2021; Lapointe, 2016; Luceno et al., 2022; Surette, 2019). It is critical to consider the system that teachers operate within when thinking about queer inclusive education, as it is unreasonable to expect teachers to implement 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education without knowing the position of their administration or school board (Surette, 2019). When educators were exposed to school-wide efforts of queer inclusion, they were less likely to report their own inaction when it came to addressing 2SLGBTQIA+ topics in schools (Campbell et al., 2021). Therefore, if school teams clearly set goals and discussed progress regularly, educators would feel supported and empowered in their efforts to implement queer inclusive education in their classrooms. As CHAT posits, the interplay between activity elements could lead to comprehensive and sustainable changes in school cultures, fostering an environment where 2SLGBTQIA+ students feel safe, supported, and valued. This collaboration between institutional policies and grassroots activism is essential for implementing queer inclusive education.

### **5.3. Systemic Efforts and Institutionalized Support**

As Fullan (2010) suggests, both top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementing queer inclusive education are vital in enacting long-lasting changes. Top-down efforts occur at institutional levels, like the Ontario Ministry of Education and school boards. This could include items like updating policies around 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion in education and rolling out professional development for teachers, which were

areas that were discussed by the participants. Kumashiro (2000, 2002) suggests that in education for the Other, the needs, experiences, and perspectives of marginalized groups must be the focus, and in this case, queer students must be prioritized within systemic changes. He proceeds to outline methods to address oppression. One approach is that schools should be affirming places for all students and provide spaces for Othered students where they can receive support (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). Most of the schools where the study participants worked had clubs like GSAs for queer students, but there was room for improvement from the schools in providing a supportive environment for queer students. For example, schools could arrange peer mentoring programs where older queer students could support and mentor younger students who are navigating their identities. Additionally, there could be a designated physical space within schools where 2SLGBTQIA+ students can access resources or find support. The literature also suggested that schools need to have outward displays of supporting and affirming queer students, such as by posting positive visuals throughout schools (Bain & Podmore, 2020; Campbell et al., 2021; Luceno et al., 2022). Ingrey (2012) examined the problematic nature of gender binary (i.e., male and female) washrooms in schools and spoke with students about alternative solutions, e.g., all-gender washrooms. True queer inclusion in education must be embedded throughout school environments (Bain & Podmore, 2020).

One way for schools to send a message of queer inclusion to their students and school community is through surplus visibility (Bain & Podmore, 2020). Surplus visibility translates to a particular group (e.g., the 2SLGBTQIA+ community) receiving an excess of representation and attention through positive materials (Bain & Podmore, 2020). This could include hanging rainbow flags throughout the school and posting queer inclusive messaging on bulletin boards and doors. These actions function to disrupt the heteronormative culture in schools and send signals of acceptance, respect, and affirmation of queer identities (Bain & Podmore, 2020). It also transforms ordinary transitional spaces, such as school hallways, into areas where 2SLGBTQIA+ acceptance is expressed. The participants in this study reported that their schools practiced queer visibility. Joseph shared that his school board had a theme of 'I belong here' and represented the idea by hanging up a pride flag in their school. Ruth spoke about the GSA that her school had, which increased visible signs of queer acceptance in her school

environment. Elizabeth took it upon herself to post positive visuals and messaging around her classroom, such as using a poster generated by her school board that read ‘you are safe here’ with a rainbow. The participants viewed these symbols of queer inclusion and pride as representing acceptance to the school community. However, while Bain and Podmore (2020) argue for the usefulness of surplus visibility, it is also important to acknowledge that it can be considered superficial if it is not carried into the other aspects of education, such as comprehensive policies and curriculum, and providing ongoing support for queer students. Visible representation and acknowledgment are not enough on their own, as it is surface-level queer inclusion; it must be backed up by systemic inclusive change. In working towards collaborative queer inclusive education, an important goal would be to incorporate diverse gender and sexual identities into the curriculum (Meyer et al., 2015).

Moving into education about the Other, this approach concentrates on curriculum (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). Oppression can be challenged by teaching all students about those considered Other. It is important to consult with marginalized groups when deciding what to include in this type of education, to reduce the risk of stereotyping (Adams et al., 2023). Oppression in this area is perceived as a knowledge shortage or distortion that exists about the Other, due to marginalization and exclusion (Kumashiro, 2000). Kumashiro (2000, 2002) suggests having specific lessons in the curriculum about the Other and featuring the knowledge as a common thread through the whole curriculum. The participants took the initiative to incorporate 2SLGBTQIA+ identities or perspectives into their lessons. Inclusion in the curriculum was the most prominent effort that the participants made towards implementing queer inclusive education. Per Kumashiro’s (2000, 2002) recommendation for challenging oppression through curriculum, this could manifest as dedicated units about queer identities, in addition to intertwining queer representation into other lessons. One example of the participants implementing this was when Joseph talked about queer voices in law-making in his law class. As discussed earlier, there needs to be programs in place to help educators with implementing queer inclusive education. Educators should receive sample lesson plans to help support their efforts towards incorporating diverse gender and sexual identities in their class lessons (Meyer et al., 2015). This would then function to provide teachers with

an idea of how to integrate queer inclusive content in their classrooms and develop their own personalized queer inclusive lesson plans moving forward. Curriculum materials that cover queer identities can help students' feelings of inclusion and belonging (Surette, 2019). Educators should receive support in implementing queer inclusive education into the curriculum, such as from school boards offering trainings and workshops, providing lesson materials with 2SLGBTQIA+ content, and implementing guidelines to address bias-based discrimination (Meyer et al., 2015). I maintain that it is vital for school boards to assist educators in integrating 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive content as it increases teacher comfort and ability level.

Some areas in Canada already have diverse gender and sexual identities incorporated into their education and curricular materials. For example, BC has SOGI 123. SOGI stands for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and encompasses a topic rather than a set of identities (The ARC Foundation, 2019). It also emphasizes that the topic is relevant to all people as everyone has a sexual orientation and gender identity, whether that be bisexual, asexual, lesbian, heterosexual, transgender, cisgender, and more. The main scope of SOGI 123 is minority sexual orientations and gender identities, due to the history of marginalization associated with them (The ARC Foundation, 2019). SOGI 123 has three main pillars of inclusive education: (1) policies and procedures; (2) inclusive environments; and (3) curriculum resources (The ARC Foundation, 2019). Their mission is to provide educators with evidence-based tools and resources that reflect provincial policies and protect people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, in order to contribute to making schools safe, inclusive learning environments for all students (The ARC Foundation, 2019). SOGI 123 was created by the ARC Foundation in partnership with the British Columbia Ministry of Education, school districts, the B.C. Teachers' Federation, as well as other education and 2SLGBTQIA+ focused organizations (The ARC Foundation, 2019). A key item to note is that SOGI is not a curriculum, rather, it is a topic that can be discussed throughout numerous subjects with the goal of developing understanding about diverse identities and learning to treat all people with respect (The ARC Foundation, 2019). It is necessary to differentiate between the BC curriculum which the Ministry of Education develops, and SOGI 123 which offers SOGI-inclusive lesson plans that align with the existing curriculum. SOGI 123

offers proven SOGI-inclusive resources for educators of various grades, including lesson plans for elementary and secondary classes, curated lists of SOGI-inclusive books (e.g. books about family diversity, queer history, gender stereotypes, etc.), a guide to selecting new resources, films and videos for SOGI classroom engagement, and links to booking SOGI workshops. SOGI 123 is a prime example of how to provide educators with queer inclusive resources that function in unison with the curriculum set by the BC Ministry of Education. Through these materials, several levels of the education system (government, policy, educators, researchers, etc.) are coming together to further queer inclusive education in schools (The ARC Foundation, 2019).

Ontario does not currently have an initiative that parallels BC's SOGI 123. The closest program is the partnership with Egale, a Canadian organization that was mentioned in the previous section of this chapter. Egale has a Relearn and React Series (2023) comprised of toolkits and videos, which was a project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education to equip educators with curriculum-aligned resources to foster inclusive learning in schools. The toolkits target grades 7-11 in a range of subjects, including Math, English, and Health and Physical Education. However, these resources are not publicly available. Additionally, participants were not aware of these series or the materials. To close this gap, the Ontario Ministry of Education, for example, could follow BC's example by rolling-out programs and making the resources widely available and accessible.

Another finding from this study was that teachers need institutionalized guidance and processes to be better equipped to implement queer inclusive education. Teachers suggested that support must come from an institutional level to have a greater impact, (i.e., school boards and Ministries of Education). Teachers do not exist in a vacuum (Ferfolja, 2013). Teachers belong to varied communities, (i.e., the school community, the school board, the community the school is located in), which shape how educators operate and affect how they are able to reach goals, such as queer inclusive education (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). If teachers aim to be inclusive of 2SLGBTQIA+ identities in their classrooms but their larger school communities are not contributing, then this imbalance causes a contradiction in the activity system. Teachers should not be the only

proponents of queer inclusive education in their schools; in an ideal world, it should be a combined effort by educators and the greater school system in order to make long-lasting change (Thompkins et al., 2019). The participants in this study believed in the importance of queer inclusion, however they did not have structures in place on a wider level to help them achieve this goal. In the Every Teacher Project that surveyed educators across Canada about LGBTQ-inclusive education, 84.5% of respondents shared that they approved of queer inclusive education, whereas only 72.6% reported that they would feel comfortable discussing LGBTQ topics with students (Taylor et al., 2016). Further, 51.1% of surveyed educators stated that they had challenged homophobia in school before, 46.9% used inclusive language and examples, 18.3% challenged transphobia, and 16.3% critiqued heterosexual privilege (Taylor et al., 2016). This aligns with the study findings that there were external barriers preventing teachers from incorporating queer inclusive education to the degree that they theoretically approved of. Some of the participants felt frustrated, as there were mediating factors interfering with their ability to reach their aim of queer inclusive education. One mediating element was that the participants did not have the opportunity to receive training around 2SLGBTQIA+ topics and thus felt unprepared to implement queer inclusive education. The findings aligned with some of the barriers to queer inclusive education that were identified in the literature review, including fear of job loss or backlash, a lack of resources, and insufficient guidance for teachers (Campbell et al., 2021; Surette, 2019). Campbell et al. (2021) found that a lack of training and resources was the most common reason that educators gave for why they did not practice queer inclusive education. This was followed by reasoning that queer topics were not relevant to their students, their students were too young, fear of formal opposition, concern about parental opposition, and worry over religious-based opposition (Campbell et al., 2021). Excluding the responses about the relevance of the topic and the age of students, the rest of the reasoning for inaction from Campbell et al.'s (2021) article was reflected in the findings from my participants. This demonstrates that the barriers to queer inclusive education that have been found in cross-Canada studies also hold true for Ontario Catholic school settings.

A suggestion echoed by all participants was that they required professional development to help all teachers feel knowledgeable and prepared to discuss queerness in

their classroom. According to CHAT and anti-oppressive education frameworks, by engaging in professional development activities, educators could learn how to challenge oppression through their practice, develop their teaching strategies, and share tools (Engeström & Sannino, 2021; Hancock and Miller, 2018). Through working together and sharing research-based practices, teachers can learn how others strive towards inclusive education and they can exchange tools and ways of thinking to help support queer inclusion on a system wide level. Other studies in this field agreed that both new teachers and in-service teachers would benefit from receiving training around 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education (Campbell et al., 2021; Richard, 2015; Tompkins et al., 2019). The level of training around queer topics impacted teacher likelihood of feeling comfortable incorporating queer content or examples into their classroom discussions (Richard, 2015; Tompkins et al., 2019). Professional development can function to increase educator knowledge around queerness, showcase how to incorporate queer inclusion in classrooms, and educate teachers on how to better support queer youth (Lapointe, 2016; Luceno et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2015; Peter, Taylor, & Campbell, 2016; Taylor & Peter, 2011; Taylor et al., 2016).

Another area of teacher education and school guidelines that the participants felt was lacking was in relation to student pronoun changes. All three participants mentioned pronoun changes as an issue they saw arising more frequently in their schools. Ruth in particular raised concerns around student pronoun changes multiple times, specifically linked to not knowing how to properly handle the situations. She felt that there was a level of confusion in her school on what was the ‘right thing to do’ about pronoun changes. Ruth expressed that she wanted to respect student wishes, but she was unsure of the school protocol and was concerned about parental backlash. Pronoun changes was a topic on which the participants had never received training, but they expressed that they would be interested in a workshop or at least having established guidelines set by their school boards. As a topic that is emerging more often, this is an area that could benefit from having a session during a professional development day for educators. However, school boards will first need to decide on a protocol that teachers can follow. Ideally, this would be developed in collaboration with teachers so that the protocol incorporates educators’ insights into classroom dynamics, their understanding of individual student

needs, and their consideration for practical implementation into daily routines. The protocol would also provide a baseline of rules for how educators should handle student pronoun changes, which could protect teachers from the backlash they were concerned about. In the meantime, there are some resources available that educators can turn to for guidance. SOGI 123 has a Resource Guide with a section on Supporting Student Transitions (The ARC Foundation, 2020). It provides teachers with suggestions on facilitating supportive transitions for students in schools, and has some overlaps with pronoun changes. Egale also has a Pronoun Usage Guide (2023) that educators can turn to for foundational knowledge about using language to be inclusive and respectful of gender diversity. While these are starting points that teachers can reference for guidance, a top-down approach in the form of protocols and professional development are also needed to have a collaborative impact.

An anti-oppressive education lens encourages the dismantling of discrimination in school settings and promotes the idea that human agency can alter oppressive structures and result in new systems that value diversity (Callaghan, 2016; Kumashiro, 2000). This incorporates the approach that Kumashiro (2000, 2002) called education that changes students and society. This type of education does not focus solely on transforming students individually, but also challenging and reshaping societal norms and structures. Oppression in this realm is thought to originate in discourse that forms how people think, feel, and act (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). This allows oppression to manifest in an array of contexts (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). The structures that continue cycles of oppression and harm, such as heteronormativity, gender binaries, and policies that marginalize 2SLGBTQIA+ voices, must be disrupted and rebuilt in the form of more productive systems. Efforts towards anti-oppressive education must be done on a systemic basis, which aligns with the findings from this thesis that institutional processes, including curriculum development, policy formation, and teacher education, must change to better support queer inclusive education. This echoes Callaghan's (2016) study on youth resistance to homophobia in Catholic schools, which found that anti-oppressive education underlines the ability of human agency to alter oppressive structures towards being valuable systems that flourish with diversity.

Kumashiro (2000, 2002) stated that to work against oppression, a thorough critique of dominant structures and ideologies in society and education must be enacted. A critique needs to start with being able to recognize and understand inequalities in society (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002). For educators to be able to teach about oppression, they need to be informed themselves. This is where professional development re-enters the equation, as it is one possible avenue for teachers to learn about 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and the ways that oppression is reinforced by typical educational systems. Professional development is an opportunity to reach numerous teachers at once to establish a baseline of knowledge for queerness, leading to increased ability for integrating queer inclusion into classrooms (Lapointe, 2016). While schools may face limitations with time, funding, and resources for professional development activities, queer inclusive education is a worthwhile area to invest in, and a topic that teachers are currently calling for support with. Professional development also requires supplementary follow-up materials and resources, otherwise teachers may struggle with effectively transforming their learnings into long-lasting changes. Kumashiro (2000) emphasized that a critical approach should involve self-reflection and unlearning, to dispel privilege that was ingrained at a young age. This could also function to alter the mindset of teachers who potentially hold exclusionary and discriminatory beliefs. By helping teachers become more open-minded and accepting of diverse identities through targeted education, it could result in more teachers understanding the importance of queer inclusive education and committing to incorporate it into their classrooms. Once educators have done the work of learning and dispelling privilege themselves, they can teach their students about oppression and try to enact inclusive education. This reflective method of combating oppression speaks to an argument of Joseph's that was relayed in the Findings. He expressed that the typical monthly focus in society on various minority groups (e.g., Black History Month, Asian Heritage Month) felt shallow to him. Joseph argued that alternative approaches to education about oppressed groups should be employed in order to offer meaningful representation. Kumashiro's (2000, 2002) suggestion of deep self-reflection, learning, and applying a critical lens to dominant societal structures is a potential first step to a future of meaningful representation in schools. As discussed earlier, ideally the whole

educational system would be aligned and work together to implement inclusive education (Fullan, 2010).

Combining the theoretical frameworks of CHAT and anti-oppressive education allowed me to examine the elements of the activity system and determine that they were not aligned with the goal of queer inclusive education as 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive teaching was constrained. CHAT and anti-oppressive education provided direction for how contradictions identified within the activity system could be resolved, and where efforts for queer inclusive education improvement could be focused. Specifically, oppression needs to be fought on systemic levels and intertwined with teacher education and the curriculum in order to move towards overall queer inclusive education. The success of queer inclusive education partially depends upon the collaborative efforts of educators, school boards, and the Ontario Ministry of Education. Teachers have the power to be agents of change and enact positive action from the bottom-up, however educational guidelines and resources must also be in place to support teachers and ensure that school activities are aligned with 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive ideals and practices (Fullan, 2010; Watson, 2014).

## **Chapter 6.**

### **Conclusion**

With this thesis, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of high school teacher experiences navigating queer inclusive education in Ontario Catholic schools. Specifically, my research questions were: (1) What are the perspectives and experiences of teachers working in Catholic high schools in Ontario on 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education? (2) To what degree are diverse gender and sexual identities being taught in Catholic high schools in Ontario? The findings echoed the existing literature and provide insights into the current state of queer inclusive education in Catholic schools from the perspectives of teachers. I will summarize the findings below and discuss the limitations of this study, recommendations, and considerations for future research.

#### **6.1. Summary of Findings**

One theme from the data was that queerness was not normalized in educational settings. Part of the attitudes around queerness being outside of the norm were rooted in societal ignorance towards 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusivity. The gap in knowledge that some educators had around queerness led to their discomfort with discussing queer topics in their classrooms. Some members of the school community (e.g., parents, students, administrators, teachers) struggled to accept queer students. Students being bullied due to their queer identities occurred in schools. However, participants believed these bullying instances were not commonplace and were often not observable to teachers. Additionally, participants shared that some parents of students used religion to justify their negative positions toward queerness. For example, the Bible was employed to claim that being queer was a sin and, thus, should not be discussed in a Catholic school. The theme of queerness not being a norm in schools is significant as it sheds light on the current environment and attitudes towards 2SLGBTQIA+ topics in schools.

The next major finding from this study was that efforts to incorporate queer inclusive education existed in schools. The schools that the participants taught in

attempted to create queer inclusive spaces via clubs like GSAs and having positive visuals, like pride flags, hanging in their hallways. The participants observed that in their opinions, current students were more accepting overall of queer identities than past generations of students. Teachers influenced their classroom environments through their words and actions. The participants used their teacher role to set examples of acceptance and inclusion of queer identities. Each participant recounted instances of including discussions of queerness in their classroom lessons and being open to incorporating queer inclusion further in their courses. I also found that the teachers supported queer students where they could, including finding extra resources to make them feel included. However, there were also challenges that teachers faced in navigating queer inclusive education. Barriers for educators included outdated curriculum and materials, dealing with conservative, religious families who were against queer inclusion, and determining what the right actions to take were, such as when handling student pronoun changes. This theme demonstrates that teachers hold power on an individual level and made some inroads towards queer inclusive education via a bottom-up approach, however they also need support and leadership from the top to overcome associated challenges.

The final key finding from this study offers direction for future changes towards queer inclusive education. This theme suggests a significant need for institutions to develop and apply structures and processes to support queer inclusive education. While the participants individually tried to practice queer inclusion in their classrooms, some were held back from doing more by potential backlash they feared they could receive for discussing queer topics. Being given guidance and support from higher levels of the education system could reassure teachers and aid them in feeling confident in their efforts toward queer inclusion. A major avenue that could be employed to help educators is enacting professional development around 2SLGBTQIA+ topics. Formalized training could aid teachers in feeling properly equipped to discuss queer identities in their classrooms, navigate potential questions from students, and incorporate representations of queerness into lesson plans. The school boards that the participants were part of offered some educational initiatives around oppressed or minority groups. The participants believed it would be feasible to also launch programs and resources around queer identities to increase representation. While educators have tried to incorporate queer

inclusion on an individual level, they need clear operational guidelines and action from across the educational system to implement cohesive, lasting change towards 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion. As CHAT suggests, the key to creating sustainable change is through coherent, collaborative activities, wherein, in this case, educators, administrators, school boards, policymakers, and the Ontario Ministry of Education would work collaboratively to implement queer inclusive education.

## **6.2. Limitations**

There were limitations to this study that are important to note. The study had a small sample size, and only recounted the perspectives of three teachers at their schools in Ontario. Since participants' demographic and social positioning data were not collected, it limits the intersectional understanding of queer inclusive education. With three participants, the study is not generalizable to other teacher experiences in Ontario Catholic schools; the study offers depth, not breadth. This study also focused on the perspectives of teachers, not students. The accounts reported in this thesis are how the teacher participants viewed the current state of queer inclusive education in their schools, however that may be misaligned with how students receive efforts of 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion. Additionally, the interviews were conducted online, so it is possible that nuance in body language that would have been observable during in-person interviews is missing.

Due to the study participants being recruited through my personal connections with educators, there is a possibility of bias in the data collected and presented. Moreover, because of the nature of the topic, it is likely that only teachers who view queer inclusive education positively responded to my invitations to participate in this study. Based on the participants' accounts of some attitudes of their colleagues, there are some teachers who hold negative views of queer inclusion in schools.

## **6.3. Recommendations**

In terms of queer inclusive education in Ontario Catholic schools, there were several threads throughout this thesis that would be useful to pursue further. This section lays out recommendations toward normalizing queerness in schools, teachers as agents of change in their classrooms, and the need for systemic efforts and institutionalized support.

### **6.3.1. Normalizing Queerness in Schools**

Within the finding of queerness being outside of the norm in schools, there were two contradictions that interfered with educators implementing queer inclusive education. One was that there were intolerant attitudes and conservative beliefs rooted in religion in Catholic schools, for example Catholicism viewing being gay as a sin. Participants wanted to implement queer inclusive education, but it conflicted with the Catholic school setting that they were in. However, it is important to remember that Catholic schools in Ontario are publicly funded and thus fall under the policies of the provincial government. Any regulations from the Ontario Ministry of Education encompasses Catholic schools as well as the public school board, including the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2022) Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. This means that diverse gender and sexual identities are protected from discrimination in Ontario Catholic schools. In terms of what educators can do to turn the contradictions between religion and queer inclusive education into opportunities for change, there are resources available for them to consult. As part of their ongoing workshops targeting inclusive schools, Egale offers a webinar on the topic of faith and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth (Egale, 2023). The session discusses the gap between faith and queer identities, as well as equipping attendees with strategies for fostering conversations and responding to faith-based hate towards queer people in schools. Egale also has companion materials to the webinar that are free to access through their website. These include resources on facilitating conversations with school community members, reflective worksheets, strategies for implementing inclusive practices, and a list of additional resources around faith and 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.

Such materials can help educators develop strategies for reconciling points of contention in schools regarding queerness and religion.

The other contradiction relevant to normalizing queerness was that while the participants wanted to implement queer inclusive education, they were concerned about receiving backlash from parents who disagreed with diverse gender and sexual identities being represented in education. Firstly, it needs to be more clearly laid out that there are items in the Ontario curriculum that speak about 2SLGBTQIA+ identities. Thus, teachers are within their rights to incorporate queerness into their lessons. This needs to be established so that parents understand that queerness is part of the approved curriculum. Additionally, Joseph brought up a point in his interviews that is applicable to this situation. He highlighted that people who are against queer inclusion are frequently operating from a place of ignorance and a lack of understanding. Joseph suggested that to change someone's behaviour, the first step is to change their minds. Parents who are anti-2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion deserve the same supportive education that students receive (Herriot et al., 2018). Parents generally have their child's best interests at heart, even when they are opposing queer inclusive education. Providing the opportunity for parents to learn and engage with research around queerness and education could function to broaden their minds and help them develop an understanding of the importance of queer inclusive education (Herriot et al., 2018). This could be beneficial, especially during policy changes, to diffuse tension, dispel misinformation, and allow for open, productive conversations (Herriot et al., 2018). Several of the queer advocacy organizations that I have mentioned also have resources for parents. Egale has materials directed towards adults with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in their lives, and some of their workshops and webinars are open for anyone to join and learn. SOGI 123 has a section of their website dedicated to parents and educating them about sexual orientation and gender identity. They have a parental guide to SOGI in schools which covers areas like the basics of SOGI, conversations at school, conversations at home, myths, and additional resources (The ARC Foundation, 2022). They also offer videos, common questions and answers, and brochures. If parents are approached without judgement and they are open to learning, resources such as the ones mentioned above could help to increase understanding of diverse identities and the importance of queer inclusion in education.

### 6.3.2. Teachers as Agents of Change

Teachers hold power on their individual levels to implement queer inclusive education in their classrooms. The participants set the tone in their classes, incorporated 2SLGBTQIA+ content within the curriculum, and supported queer students. The bottom-up power that teachers hold can challenge oppression in schools and have an impact on the state of queer inclusive education. It is crucial for teachers to make consistent efforts towards 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education now, as top-down systemic changes can take time to occur. There are a range of resources that exist that can aid teachers in making queer inclusive efforts in their classrooms and lessons. Egale has a webpage dedicated to inclusive schools that feature educational resources for teachers, including fundamentals of queer inclusion, webinars, workshops, downloadable prepared posters, and toolkits that align with Ontario curriculum (2023). Despite only being incorporated into BC and Alberta, SOGI 123 has a webpage that targets all educators. They offer resources in the following areas: getting started, teaching materials, ongoing learning, policies and procedures, physical environments, and student transitions (The ARC Foundation, 2019). The Rise Project offers materials for teacher education programs and for in-service teachers. Their webpage entitled *K-12 Methods Modules* demonstrates how educators can expand lessons to incorporate queer content (RISE, 2022). For example, one subject module is social studies, history, and geography. RISE (2022) outlines what it means to queer these subjects, what stories are told in history, who is represented throughout history, how social movements are treated, and why queering these topics is needed. The module emphasizes the need to normalize 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences throughout history, as queer people have always existed, and it is important to showcase their contributions as they have often been removed from history due to misrepresentation, omission, and censorship (RISE, 2022). Rise (2022) also provides specific lessons and teaching activity suggestions. Organizations such as these offer practical and accessible resources for teachers on how to implement queer inclusive education in their classrooms.

### 6.3.3. Systemic Efforts and Institutionalized Support

One of the contradictions that was examined in the Discussion chapter was the unequal division of labor that existed in schools around fostering queer inclusive education. Part of the reason that 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion in education had not been fully implemented was because not all members of the school system were doing their share of the work. The whole educational system needs to function in unison with top-down and bottom-up efforts to contribute to a positive school environment for queer students, educators, and staff. One way for school boards and the Ontario Ministry of Education to give support is to provide clear guidelines from the district or provincial level for teachers. The participants were not aware of any guidelines from their school boards or Ontario government regarding queer inclusive education. The Ontario Ministry of Education does have an Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2022), which emphasizes creating inclusive and safe environments for all students, including queer students. However, this strategy has not carried through to concrete, actionable guidelines that are distributed to educators. Having processes in place would help provide teachers with the parameters for what they can discuss in classrooms in terms of queerness. This would also function to fuel educators' confidence in what they are allowed to say or show without fear of backlash that could endanger their position in the school.

Another area associated with teacher hesitation to fully implement queer inclusion was that some participants reported that they were unsure how to confront people who spoke negatively about queerness in certain contexts, like teacher colleagues. Educators need guidance on how to face prejudiced comments in schools, whether from other teachers, administrators, or students. An example of the types of resources that should be distributed to all educators is from Learning for Justice. They are an organization that provides free educational resources to aid educators, youth, and all community members in matters of social justice. They offer resources to help fight prejudice and stereotypes in schools, including outlining how to take straightforward action to interrupt bigotry and encourage perpetrators to unpack their statements and rethink their words in a non-aggressive manner (Learning for Justice). Learning for Justice also offers a free *Speak up at School* (2022) guide which features tools and strategies for responding to prejudice and

stereotypes at school. They have accompanying materials designed to aid educators in implementing their tips to create respectful educational climates (Learning for Justice). GLSEN, the gay, lesbian, and straight education network, is an American-based queer advocacy organization working to create supportive schools for all students. They provide a range of resources on their website, with focuses on educators, students, policy, GSAs, webinars and workshops, and more. Their offerings involve materials on allyship, including a guide on facilitating an Allyship in Action training to make schools safer for queer students (GLSEN). These types of resources are valuable in equipping educators with knowledge and strategies for fighting prejudice in schools.

Another key recommendation is to provide professional development and prepare teachers for queer inclusive education. This should involve reviewing 2SLGBTQIA+ terminology to ensure that educators have a baseline of knowledge about diverse gender and sexual identities. Teachers also need to feel well-equipped and prepared to facilitate discussions about queerness in their classrooms. In addition to receiving training on how to intertwine representations of queer identities into lessons, educators should receive sample lesson plans to view examples of how to incorporate diverse genders and sexualities into their materials (Meyer et al., 2015). An example of a valuable resource is *Teaching about Gender Diversity: Teacher-Tested Lesson Plans for K–12 Classrooms* (Woolley & Airton, 2020). This book addresses the need for practical lesson plans for teachers to discuss gender diversity in their classrooms (Woolley & Airton, 2020). It bridges the gap between theory and practice to feature lesson plans prepared by a range of teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and showcases accessible methods of incorporating gender diversity into courses (Woolley & Airton, 2020). As I have discussed previously, Egale’s Relearn and React series (2023) has toolkits to help teachers incorporate queer inclusive education into a range of Ontario curriculum-aligned lesson plans. RISE (2022) also has suggestions and examples to show educators how to incorporate queer content into a range of subjects and lessons. Through official partnerships with these organizations, the Ontario Ministry of Education and school boards could train educators on how to implement queer inclusive education into their classrooms and lessons. The field of education requires practical resources that provide teachers with concrete examples of encouraging queer inclusive classrooms. This would

also address the barrier to queer inclusivity regarding the outdated materials and textbooks that teachers encounter. Schools could provide approved online resources so that teachers have materials to help them towards queer inclusive education. Resources and guides focused on queer lesson plans also need to be transformed into professional development activities. There are numerous workshops that have been developed targeting queer inclusive education, such as from Egale and GLSEN. By school boards bringing such sessions into professional development days, educators would have the opportunity to learn about the importance of queer inclusive education and strategies on implementing it (Richard, 2015). This would function to engage all teachers and help them to practice and visualize how 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion can exist in their classroom, no matter the subject area (Richard, 2015).

#### **6.4. Future Research Considerations**

There is more research and work to be done to understand the current state of queer inclusive education in Canada. This study could be built upon using a larger sample of teachers, to capture nuances of teachers' understanding about their roles in relation to queer inclusive education implementation. It would also be useful to encompass a range of locations to determine if geography and demographics impacts teachers and queer inclusive education implementation (e.g., urban centres vs. rural areas; teachers whose identities have been historically marginalized vs. teachers from more privileged backgrounds). Further research is also needed on queer inclusive education at various grade levels. Another area of future research would be to interview school administrators, given that they could provide some key information about the current state of 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education in their contexts. Student participation in a future study would be key in discovering their experiences with their school environments and queer inclusive education. Having students as participants would also allow them to express how inclusion efforts from teachers were received.

Another important area for future research is to compare the current state of queer inclusive education in Ontario Catholic schools with schools in the other provinces that publicly fund Catholic schools (i.e., Alberta and Saskatchewan). This would allow

researchers to discern the differences in experiences based on provincial governments and geographical locations. Additionally, a possible line of inquiry would be to study teachers who have recently graduated to determine how prepared they feel to implement queer inclusive education in their practice. Another necessary realm of research would be to concentrate on the guidelines and professional development activities that could be implemented to support queer inclusive education in Ontario. This would help determine how school boards and the Ministry of Education could most effectively develop and implement successful policies for gender and sexual diversity inclusion.

## **6.5. Final Thoughts/Conclusion**

Overall, this research has contributed to the field of queer inclusive education by documenting the perspectives and experiences of three teachers within Ontario Catholic high schools. In order for progress to be made towards queer inclusive education, it is essential for the whole educational system to work together to achieve the goal. Change occurs through the influence of top-down and bottom-up factors, thus educators, school boards, and the Ontario Ministry of Education must all contribute to queer inclusive education efforts (Fullan, 2010). Educators are entitled to training and professional development around queerness (Meyer et al., 2015), so they can feel fully equipped to incorporate diverse gender and sexual identities into their classrooms. Queer individuals must be included in the educational system and see their identities represented in schools. Working towards queer inclusion in the field of education is critical for the well-being and acceptance of all youth, including those who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+.

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## Appendix A.

### Literature Search Results and Included Articles

Database: Search Terms	ERIC		Education Source		Google Scholar	
	Number of results found	Number of articles that met inclusion criteria	Number of results found	Number of articles that met inclusion criteria	Number of results found	Number of articles that met inclusion criteria
“educat*” OR “school” AND “queer” OR “lgb*” AND “Canada” AND “curricul*”	23	2	31	3	28	0
“educat*” OR “school” AND “queer” OR “lgb*” AND “Canada” AND “high school” OR “Secondary”	22	10	33	7	17,400	21
“educat*” OR “school” AND “queer” OR “lgb*” AND “Canada” AND “sex* ed*” OR “Inclusive sex* ed*”	10	2	15	2	120	0
“educat*” OR “school” AND “queer” OR “lgb*” AND “Canada” AND “inclusive ed*”	7	4	6	3	12	3
“educat*” OR “school” AND “queer” OR “lgb*” AND “Canada” AND “teacher” OR “educator”	38	13	46	6	17,000	16
Total:	100	31	131	21	34,560	40
Combined 34,791 search results and 92 included articles Once duplicates were removed = <b>33 final included articles</b>						

## Appendix B.

### Systematic Literature Review: Summary of Included Articles

Reference	Year	Journal	Location	Purpose	Theoretical/ Conceptual Framing	Participants	Age/Grade Level Focus	Research Design	Data Sources	Findings
Bain & Podmore	2020	Gender, Place, & Culture	Peripheries of the Vancouver city-region in British Columbia, Canada	To provide an analysis of how suburban high school GSAs in the Vancouver city-region use "surplus visibility" to rework institutional heteronormativity.	Surplus Visibility	GSA Teacher Sponsors and 11 LGBTQ2S youth	High schools	Qualitative	Interviews, focus groups, examples from two case studies	GSA members use a variety of socio-spatial practices in the process of generating surplus visibility (ex. undertaking field trips to LGBTQ2S community spaces). There needs to be more LGBTQ2S-inclusive spaces in schools.
Bortolin	2010	Journal of LGBT Youth	Windsor-Essex County, Ontario, Canada	To examine how male heterosexual students contribute to the school climate for their LGBTQ peers in Canadian secondary schools.	Hegemonic Masculinity	15 heterosexual males ages 16–18 from 11 secondary schools	High schools	Qualitative	Interviews	High school functions as a microculture where masculinity take precedence; behavior that threatens it, such as being gay, is reprimanded by peers. Educators and school policymakers should make schools more equitable places by creating environments that are more supportive of LGBTQ youth.
Broom	2013	Social Studies Research and Practice	British Columbia, Canada	To present findings that explore the opinions of stakeholder groups regarding the Social Justice 12 course.	Critical Pedagogy	2 course developers, 3 principals, teachers, and 3 community members	Grade 12	Qualitative	Interviews, surveys	There is contention around (1) who has authority to determine what students believe (parents or schools and teachers) and (2) the relations between special interest groups and schooling. Educators should foster critical thinking skills by presenting multiple points of view and illustrating the strengths and weaknesses of varied positions.
Burk et al.	2018	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	British Columbia, Canada	To evaluate the Out in Schools intervention and its association with mental health outcomes and bullying experienced by sexual minority adolescents.	Intergroup Contact Theory and Theatre for Social Justice	998 LGB students and 20077 Heterosexual students	Grade 8-12	Quantitative	Surveys, Presentation data from Out in Schools Interventions	Out in Schools media-based events appeared to contribute to reduced odds of bullying, sexual orientation-based discrimination, and serious suicidal thoughts in the past year, as well as improving school connectedness among LGB students. It also reduced discrimination, bullying, and suicidal thoughts for heterosexual students.
Burkholder et al.	2021	Canadian Journal of Education	Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada	To highlight the ways that zines produced by queer youth and pre-service teachers might be shared and disseminated as forms of political activism.	Participatory visual research framework, intersectional feminism, queer theory	7 queer/trans/non-binary youth	Youth age 13 to 17	Qualitative	Workshop	Creative knowledge dissemination through zine production can promote youth solidarity and local and school-based activism by connecting youth with larger audiences.
Callaghan	2015	Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy	Alberta and Ontario, Canada	To report on the experiences and plight of lgbtq teachers in Canadian Catholic schools.	Anti-oppressive educational research, Foucault's micro-physics of power	6 queer educators	Elementary and high school educators	Qualitative	Interviews presented as narrative vignettes	The teachers experienced degrees of doctrinal disciplining regarding non-heterosexuality. All participants experienced some form of homophobia in their Catholic schools and none described a Catholic school environment that was accepting and welcoming of sexual and gender diversity.
Callaghan	2016	Journal of LGBT Youth	Alberta and Ontario, Canada	To report on the experiences of lesbian high school students with religious based homophobia in Catholic school and their activist resistance to this.	Critical theory, critical pedagogy, anti-oppressive education, Foucault's micro-physics of power	3 lesbian high school students	High school	Qualitative	Interviews presented as narrative vignettes	Despite the widespread nature of homophobia in publicly funded catholic schools, some students are able to resist the doctrinal disciplining of their catholic schools and have the potential to lead more organized acts of resistance to homophobic oppression.

Reference	Year	Journal	Location	Purpose	Theoretical/ Conceptual Framing	Participants	Age/Grade Level Focus	Research Design	Data Sources	Findings
Campbell et al	2021	Canadian Journal of Education	Cross Canada	To analyze teachers' reasons for not addressing 2SLGBTQ+ topics in their schools to develop a clearer picture of their reasons for inaction.	Not specified	3,319 educators	K-12	Quantitative	Surveys	Efforts to support educators through school-wide and school system-wide efforts at 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion are necessary to increase educators' confidence. Schools must provide the training/resources necessary to empower educators to act.
Cavanaugh	2016	The Arbutus Review	Victoria, British Columbia, Canada	To suggest that a queer-affirming model is superior to a queer-safe approach in schools; and to offer sharing personal stories as a medium for teachers to realize queer-affirming practice.	Storytelling, queer affirming approach	2 English teachers, 30 grade 10 students	Grade 10	Qualitative	Interviews, surveys, observations from a workshop	Stories can be a tool for educators to initiate conversations about gender and sexual diversity in their classrooms. Ongoing integration of LGBTQ content in classrooms will make for more sustained inclusivity in schools.
Ferfolja	2013	Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy	Toronto, Ontario, Canada	To examine how LGBTQ equity work was being implemented in two Toronto District Schoolboard high schools.	Ball et al.'s (2012) policies as sites of struggle	2 staff, 4 teachers, 6 guardians, 2 stakeholders, 23 students.	Grades 9 to 12	Qualitative	Interviews	As part of a whole-school approach, students who are committed to LGBTQ equity issues can provide important additions to school-based equity teams. Students can be powerful in educating their peers, juniors, and even teachers in meaningful and important ways to address LGBTQ in/equity.
Goldstein et al.	2021	Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education	6 cities in Ontario, Canada	To explore the ways LGBTQ families are working with teachers and principals to create safer and more supportive learning spaces for their children.	Crosby and Lykes's (2019) understanding of testimony, Triangle Model (McCaskell, 2005; Thomas, 1987), Intersectionality	3 LGBTQ families	Elementary and secondary schools	Qualitative	Interviews	LGBTQ families responded to the institutional cis-heteronormative cultures of their schools by challenging the ideas teachers and principals held about gender and sexuality, and the oppressive everyday practices that were fueled and sustained by these ideas.
Harriot et al.	2018	Gender and Education	Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada	To examine how multiple competing visions of educational and parental authority can be manifested in the context of a single policy process, and how to address these issues and encourage a more supportive dialogue.	Transmisogyny (Serano, 2007), multi-layered discursive performance.	5 public consultation meetings, each attended by 200-300 members of the public	K-12	Qualitative	Field notes from a case study	Some parents opposed to allowing trans students to use the washroom that matched their gender identity were motivated by beliefs indicative of hypermasculinity, rape culture, and heteronormativity. Parents should be approached as deserving of the same supportive education, resources, and counselling as students.
Ingrey	2012	Gender and Education	Mid-sized City in Ontario, Canada	To consider how an institutional space can inform our understanding of self-fashioning and peer regulatory practices as they relate to gender performativity and embodiment within the context of schooling.	Butler's (1990, 1993, 1997a) concepts of gender performativity, Foucault's (1977, 1988) disciplinary power and technologies of self	8 students	Secondary schools	Qualitative	Interviews, focus group	Students recognized the problems of binary gender washrooms, leading them to speak about the alternatives. Fear of transgender washrooms was because it was thought to conceal and allow sexual violence. Through panoptic punishment, homophobia and heteronormative presumptions emerge.
Kitchen & Bellini	2013	Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy	Ontario, Canada	To examine LGBTQ inclusion and safety from the perspective of GSA advisors.	School ecology	41 educators who were GSA facilitators for their school	39 secondary schools, 2 middle schools	Mixed methods (these findings based on the quant data)	Questionnaires	Climate is improving in schools with active GSAs. This is because GSAs serve as advocates for social acceptance and school climate is less tolerant of harassment and bullying. There is still much work to be done.
Lapointe	2014	Sex Education	Ontario, Canada	To generate knowledge about straight allies' involvement in GSAs and examine how they engaged with sex education and sexual health at their schools, to find how they were able to disrupt LGBTQ-based stereotypes and prejudice at school.	Queer theory, Anti-oppressive education	4 straight youth, 1 gay youth (all GSA members)	High school	Qualitative	Observations, field notes, interviews	Student participants noted an absence of LGBTQ content in formal curriculum and thought it was important to incorporate queer concepts into teacher education. Findings suggest that straight allies can use their heterosexual privilege to address LGBTQ issues with their peers.

Reference	Year	Journal	Location	Purpose	Theoretical/ Conceptual Framing	Participants	Age/Grade Level Focus	Research Design	Data Sources	Findings
Lapointe	2015	Journal of LGBT Youth	Southwestern, Ontario, Canada	To capture how heterosexual students are participating in anti-homophobic clubs.	Queer theory	4 straight youth, 1 gay youth (all GSA members)	High school	Qualitative	Interviews	While GSAs offer safety and support for LGBTQ students, their presence in schools is not a wholly positive solution. Queer pedagogy should be infused into educational practice to counter systemic LGBTQ-based oppression.
Lapointe	2016	The Journal of Social Studies Research	Ontario, Canada	To explore how Social Studies educators can adopt the queer theoretical positions and pedagogical approaches of GSA members in terms of linking queer/trans experiences, perspectives, and history with Social Studies curriculum expectations.	Queer theory, queer pedagogy	4 straight youth, 1 gay youth (all GSA members)	High school	Qualitative	Interviews	(1) GSAs' queer educative role compensated for a void in LGBTQ curricular content. Teachers need to integrate more content that disrupts homophobia and transphobia; (2) Social Studies educators can mirror students' drive to learn about and challenge preconceived beliefs; and (3) the queer educational approaches of GSAs differed from the teaching of their educators.
Liboro et al.	2015	The High School Journal	Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB) in Ontario, Canada	To determine if established strategies and programs that have been successful in supporting LGBT students in public schools in the US could also be successful in supporting LGBT students in publicly funded Canadian Catholic schools.	Not specified	One former and two current students, two teachers, a school administrator, two trustees from the WCDSB, and two service providers	High school	Qualitative	Interviews	Implementing successful strategies and programs from the US can support LGBT students in the publicly funded Canadian Catholic school system. Further, the success of strategies was influenced by factors such as realizing the significant influence of Catholic values and recognizing the necessity for school boards to maintain legitimacy as publicly funded institutions.
Luceno et al.	2022	Alberta Journal of Educational Research	Alberta, Canada	To identify helpful strategies that educators are using to support LGBTQ youth, the barriers they face in doing so, and how they might surmount those barriers.	Not specified	77 Educators	19 elementary educators, 58 high school educators	Mixed methods	Surveys, interviews	The educators took supportive roles toward LGBTQ youth. Educators may experience barriers to supporting LGBTQ youth due to a lack of training and professional development, fear of job loss, backlash from religious and conservative community members, lack of resources, etc. Despite these barriers, most educators surveyed felt it was extremely important to support LGBTQ youth in their schools.
Meyer et al.	2015	Sex Education	Cross Canada	To find the current perspectives and experiences of LGBTQ teachers on the subject of GSD-inclusive education and how they differ from those of straight teachers.	Anti-oppressive education, GSD-Inclusive Education, Intersectionality	Over 3400 Educators	K-12	Mixed Methods	Surveys	Many Canadian teachers believe that LGBTQ rights are human rights and should be incorporated in diversity-education efforts in the classroom. However, the gap between beliefs and behaviours indicates that there are still many structural barriers that exist for educators to fully implement GSD-inclusive education.
Morrison et al.	2014	Canadian Journal of Education	Saskatchewan, Canada	To explore high school students' perceptions of school climate around homonegative behaviours, the toll the behaviours take on the school and students, the likelihood that students will intervene, and the role that support networks play.	Not specified	60 students	High school	Mixed methods	Surveys	One in five students were affected by homonegative speech, and homonegativity had scholastic consequences for these students. Schools should create interventions to combat homonegativity.
Ng et al.	2019	Health	Three communities in British Columbia, Canada (Vancouver, Abbotsford, and a small northern community)	To analyze how young people in BC discussed LGBTQ issues and how they took up some prevailing discourses about gender and sexual minorities.	Foucauldian Discourse Analytic Approach, Butler's concept of Citationality	82 youth	Age 13 to 18	Qualitative	Interviews	In the absence of a province-wide strategy in schools, there were key gaps and contextual differences in terms of how young people took up views about LGBTQ issues; while change and acceptance among this generation may be highly touted, many youth express viewpoints that uphold heteronormativity.

Reference	Year	Journal	Location	Purpose	Theoretical/ Conceptual Framing	Participants	Age/Grade Level Focus	Research Design	Data Sources	Findings
Peter, Taylor, & Chamberland	2015	Journal of Homosexuality	Cross Canada	To examine how location is related to indicators of a hostile school environment for sexual minority youth, particularly when physical abuse is the outcome variable.	Not specified	5,766 students	High Schools	Quantitative	Questionnaires	(1) there are some differences between Canadian provinces/territories in regard to homophobia in schools; (2) LGBQ students experience high rates of homophobia in schools; (3) heterosexual students are also affected by homophobic-motivated abuse; and (4) verbal abuse is often a precursor to physical abuse.
Peter, Taylor, Ristock, & Edkins	2015	Journal of Lesbian Studies	Cross Canada (excluding Quebec)	To analyze the ways in which covariates relating to homophobia and gender identity/expression impact school attachment among lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual female students.	Not specified	1256 LGB and heterosexual female students	High schools	Mixed Methods	Surveys	Lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual girls are exposed to hostile school climates and experience correspondingly weakened school attachment. Homophobic and transphobic bullying is not exclusively a sexual minority student issue; rather, heterosexual students can also be affected.
Peter, Taylor, & Edkins	2016	Canadian Journal of Education	Cross Canada (excluding Quebec)	To empirically analyze the impact of having an LGBT parent on the propensity to skip school due to feeling unsafe.	Not specified	3,092 students	Secondary schools	Quantitative	Questionnaires	Students who have an LGBT parent, and who report feeling unsafe at school due to their family or their own identity, were almost four times more likely to report skipping school than cisgender-heterosexual students with non-LGBT parents who feel safe at school.
Peter, Taylor, & Campbell	2016	Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health	Cross Canada	To examine the link between suicidality and school climate.	Heteronormative discourse	Over 3,700 students	Secondary schools	Mixed Methods	Questionnaire	The findings show that even modest efforts to shift the balance of heteronormative discourse on behalf of LGBTQ students can have profound effects on the experiences of sexual and gender minority youth, which would go a long way in reducing incidents of suicidality among LGBTQ youth.
Peter et al.	2018	Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy	Cross Canada	To address the extent to which religious affiliation influences the likelihood of teachers intervening in homophobic or transphobic incidents and practicing LGBTQ-inclusive education in their classrooms.	Not specified	Over 3400 educators	PK-12	Quantitative	Surveys	Results show that religious affiliation does have a significant impact on the likelihood that educators will (or will not) practice LGBTQ-inclusive education, however, the pathways to such practices vary considerably across religious groupings.
Richard	2015	Journal of LGBT Youth	Quebec, Canada	To explore the ways in which teachers describe their pedagogical and intervention practices relative to sexual diversity.	Not specified	243 high school teachers	High school	Quantitative	Surveys	The non-heterosexual respondents, those who are closely acquainted with an LGB person, and/or those who have completed specific training on sexual orientation were more likely to say that they discuss sexual diversity in the classroom and have responded positively when LGBQ youth confided in them.
Short	2010	Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies	Toronto, Ontario, Canada	To inquire how safety was defined and understood by sexual minority students and their allies, and to explore how sexual minority students reported that safety was pursued at their schools.	Anti-oppressive pedagogy, critical pedagogy	Approximately 25 sexual minority students and 15 teachers/guidance counsellors	Grade 9-12	Qualitative	Interviews, observations	The effectiveness of legislation and policies, as well as the larger goal of doing equity and achieving social justice in schools, is impacted by how a school conceptualizes and implements safety.
Surette	2019	Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education	Rural Southern Alberta, Canada	To explore Canadian students currently navigating the heterosexist environment in their schools, and investigate how students interpret the silence of their teachers.	Narrative Inquiry	6 Students	Secondary schools	Qualitative	Narrative interviewing	Topics pertaining to gender and sexual diversity remained almost completely absent from classroom discussions. (a) students felt this eradication of gender and sexual diversity from the classroom was pervasive and intentional; (b) when gender and sexual diversity did come up, it was quickly shut down, or harmful messages were sent by teachers.

Reference	Year	Journal	Location	Purpose	Theoretical/ Conceptual Framing	Participants	Age/Grade Level Focus	Research Design	Data Sources	Findings
Taylor & Peter	2011	Canadian Review of Sociology	Cross Canada (excluding Quebec)	To report on homophobia and transphobia in Canadian high schools, specifically about school climate, harassment, school attachment, and institutional interventions.	Anti-oppressive education	3607 high school students	High schools	Mixed methods	Questionnaires	Schools were neither safe nor respectful for sexual and gender minority students. Participants see school officials as turning away from their own principles under pressure from homophobes, and that causes them to lose respect for teachers and to become cynical about the Charter of Rights.
Taylor et al.	2016	Journal of LGBT Youth	Cross Canada	To identify the beliefs, perspectives, and practices of K to 12 educators in Canadian public schools regarding LGBTQ-inclusive education.	Anti-oppressive education	Over 3400 educators	K-12	Mixed Methods	Questionnaires	LGBTQ teachers are more likely to be aware of harassment of LGBTQ students, and to have confidence in student support for LGBTQ-inclusive education; they are less likely to see their school as safe, especially for LGBTQ students; they are more likely to approve of LGBTQ-inclusive education and to practice it, and more likely to support students' freedom of gender expression.
Tompkins et al.	2019	Canadian Journal of Education	Ontario and Alberta, Canada	To explore the experiences of beginning LGBTQ educators to understand how schools may harm or exclude them as well as students, specifically focusing on their successes and challenges advocating for LGBTQ-inclusive education.	Anti-Oppressive lens	4 queer educators	Elementary and High school	Qualitative	Interviews	Participants felt empowered and accepted, they were conflicted about sharing personal information, some were the only person in a school environment advocating for LGBTQ students and families, and they experienced school climates and school leadership that ranged from supportive to hostile.

## Appendix C.

### Participant Profiles

	<b>Participant 1</b>	<b>Participant 2</b>	<b>Participant 3</b>
<b>Pseudonym</b>	Elizabeth	Joseph	Ruth
<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>	Approximately 14 years	Approximately 25 years	Approximately 32 years
<b>Subjects Teaching<sup>2</sup></b>	English, Drama	Law, Religion, Philosophy	Religion

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<sup>2</sup> This only encompassed the courses the participants were teaching during the semester they were interviewed.

## Appendix D.

### Recruitment Flyer

Hello,

My name is Michaela Armstrong. I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. The purpose of this flyer is to see if you would be interested in participating in a small-scale project.

The purpose of the project is to learn how teachers navigate classroom discussions that include diverse gender and sexual identities. The project period would be October to November 2023.

Project Description and Commitment: I would like to conduct three online interviews (60-90 minutes each) that will be audio/video recorded and deleted after I successfully defend my thesis. Interviews will take place during a convenient time for you. You will also be asked to complete two brief activities in preparation for the interviews and, if applicable, share any materials (e.g., non-identifiable lesson plans, readings) that you use to discuss LGBTQ+ identities in your classroom.

Any high school teachers who have worked in Ontario Catholic schools for 8 or more years and who have a valid provincial teaching certification are invited to participate.

I would be happy to accommodate any requests from you during the project. It is important to note that you can withdraw from the project at any time. Measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality and secure the collected data, meaning that your identity will not be disclosed. Recordings will be used only for research purposes and will not be shared with school administrators or other officials without your consent.

Thank you for your consideration of this project. Please let me know if you have any questions or if you'd like me to clarify anything for you.

If you would like to participate, please contact me either by email at xxx@sfu.ca or by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

Michaela Armstrong

# Appendix E.

## Consent Form

### Teacher Experiences with Queer Inclusive Education in the Ontario Catholic School System

#### Who is conducting this study?

Student Lead: Michaela Armstrong, Graduate Student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University [SFU], [xxx@sfu.ca](mailto:xxx@sfu.ca)

Principal Investigator: Dr. Inna Stepaniuk, Assistant Professor at SFU Faculty of Education, [xxx@sfu.ca](mailto:xxx@sfu.ca)

#### Why are you invited to take part in this study? Why are we doing this study?

We are doing this study to learn more about how teachers navigate classroom discussions that include diverse gender and sexual identities. You are invited to participate in this study because we want to learn from your experience as a teacher and because you are a teacher who has worked for more than eight (8) years in an Ontario Catholic school.

#### Your participation is voluntary.

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences to education, employment, or other services to which you are entitled or are presently receiving. You will not receive compensation for your participation in this study.

#### What happens if you say, “Yes, I want to be in the study?” How is the study done?

If you decide to take part in these interview sessions, three, 60- to 90-minute interviews will be conducted online and can be scheduled at a time that is most convenient for you. The goal of these interviews is to learn more about your experience with LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus) topics and discussions in schools. During the interviews, our conversation will be video/audio recorded in order to transcribe it. Each of these interviews will be scheduled approximately one week apart whenever possible. You will also be asked to complete two brief activities in preparation for the interviews, and share one to two lesson plans or other materials that discuss LGBTQ+ identities that you created and own, if applicable. The teaching materials that you may share must not include any identifiable student information.

#### Is there any way that this study could be harmful for you?

There are no foreseeable risks to you in participating in this study.

**What are the benefits of participating?**

While we do not think taking part in this study will help you directly, in the future, others may benefit from what we learn in this study.

**How will your data be protected and your privacy be maintained?**

Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent. Audio/video recordings of the interviews will be stored in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility and will be permanently deleted once the study concludes. We will transcribe the recorded interview and these files will be stored in an SFU supported secure storage facility, along with the other materials you submit. The resulting transcript will not include your name or place of work and will instead use a pseudonym. We will permanently delete the audio/video files after the study has concluded. We will keep the anonymized interview transcriptions and other submitted materials in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility following the conclusion of this study for a period of 5 years.

Please note that the online interviews will take place via Zoom. Zoom is a US company. Any data you provide may be transmitted and stored in countries outside of Canada, as well as in Canada. It is important to remember that privacy laws vary in different countries and may not be the same as in Canada.

**How will your information be used?**

The results of this study will be reported in the student lead's master's level graduate thesis and may be published in journal articles or presented at academic conferences. The study results may include anonymized quotations from your interviews. Anonymized interview transcripts and other submitted materials will be kept for 5 years after the conclusion of the study in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility. The student lead, Michaela Armstrong, may use these stored anonymized transcripts and other submitted materials within their 5-year storage period as data for future academic or graduate studies work with your consent.

**What if you decide to withdraw you consent to participate?**

You may withdraw from this study at any time without giving reasons and with no effects on employment or any other services you may be entitled to receive. You may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the student lead, Michaela Armstrong, using the contact information at the top of this form. If you choose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw at a later time, you can choose to allow the researchers to retain your existing data in the study or choose for all of the collected data to be destroyed.

**Where can you find study results?**

Study results will be reported in a publicly-available graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles or presented at academic conferences.

**Do you want to receive a copy of the study findings before they are made public?**

You can choose to receive a summary of the study findings in order to have an opportunity to comment on the findings before they are made publicly available. Upon receiving the findings, you will be invited to respond to them within seven (7) days in order to comment on the study findings and to identify if there any quotations from your interviews or other materials that you do not want to appear in the publicly available study findings. Do you wish to receive a summary of the study findings to review before they are made public?

- Yes
- No

**Do you consent to being recorded during the interviews?**

The interviews will be video and audio recorded on Zoom using the built-in recording software. This will be done in order to transcribe the interviews. The recordings will only be accessible to the student lead and principal investigator, and will be stored in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility and will be permanently deleted once the study concludes. Do you consent to your interviews being video and audio recorded?

- Yes
- No

**Consent for Future Use of Research Data**

The researchers may seek to publish the study findings in a journal article or present them at an academic conference in the future. For this process, the anonymized data may be requested. Any data collected from you as a participant will have the identifying information, such as your name and place of work, removed in order to keep your identity confidential. Do you consent to the study findings possibly being made publicly available in the future, such as for an article to be published in an academic journal?

- Yes
- No

The student lead, Michaela Armstrong, may wish to use the collected de-identified study data for future unspecified uses. This could involve future academic or graduate studies work. Do you consent to your de-identified data being potentially used for future purposes?

- Yes
- No

**Do you want to be contacted in the future?**

In the event that the researchers wish to contact you at a later date for follow-up purposes or to participate in other studies, do you consent to being contacted? At that time, you can decide if you would like to participate.

- Yes  
 No

**Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?**

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the student lead, Michaela Armstrong, at [xxx@sfu.ca](mailto:xxx@sfu.ca).

**Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?**

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, please contact the Director, SFU Office of Research Ethics, at [dore@sfu.ca](mailto:dore@sfu.ca) or 778-782-6593.

**Participant Consent and Signature**

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your employment, or any services to which you are presently entitled to receive.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this Consent Form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
- You do not waive any of your legal rights by participating in this study.

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Signature of Participant  
(YYYY/MM/DD)

---

Date

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Printed Name of Participant

# Appendix F.

## Interview Protocol

### Interview #1 – Participant Key History

1. Introduce myself and the study, ask if the participant has any questions.
2. Proceed to the discussion of educator journey mapping activity (sent to participants prior to the interview):
  - a. Can you please ‘walk me’ through your map and describe the events that you think have shaped who you are as an educator?
    - How long have you been teaching?
    - What grade do you teach?
    - How long have you been teaching within the Catholic school board?
  - b. Going back to the map that you drew, what has shaped your teaching the most? Why?
  - c. What does gender and sexual diversity mean to you? How do you define those terms?
  - d. Do you remember the first time you came across the above terms? When was it?
3. As part of this study, I am collecting educational materials related to teaching LGBTQ+ classroom discussions. Do you have any materials that you own that have helped you to facilitate discussions of diverse gender and sexual identities in your classrooms?

- a. If you do, would you be willing to share a couple of items with me via email?
- b. For example, this could be a lesson plan that you created. Note: These materials must not include any identifiable student information.

### **Interview #2 – Details of Lived Experience**

1. Start with a discussion of the vignette to gather participants' perspectives on the topic (the vignette was sent to participants prior to interview)
  - a. What were your immediate reactions and thoughts when you read the story?
    - Why do you think you've reacted that way?
  - b. What has been your experience with queer inclusive education in your school so far?
  - c. If you can, please rate on scale from 1 to 10 (1 being "never" and 10 being "very often") how often queer topics occur in your classroom?
    - If the answer is "never", then ask "why"?
    - When those conversations take place in your classroom, what are they usually about?
    - Who usually initiates those conversations?
    - Do you remember the first time you talked about queerness in your classroom? Can you tell me a little bit about it.
    - When you talk about queer topics with your students, what are your primary goals?

- How do you connect those conversations to the Catholic curriculum?
2. Based on your experience, what approaches to including queer topics in your classroom have worked the best? Could you please share some examples.
  3. What challenges have you experienced associated with teaching about gender and sexual diversity within the Catholic school?
    - Let's talk a little bit more about some of the challenges that you mentioned. One of the challenges was X, how did you navigate your role in that situation?
    - You also mention about Y challenge, how did you address it?

### **Interview #3 – Reflection on Meaning**

1. What would you say to a new teacher about teaching queer topics within the Catholic school?
2. If you could talk to policy makers, what would you say about teaching queer topics within the Catholic school?
3. If you were to design a teacher education/preparation program, what would you include to better prepare teachers for addressing queer inclusive education in schools?
4. What would you say to families or colleagues who are resistant to queer inclusive education?
5. Is there anything else you'd like me to know?
6. Would you be comfortable with me contacting you again if I have any follow-up questions or if I want to clarify any of your answers?

\*Questions may be altered based on responses to interviews 1 & 2

## Appendix G.

### Educational Journey Mapping

Educational journey mapping is a flexible and open-ended activity designed to learn more about the events that you think have impacted who you are as an educator and shape the ways you teach.

**Visualize Your Journey:** Begin by visualizing your educational journey from its origins to where you are today. There are no rules here; you can use any format you prefer – whether it's a traditional timeline, a mind map, a collage, etc.

**Capture Significant Moments:** Think about the events (moments, experiences) that have contributed to your development as an educator. Jot down notes, sketches, or images that represent these moments.

**Create Connections:** Connect these significant moments in a way that makes sense to you. Draw lines or use arrows to show how one event led to another or influenced your path. This can be a simple visual representation or a more intricate design – it's entirely up to you.

**Add Personal Touches:** Feel free to add your personal touch to your educator journey map. Use colors, images, or symbols that resonate with your experiences and emotions.

**Reflect and Explore:** As you work on your map, reflect on your journey. Consider questions like:

- What has shaped who you are as an educator?
- How have your experiences shaped your teaching?
- What have been turning points or breakthrough moments for you?

**Share:** When you send in your educator journey map, you can either choose to also send a description of your map and its timeline (in whatever format you prefer) or you can wait to explain it during your first interview. Remember that there are no right or wrong

ways to create your educational journey map. It's a reflection of your individual path and experiences as an educator.

## Appendix H.

### Vignette

Please read the following short fictional story and reflect on it. Based on your personal preferences, you can either record your reactions and answers to the subsequent questions now and send them to Michaela in whichever format you choose, or you can wait to discuss your thoughts during the second interview.

*In the hallways of Sky High School, a cloud hung over a student named Alex. Each day, his steps seemed heavier as he navigated the complex terrain of high school. Alex was openly queer and proud of his identity, but it made him a target for cruel taunts and bullying from a group of peers.*

*One afternoon, after witnessing a couple of students whispering slurs at Alex during class, one of Alex's teachers found themselves contemplating the situation. It was delicate terrain as the recent protests across Canada regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in education had caused a lot of tension in the school, with some parents and staff members having conflicting views on which side of the protest they supported. The teacher could see how much this bullying was impacting Alex and did not feel right remaining silent; however, they did not want to cause any backlash.*

#### Questions:

1. What was your immediate reaction to the story?
2. What would you suggest this teacher do?
3. What resources would you seek out or utilize to address an issue like this effectively?
4. How do you navigate your role as an educator when it comes to keeping students safe?