We Are Not Alone:

Queer Teachers' Navigating Personal and Professional Identity; A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored how Queer teachers navigate their personal and professional identities. The research questions sought to understand how Queer teachers balance their Queer identity in their personal and professional lives and how they find support for their identities in their workplace. Goodson's study of teachers' lives and Alsup's on teacher identity negotiation were used as a theoretical lens to bring greater attention to a neglected subject and situation: the lack of belonging that (as several studies show) Queer teachers tend to feel in school. The research design combined self-study with a focus group discussion. The autobiographical self-study, inspired by Grace's concept of writing to the Queer self, allowed the researcher/teacher to reflect on their own experiences as an openly Queer teacher navigating their identities. The focus group participants were openly Queer individuals who had been working as teachers for 3-5 years in the Greater Montreal area. The findings revealed that Queer teachers feel more supported with respect to their identities in environments that provide professional development, and a supportive community and resources for students. The research allowed the teacher-researcher to reflect on their own experiences as well for Queer teachers to reflect together—an all too rare but necessary opportunity that shows promise for future work in research and practice. The focus group format generated momentum for change, as teachers shared ideas for improving the working conditions of Queer teachers in the Quebec education system. The thesis concludes with recommendations for educational leaders and policy makers on how to best support Queer teachers.

Résumé

Cette étude qualitative a exploré la manière dont les enseignants Queers naviguent entre leurs identités personnelles et professionnelles. Les questions de recherche visaient à comprendre comment les enseignants Queers équilibrent leur identité Queer dans leur vie personnelle et professionnelle et comment ils trouvent un soutien pour leurs identités sur leur lieu de travail. L'étude de Goodson sur la vie des enseignants et celle d'Alsup sur la négociation de l'identité de l'enseignant ont été utilisées comme objectif théorique pour attirer l'attention sur un sujet et une situation négligés : le manque d'appartenance que (comme le montrent plusieurs études) les enseignants Queers ont tendance à ressentir à l'école. La conception de la recherche a combiné l'auto-étude avec une discussion de groupe. L'auto-étude autobiographique, inspirée par le concept de Grace de l'écriture au soi Queer, a permis au chercheur/enseignant de réfléchir à ses propres expériences en tant qu'enseignant ouvertement Queer naviguant dans ses identités. Les participants aux groupes de discussion étaient des personnes ouvertement Queer qui travaillaient comme enseignants depuis 3 à 5 ans dans la région métropolitaine de Montréal. Les résultats ont révélé que les enseignants Queer se sentent plus soutenus dans leur identité dans des environnements qui offrent un développement professionnel, une communauté de soutien et des ressources pour les étudiants. La recherche a permis à l'enseignant-chercheur de réfléchir à ses propres expériences et aux enseignants Queer de réfléchir ensemble - une occasion trop rare mais nécessaire qui est prometteuse pour les futurs travaux de recherche et de pratique. Le format des groupes de discussion a généré une dynamique de changement, les enseignants ayant échangé des idées pour améliorer les conditions de travail des enseignants Queers dans le système éducatif québécois. La thèse se termine par des recommandations à l'intention des responsables de l'éducation et des décideurs politiques sur la manière de soutenir au mieux les enseignants Queer.

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Chapter 1 - The Introduction

Since 2020, I have worked in both public and private high schools in Quebec, where I have struggled with the realities of being an openly Queer teacher in my professional practice. Discussions with colleagues have made me realize there is a shortage of spaces in schools for Queer teachers to speak together as teaching professionals. Given that, Queer teachers encounter challenges in navigating their professional and personal identities; such navigation can be a complex and isolating process (Chamberland et al., 2007). There is a need for spaces for Queer teachers to share their experiences with one another and discuss how to best address challenges.

In this research project, I have studied how Queer teachers negotiate their identities, what challenges they face with coming out to their school community, and the continuous struggle Queer teachers face in being openly Queer in their schools. While teacher identity, both within and outside of the classroom, is a major focus of educational research, my research focuses on the narratives of Queer educators: their pasts, and their current challenges.

In this study, I will address the following two research questions:

(1) How do Queer teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities with respect to their Queerness?

(2) How do Queer teachers feel supported with respect to their identities, or find support?

The thesis represents a desire to challenge the working environments of Queer teachers in schools. It has also been inspired by the necessity of creating safe spaces to improve our collective school environments for both Queer and non-Queer individuals: teachers and students alike.

To that end, I combined self-study with qualitative research in the form of a focus group study. In the self-study section, the research questions were addressed through reflecting on my own experience as a Queer teacher, and where I was inspired by Grace's (2006) work of writing to the Queer self. In the second portion of the study, the research questions were addressed to the teacher participants and hearing how they responded when they engaged in two focus group discussions to discuss the realities and issues they face/have faced as openly Queer teachers.

The professional voices of teachers have been traditionally privileged in research. However, Goodson's decades-long research (1985, 1992, 1995, 1997, 2008, 2013) has drawn attention to the notion (and existence) of teachers' lives, a theory which encompasses both their professional and personal identities and how these become intertwined. This is especially so in the case of Queer teachers because of the difficult terrain that they often navigate in schools and in their everyday lives; it is a social terrain laced with certain perceptions of Queer teachers, and queerness generally. For Goodson, the study of teachers' lives is an effort to create a counterculture that can fight the inclination to "return teachers to the shadows," a counterculture built on a research approach that prioritizes respect for teachers and strives to hear "the teacher's perspective" (Goodson, 1992, p. 10, p. 56). The idea of a counterculture that resists the shadows is especially attractive to Queer teachers. The idea of a teacher's perspective - or voice – in a counterculture is central because it conveys both sentiments and feelings, including tone, language, and feelings as well as the right

to speak and be heard politically. As such, counterculture entails both individual voice and communal voice (Goodson, 1992). Goodson (1992) has emphasized the value of paying special attention to teachers' perspectives on the dialectic between "school life" and "whole life" since this dialectic - or what I am calling a negotiation - contains important stories about one's commitments and profession; by “whole life”, he emphasizes the need to consider the entire spectrum of a person's experiences, not just those that occur within the walls of “school.”

Studies have long demonstrated, too, that there can be a great discrepancy between what we learn from published descriptions of historical events and what we learn when we speak directly with the people who were there, in person (Goodson, 1985). Especially when we examine minority history, this divide can become even more apparent — glaring, even. The study of teachers' lives aims to comprehend and give voice to an occupational group that has historically been underrepresented, especially the case with Queer teachers because public history frequently ignores minority viewpoints, here Queer people. There is a pressing need to document the narratives of Queer educators in the education system to inform policymakers, school boards and administrators as to how best to create more inclusive working environments. Such narratives are presently scarce to nonexistent. Supporting Queer teachers is necessary to promote the diversity and inclusion many schools set out to address in their educational missions and to actively combat heteronormative culture as well as homophobia and transphobia.

In chapter two, I review the literature on: defining Queer, a historical outlook on Queer teachers, the complexities of coming out as a teacher, teacher identity research, teacher lives and voices, and what it might mean to write to the Queer self. My own journey of academic self-exploration

was made possible through reading this literature, which provided me with the confidence necessary to share my stories and those of others.

In the third chapter, I describe the theoretical underpinnings of my methodological approach. I then explain the study's design and its data collection and analysis, along with how the data is presented. A combination of self-study and focus group interview methods have helped triangulate experiences of a small number of Queer teachers in Quebec.

Chapters four, five and six focus on my self-study. By carrying out an interview with myself, I have come to realize the adversity and discrimination I have felt as an often-sole Queer teacher in the schools in which I have taught. The self-study is divided into three chapter sections: Negotiating the Self, Supporting Queer Teachers and Belonging. The questions that I pose to myself were inspired by the very questions I presented to the focus group. In response to the questions, I often narrated autobiographical stories from my life so as to help contextualize and texture my responses. Conducting this self-study allowed me to situate my personal experiences in relation to those of my colleagues and share my findings with the focus group participants.

In chapter seven, I focus on the focus groups conducted with the teachers and the contents of our discussions. Organization of the themes follows the same structure as that outlined in chapters four, five and six, notably Negotiating the Self, Supporting Queer Teachers and Belonging. I explain why the findings were organized in this same way.

In the final chapter, chapter eight, I discuss the connections as well as contrasting elements across self-study and focus group research. Common themes are discussed in relation to the literature and recommendations are made, this in light of limitations, implications and future directions of the research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

2.1 Defining Queer

The term Queer has been reclaimed by the 2SLGTBQIA+ community as an umbrella term encompassing a range of identities, which extend beyond lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning. The reclaimed term more accurately reflects the spectrum of possible romantic, sexual and gender identities that may not necessarily fit into traditional categories, therefore including such as: non-binary, genderqueer, asexual, and more. Myself, and many other Queer individuals feel that the frequently used term of LGBTQ+ (and its variants) can be limiting, whereas Queer provides members of the community with an identity that is welcoming, inclusive and fluid.

Grace (2006) uses the term Queer to refer to sexual minorities, otherwise known as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual (LGBT+) people who fall under a broad range of sex, sexual, and gender diversity. The term Queer is broad but discursive, durable yet elusive. Queer refers to a community of sexual minorities who inhabit evolving areas where new and evolving information, understanding, and experience have the ability to modify the parameters of identities and distinctions. Further, the term 'Queer' stands in for a wide range of sex, sexual, and gender outsiders (Fone, 2000) who are battling discrimination and exclusion in culture and society, including in education. My use of the term Queer in this study is thus very intentional as its use signals my commitment to social justice and inclusivity – the challenging of traditional norms and assumptions about gender and sexuality.

2.2 Historical Trajectory

Queers (as a group or individually) have historically been discriminated against by anti-Queer discourses propagated by powerful sociopolitical and cultural organizations that associate homosexuality with hypersexuality and mental illness (Clarke, 2006; Ferfolja, 2007, 2008). Such beliefs are particularly marginalizing to Queer teachers as such teachers then often need to become hypervigilant about demonstrating their "normality" in educational settings (Anderson, 2020). In schools especially, such myths have circulated accompanied by concerns expressed about student safety and quality of education provided (Clarke, 2006).

Throughout history, nonconforming sex, sexual, and gender distinctions have been pushed Queer cultures to the periphery of culture and community (Fone, 2000). These distinctions have positioned Queer people as distinct individuals; more, as second-class citizens whose social and cultural existence and place have been questioned from moral, ethical, legal, and political viewpoints. Thus, the ‘history of Queer’ is a constant reminder that Queerness is a stumbling block to what is accepted and acceptable.

2.3 Coming Out

Queer people have faced social prejudice; the malaise of a hostile environment and overt forms of discrimination can cause Queer individuals psychological distress as well as impinge on their social interactions and careers (Bridgewater, 1997). Coming out, Bridgewater (1997) asserted, is "a key strategy for lowering negative views and actions of prejudice against sexual identity minority while enhancing the wellbeing of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals" (p. 65). Evans and Broido (1999) has also pointed to the therapeutic benefits of coming out, including a greater sense of

belonging to their local communities. Sears and Williams (1997) additionally argue that "the single most effective way to change homophobic attitudes is through one-to-one personal contacts … Thus we need more research to suggest the best ways to encourage more [Queer people] to come out to their relatives, friends, and coworkers" (p.7).

Coming out stories are narratives told by Queer people about their experiences telling others about their sexual orientation or gender identity. These narratives frequently emphasise the difficulties and risks associated with coming out, as well as the emotional impact of this process on both the individual and their social networks. According to Boutilier (1994), coming out narratives can serve as a form of resistance to heteronormativity or those dominant societal norms that assume and privilege heterosexuality. By sharing our stories, Queer individuals gain an opportunity to challenge the norms and assert their right accepted for who they are; as such, the experience can be quite empowering. Boutilier (1994) offers the following example of how a coming out story might occur for a Queer teacher:

> I have found that the process of bringing lesbian and gay literature into the classroom, like coming out, leaves no room for turning back. The experience has reaffirmed my personal commitment to challenging myself to face the worst of my fears. (p. 141)

That said, Boutilier says further that the structure and content of coming out stories will vary depending on the individual's cultural background, race, age, gender, and the specific context of their disclosure. While there may be a clear necessity for Queer people to come out in educational settings (Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010), this imperative can place people in invidious positions, as

Rasmussen (2004) asserts. A felt pressure to come out may force Queer teachers to confront a wide range of social and cultural expectations and norms, which can result in significant emotional, psychological, and physical stress. Individuals who are members of multiple marginalized groups, such as racial minorities, may face additional intersectional challenges in navigating this process. Crenshaw (1989) originally coined the term "intersectionality" to describe the intricate, diverse character of social identities and disparities. She argued that conventional methods being used in feminist theory and anti-racist politics fell short of accurately capturing the realities of Black women, who experienced particular types of oppression at the “intersection” of their race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Since its creation, academic and activist communities have embraced the concept of intersectionality, which enables articulation of the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other social categories (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013).

Rasmussen (2004) points to the issue that while coming out can be empowering and liberating for some people, it can also put others in a disadvantageous position, demonstrating the two-edged sword that is "coming out", that is, becoming more visible—and thus, vulnerable. Conversely, in situations or places where coming out discourses are privileged, the act of *not* coming out may be read as an abdication of responsibility: a failure to act of somebody who is disempowered or somehow ashamed of their inherent Queerness (Rasmussen, 2004).

The image conjured up by Sears and Williams (1997) of closeted teachers being cowards points to another side of coming out - the expectation that teachers are expected to come out, and those that “fail” to do so are seen as inadequate Queers who “fail” to represent their own. Teachers who "fail"

in their duty to come out may be marked as lacking, while those who do come out may be celebrated as role models promoting tolerance and inclusivity, empowering themselves and others. Snider (1996) is more cautious, pointing to the need to challenge dominant discourses of celebration and the concomitant enforcement of coming out discourses, discourses which can have the effect of silencing and shaming people for whom coming out is not a realistic or preferred option. The "problem" is not located in an individual's desire to identify as Queer but rather in the sense that dominant discourses relating to Queer politics tend to offer no moral alternative but to come out.

2.4 Queer Life Narratives & Queering Narrative Spaces

Life narrative research can serve as a contextualized and situated site of learning where identity is understood as something dynamic, and where spaces for Queer talk do not become a further silencing of voice (Hooks, 1988; Rosaldo, 1993). Life narratives can become powerful communicative spaces by weaving through knowledge, history, tradition, and politics (Giroux, 1992). A pedagogy of "resist-stance" demands the creation of a discourse of agency; in the present study, I consider the language of story as a key part of developing this discourse (Giroux, 1993).

Queer life narratives are accounts that offer insight into the identities and lived experiences of queer people, contributing to a Queer narrative space—a theory devised by Grace (2001). Such stories and spaces can be effective tools for dismantling prevalent myths in education and fostering greater inclusivity and diversity in the classroom. The use of Queer life narratives in the classroom can help individuals, both students and teachers, develop a deeper understanding of Queer topics while providing an outlet for Queer teachers to express their own experiences and viewpoints.

These stories can also assist students in overcoming their own personal heteronormative prejudices and assumptions while fostering more empathy and understanding for others. Both the teaching methods of teachers and the learning experiences of their pupils are influenced by their identities and experiences as learners. Creating Queer narrative spaces can help highlight the significance of Queer inclusive curricula and teacher training programmes in promoting positive learning environments for Queer students.

The following description is grounded in Grace's research. Queer narrative spaces can amplify the voices and experiences of Queer teachers, using autobiographical life narratives—as well as, as through the focus group data gathered in the present study, foregrounding the words and perspectives of Queer teachers. Queer narrative spaces highlight Queer teachers' personal experiences while also (like Goodson's work) situating these narratives within larger political and pedagogical contexts. By engaging with the lived experiences of Queer teachers, we can identify the complex ways in which heteronormative expectations shape the experiences of Queer teachers in educational contexts, as well as the strategies that Queer teachers employ to counter-navigate these expectations (Grace, 2001).

While Grace (2010) emphasizes the importance of this type of narrative research in extending the parameters of Queer knowledge, Grace also cautions that this type of research can pose significant risks, not only social and cultural risks but also personal ones associated with exposing one's Queer self in school and other public spaces. Hooks' (1988) concept of vocal dis-enfranchisement likewise highlights the potential threat that those who already have a voice may pose to marginalized groups. Thus, Queer individuals must carefully consider the potential dangers of

exposing their life narratives and knowledge. Engaging in this type of narrative research can also be difficult for the Queer educator as it involves self-scrutiny, revisiting potentially painful memories, and confronting the forces that have shaped one's identity. As such, Grace (2001) underscores the importance of weighing the personal risks of engaging in this research and emphasizes the need for a safe net to cushion any emotional and psychological impacts. Within the context of my own research, Grace's (2001) and Grace et al. (2019) research is especially useful in speaking to the challenges of navigating personal, political, and pedagogical spaces.

Personal spaces implicate the distinct experiences, identities, and perspectives that shape people's lives. Personal spaces can be complex and multifaceted for Queer teachers, influenced by factors such as sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, class and the intersection of these identities (Grace et al., 2019). Based on Grace et al.'s work, teachers can foster a more authentic and meaningful connection with their students by sharing their personal stories in the classroom, promoting greater understanding and empathy. Sharing personal stories can assist Queer teachers, like myself, in reclaiming identity and challenging the dominant heteronormative culture in education, which frequently silences, bullies and erases Queer voices.

Political spaces may be defined as the broader social, cultural, and political contexts that shape people's lives. Political spaces for Queer teachers can be marked by discrimination, marginalization, and oppression, as well as resistance and activism (Grace & Hill, 2014). Queer teachers can challenge heteronormative assumptions in order to promote greater social justice and equity in education by sharing their stories and perspectives with their colleagues, students and

superiors. Furthermore, using Queer life narratives in education can increase students' awareness and understanding of Queer issues, promoting a more inclusive and diverse learning environment. The teaching practices and strategies used by teachers to facilitate student learning are referred to as **pedagogical spaces**. Queer teachers' personal experiences and perspectives, as well as their political beliefs and values, can shape pedagogical spaces (Grace et al., 2019). Queer teachers can create a more engaging and meaningful learning experience for students by incorporating Queer life narratives into their teaching practices. Furthermore, using Queer life narratives in education can promote critical thinking and reflection by encouraging students to question dominant narratives and assumptions.

Engaging in Queer life narrative research provides a medium for Queer teachers to explore their history, culture, and situated experiences, which can be a crucial step in building a pedagogy of resistance against Queer negation (Ayers, 1989). Life narratives can also be used as part of a process of rehabilitating teachers' voices (Rosaldo, 1993). Queer teachers often have memories of isolation, rejection, hurt, silence, and invisibility that hindered their identification, socialization, and coming of age as Queer individuals (Browning, 2012). These experiences of exclusion can be shared through narratives of difference that challenge heteronormative constructions of normality and morality, and where Grace's research provides a focused theory for sharing stories; later in the chapter, I return to Grace's writing the Queer self in the context of self-study research.

Using autobiographical Queer life narratives in education can be a powerful tool for connecting within and across personal, political, and pedagogical spaces. Such uses can challenge heteronormative assumptions, promote greater inclusivity and diversity, and foster social justice

and equity by centering on Queer voices and perspectives in education. However, it is critical to recognize the risks and challenges of sharing personal stories in and out of the classroom, such as vulnerability, marginalization, and tokenization (Connell, 2012), as to engage in such storytelling and sharing involves researching teacher identity: one's own, others'.

2.5 Researching Teacher Identity

Teacher identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that has garnered significant attention in the field of education. It encompasses an individual's sense of self as a teacher, as well as their beliefs, values, and behaviours as a professional. Research on teacher identity has revealed that it plays a crucial role in teachers' decisions, actions, and overall wellbeing (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004).

One major area of research on teacher identity has focused on how it is formed as well as how it changes over time. This research has shown that teacher identity is not a fixed, stable entity but rather is constantly evolving, influenced by a variety of factors. These factors include personal experiences, cultural and societal values, and interactions with colleagues and students. For example, one study found that teachers' identities were shaped by their personal backgrounds, teaching experiences, and the cultural and historical contexts in which they worked (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Another area of research on teacher identity has explored the relationship between teacher identity and teacher effectiveness. This research has consistently found that teachers who possess a strong sense of identity and are able to clearly articulate their beliefs and values as educators are more

effective in the classroom (Grossman, Wilson and Shulman, 1989). Additionally, research has shown that teachers who are able to integrate their personal and professional identities tend to be more satisfied and motivated in their work (Beijaard et al., 2004).

There has also been research on the role of teacher identity in teacher retention. Studies such as those conducted by Ingersoll (2003) have found that teachers who feel a strong sense of identity and commitment to the profession are more likely to remain in the field. In contrast, teachers who experience incongruence between their personal and professional identities or who do not feel a strong sense of belonging in their schools or communities may be more likely to leave the profession (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Teachers' personal histories can overtly and subtly influence their professional behaviors in the classroom. The settings, dispositions (attitudes, values, and beliefs), and connections that shape the teacher as a person form an emergent history that shapes the teacher as a professional. According to this viewpoint, a teacher's practice is shaped at the crossroads of the personal and the professional (Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006).

The difficult terrain that Queer teachers navigate in managing their various identities and the potential for coming out within and around school settings has been emphasized by Evans and Broido (1999). They point to the *interactive nature of identity negotiation*, arguing that the construction of divisions between public and private spheres must be constantly renegotiated by Queer teachers.

In summary, scholars increasingly recognize the importance of teacher identity in the teaching profession (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Individuals who identify with their role tend to have an emotional attachment to it, which shapes their worldview (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). The research on teacher identity highlights its importance in shaping teachers' decisions, actions, and overall wellbeing. It also points to the need for teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities to support the development of a strong and positive teacher identity for both Queer and non-Queer teachers alike.

2.6 Heteroprofessionalism

The idea of professionalism in education favours people who are white, middle-class, heterosexual, and who adhere to traditional gender norms while discriminating against people who are sexually and/or genderly diverse and/or who identify as racialized (Mizzi, 2013, 2016). This phenomenon, known as heteroprofessionalism, exemplifies how normative gender is regarded as a vital aspect of professional conduct and how heterosexuality is seen as necessary inside professional contexts (Mizzi, 2013, 2016). Regrettably, a lot of Queer teachers feel pressured to follow heteronormative norms in order to fit in at work and safeguard themselves from any repercussions (Ferfolja, 2009).

According to Khayatt (1997), this conformity may include hiding personal information from co-workers, such as their romantic partners, adhering to explicitly or implicitly stated gendered dress codes, and ignoring or internalising homophobia and transphobia in order to preserve the status quo (Mizzi, 2013, 2016). Such demands can damage and stifle Queer educators, and they may also have profound, unstated effects on their students.

Queer teachers can feel profound friction between their Queer identity and their identity as teachers, identities which are seen as being incompatible and at odds with one another (Rich, 1980). In the environment of a school, acknowledging one's sexuality might be seen as unprofessional, and any identification that deviates from heterosexual marriage may be considered as inappropriate (Henderson, 2019). Queer teachers must continuously decide whether to uphold traditional gender roles or challenge them, risking exposure to homophobia and transphobia-related violence (Henderson, 2019).

Queer teachers have created certain coping techniques to deal with the pressures of heteronormativity, such as separating their personal from professional lives while pretending to be heterosexual, balancing their way around the rigid constraints of heteronormativity, or leaving the field altogether (Ferfolja, 2009). In a setting where invisible sexual diversity is usually recognised but not gender diversity, teachers who demonstrate "mainstream" homonormativity can pass for straight and teach (Harris & Jones, 2016).

In sum, heteronormativity in the teaching field places Queer instructors in a challenging situation by requiring them to balance their identities as Queer people and as teachers. This pressure can have negative personal, psychological, and emotional effects that are far different from what their heterosexual and cisgender coworkers go through. While the coping strategies of Queer teachers could offer momentary solace, they do not deal with the fundamental problems of heteronormativity in the teaching profession. This leads to the crux of this thesis: negotiation of personal and professional identities.

2.7 Negotiating Teacher Identity

Identity negotiation is a complex process that involves individuals' subjective experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts (Charmaz, 2006). This process can be challenging for teachers, who may need to navigate multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities and roles in their personal and professional lives (Beijaard et al., 2004). In their book *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces*, Alsup (2016) sheds further light on how teachers negotiate their identities and professional roles in a variety of contexts, highlighting the complexities and contradictions of this process.

The formation of a professional identity is crucial for teachers in their journeys towards becoming successful teachers. Alsup (2016) delves into the complex process of negotiating professionalism and identity, underscoring the importance of discourse in shaping and navigating the intricacies of personal and professional subjectivities. Alsup acknowledges the struggles teachers face when attempting to reconcile their personal identities with the professional expectations placed upon them. This tension can be observed when examining the experiences of preservice teachers like Emily, who struggled to align her personal beliefs and experiences with the culturally dominant model of "the good teacher." In her narrative, Emily expressed feelings of inadequacy and failure, which she attributed to her inability to conform to traditional expectations (Alsup, 2016).

Alsup (2016) argues that teachers often struggle greatly with the tensions between their personal and professional identities, so much so that some individuals quitting the profession altogether. To address this challenge, Alsup (p. 44) builds upon the following questions originally proposed by Britzman (1991):

1. What kinds of identities might be made available to teachers?
2. What kinds of knowledge, imagination, and ways of being would be desirable?
3. What kinds of discourse can be facilitated during preservice teacher education to help new teachers most effectively use their knowledge and develop a professional identity?

These same questions can also very usefully inform Queer teachers' navigating of territories or borders. Central to Alsup's (2016) work is the concept of "borderland discourse," a space where teachers can negotiate multiple subjectivities and reconcile tensions between their personal and professional identities. This discourse would allow them to honor their personal beliefs and passions while also embodying a professional identity that acknowledges and transcends cultural stereotypes. Alsup provides examples of borderland discourse in action, such as the narrative of Melissa, a preservice teacher who struggled with the conflicting expectations of her personal and professional lives. Through engaging in borderland discourse, Melissa was able to navigate her multiple subjectivities and develop a more coherent and authentic professional identity.

Alsup (2016) also emphasizes the significance of materiality and corporeality in shaping teacher identity. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, she argues that identity is performative, with linguistic expressions of self intricately connected to material and corporeal existence. Alsup's work offers valuable insights for teacher educators in designing and implementing programs that facilitate the development of professional identity. By fostering a borderland discourse in preservice teacher education, teacher educators can help students navigate the complexities of their

personal and professional identities and better prepare them for the challenges they will face in their careers—likewise for future Queer teachers.

Alsup's (2016) work on negotiating professionalism and identity offers a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the challenges faced by Queer preservice teachers in developing their professional identities. By engaging in borderland discourse and addressing the tensions between personal and professional subjectivities, Queer preservice teachers can develop a more integrated and holistic understanding of their professional selves. Incorporating these concepts into teacher education programs can ultimately contribute to the development of more effective and resilient educators, prepared to navigate the complexities of identity. The challenges with identity negotiation (generally, and as extrapolated to Queer educators) experienced in pre-service education cannot but carry forward into the lives of practicing Queer teachers.

2.8 Teachers' Lives

In an effort to comprehend the complexity of teachers' lives and careers, academics have used a variety of methodological techniques. Goodson, one of these researchers, made a substantial contribution to the area with his in-depth study of teachers' lives. With a focus on his works *Teachers' Lives and Careers* (1985), *The life and work of teachers* (1997) and *Studying Teachers' Lives* (2013) this section seeks to provide a more in-depth study of Goodson's work and its implications for Queer teachers' lives.

Goodson's approach emphasises the value of investigating teachers' personal and professional experiences, beliefs, and identities in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their lives

and careers (Goodson, 2013). This approach is consistent with autobiographical and narrative methodologies, which recognise the importance of personal stories and experiences in social science research (Sikes, 2010). Goodson (2013) contends that personal narratives of teachers are critical to understanding their professional identities, career paths, and the larger social context in which they work. Goodson's research illuminates the complexities and nuances of teachers' lives by focusing on their individual experiences, like Mary's, amongst many other student teachers (Ball and Goodson, 1985).

Ball and Goodson (1985) examined Mary - a "disillusioned" (p.96) student teacher who self-describes herself as not fitting in the mold of what it means to be a teacher. A life history approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the interactions between individual agency and structural constraints in shaping teachers' lives and careers. These "disillusioned" student teachers had initially understood the teaching profession through their own childhood experiences, which conflicted with their new experiences as student teachers. Ball and Goodson's approach provides a nuanced understanding of teachers' lives, uncovering insights by focusing on the specific experiences and perspectives of a single disillusioned teacher. The approach also allows for investigating the dynamic interplay of personal, professional, and social factors in shaping teachers' lives, providing valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners—as well as for myself, given my research focus.

According to Butt et al. (1992), teachers' lives can be understood on four levels: life as lived, life as experienced, life as told, and life history. It is critical to consider these various dimensions in order to better understand the complexities of teachers' lives. Furthermore, it is critical to recognise

that teachers' lives intersect at multiple levels, including personal, contextual, and textual (Butt et al., 1992). According to Denzin (1989), people live their lives on both the surface and deep levels, with the deep level representing the inner self that is rarely revealed to others.

Given these considerations, the process of rendering a teacher's life as text is fraught with difficulties. As Denzin (1989) explains, language and signification processes inherently obscure a person's true inner life, potentially leading to meaning distortions. As a result, researchers must strike a balance between life as lived and experienced, and life as reported and rendered in text (Butt et al., 1992).

In addition to methodological concerns, the ethical issues surrounding the relationship between the life story "giver" and the research "taker" must also be considered (Bertaux, 1981). This power dynamic is particularly evident in Casey's (1995) work, in which she emphasizes the importance of respecting the authenticity and integrity of the narrator's discourse. To address this power imbalance, researchers must be transparent about their positions and develop research processes that reflect their values. However, as Butt et al. (1992) points out, the relationship between teacher-life studies and the academy raises additional ethical and methodological concerns. Researchers must be aware of the possibility of research methods being co-opted by academic interests. Scholars can work towards a more nuanced and ethical understanding of teachers' lives by acknowledging these complexities.

Goodson (1992) emphasises the importance of understanding teachers' lives from their own perspectives in his seminal work, *Studying Teachers' Lives*. He contends that "accounts from

below," or accounts from teachers, provide valuable insights that are frequently overlooked or dismissed by the academy and those in positions of power (Goodson, 1995, p.14). Collaboration between teacher and researcher is essential in life history research. According to Goodson, a viable "trading point" can be established between the teacher and the researcher because each party brings unique perspectives and insights to the table. This collaborative process allows both parties to investigate not only the stories of teachers' lives, but also the larger contexts in which they exist. These insights have informed the self-study and focus group discussions in the present study.

Goodson (1992) emphasises the significance of studying teachers' lives in order to comprehend issues affecting teaching; the one he focuses in on (as a text produced in the 1990s) is teaching as a gendered profession. However, this kind of thinking is clearly pertinent to the present study with Queer teachers. Researchers can learn about the hidden aspects of women's (and here, in the present study, Queer teachers') lives in the classroom and the impact of their identities on their professional experiences.

Studying the lives of teachers can aid in the development of teacher-centered, professional knowledge, carrying the potential to rethink educational research paradigms and foster stronger links between research and teacher experiences/perspectives (Goodson, 1992). Goodson's emphasis on individual narratives and experiences, combined with his auto/biographical and narrative approach, allows for a more thorough and textured examination of teachers' lives. By collaborating with teachers and addressing ethical, procedural, and methodological issues, researchers might acquire important insights into the private and professional lives of educators.

2.9 Teacher Self-Study and Queering Self-Study

Despite the popularity of reflection and reflective practises among teachers in the early 1980s, it took almost another decade for teacher researchers to recognise the importance of doing what they were encouraging teachers to do - studying their own practise (Korthagen and Wubbles, 1995). Self-study work has been gradually shared, critiqued, and extended over the last two decades (Loughran, 2004). Self-study is an essential component of educational professional development. It enables teachers to systematically examine and analyse their teaching practises, fostering continuous improvement and contributing to the generation of new knowledge (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). Loughran & Northfield (1998) present a useful framework in (Hamilton, 1998) *Reconceptualizing Teaching Practice: Developing Competence Through Self-Study*, highlighting the critical aspects of self-study and the importance of collaboration in the process. Individuals can gain insight into their professional development and identify areas for growth through self-study by focusing on their own experiences, beliefs, and actions (Ritter & Quiones, 2020). Self-study provides both a theoretical orientation on the present study as well as holding methodological implications for research design and the representation of findings. Here I focus on self-study as an extension of the study of teachers' lives, by teachers themselves, in particular by Queer educators on being a Queer teacher.

Self-study research, according to Ritter and Quinones (2020), encompasses a variety of research orientations that can be broadly classified into four major areas: narrative enquiry, autoethnography, self-reflective practice, and action research. All approaches share a common focus on the researcher's personal experiences, thoughts, and emotions as a means of understanding their professional practice (Ritter & Quinones, 2020). Self-reflective practice involves the

researcher critically reflecting on their actions and experiences, often as a means of identifying areas for growth and improvement (Ritter & Quinones, 2020). Self-study, according to Loughran and Northfield (1998), is an intensely personal endeavour that requires individual practitioners to engage in deep reflection and analysis of their teaching experiences. The personal nature of self-study is critical because it allows teachers to develop a context-specific understanding of their practise, making their learning more meaningful and relevant to their specific circumstances (Loughran & Northfield, 1998).

The emphasis on understanding and improving one's practise is an important aspect of self-study, as Loughran and Northfield (1998) develop. Thus, for example, to properly participate in the process, teachers must have a high level of self-confidence because self-study is a deeply personal experience that frequently includes facing difficulties and uncertainty. Teachers must be comfortable with the vulnerability that comes with self-study, and they must be prepared to deal with any personal conflicts or dissonance that may arise as they examine their practice, they further maintain. While self-study is based on reflection, they wish to distinguish reflection from self-study, which is an action-oriented, systematic approach to examining one's practice, often involving collaboration with others, whereas reflection is a personal, internal process of thinking (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). Whereas reflection precedes self-study by allowing teachers to identify areas of their practise that require further investigation and improvement, teachers who engage in self-study can reach a deeper understanding of their professional selves (Loughran & Northfield, 1998) and along with that, the kind of personal development and increased self-awareness that can contribute to innovative teaching techniques (Ritter & Quiones, 2020).

One potential addition to the Ritter and Quinones (2020) framework is the exploration of specific issues related to identity development, such as understanding the experiences of Queer teachers. A Queer teacher, for example, might conduct self-study research to investigate the impact of their sexual orientation on their professional practise and identity development. This could entail taking stock of their educational experiences, assessing their interactions with coworkers and pupils, and taking into account how societal expectations and biases have influenced their professional choices. Loughran and Northfield (1998) assert that self-study can help educators better comprehend the intricate interplay of personal and professional identities while also offering chances for development and change. Through self-study, queer teachers can learn important lessons about their own lives and contribute to a greater understanding of the difficulties this community faces in the field of education.

Self-study can prove to be a highly useful approach for comprehending the experiences of Queer teachers since it offers insights on how educators navigate their identities in institutional settings. Kitchen and Bellini (2012), for instance, used self-study to analyse the experiences of Queer educators in the United States to think about the difficulties they themselves both encounter while attempting to balance their professional and personal identities. They reflected on how challenging it is for Queer teachers (like themselves) to offer their students a safe and inclusive learning environment because the students themselves frequently encountered prejudice and marginalisation in the classroom. Despite these obstacles, Queer educators frequently manage to come up with creative answers to these problems, drawing on their own identities and experiences to create more welcome environments.

Kitchen (2014) further explores the use of self-study to examine their personal and professional development as a gay person and a Queer teacher educator in “Coming out in changing times: A queer teacher educator's self-study.” Their self-study begins with a reflection on their childhood and coming to terms with their sexual identity. Their self-study continues through their career as an educator. Kitchen discusses the difficulties they encountered, such as being closeted in a Catholic school, the challenge of being open with colleagues while remaining discreet with students, and finally becoming an out teacher educator at the University of Toronto. Kitchen reveals the complexities and nuances of their journey and emphasises the importance of being a role model for both Queer and straight students. Kitchen also delves into their professional experiences, sharing incidents that inspired them to become more involved in Queer advocacy and research. One of these was an icebreaker activity at a conference where they felt awkward discussing their personal lives. This experience inspired Kitchen to be more open and honest about their identity in the future, as well as to help others understand the difficulties that Queer people face in such situations.

Kitchen's self-study also reflects on their previous collaboration with Christine, a former teacher candidate, and their collaborative efforts to create and deliver workshops that increase teacher candidates' exposure to queer issues. This collaboration also resulted in the creation of a project on Gay Straight Alliances in Ontario schools as well as a number of publications. Kitchen’s life story—personally and professionally—exemplifies the transformative potential of self-study for educators. As a theoretical (as well as methodological) framework, self-study can encourage Queer educators to critically evaluate their experiences, practises, and beliefs, generating both professional and personal growth while also advancing the field of education.

There is a pressing political and pedagogical need for researchers to link autobiographical (self-study) research to advocate for Queer people through their educative and cultural work, thus assisting teachers to be cultural workers who recognize, respect, and accommodate Queer differences and positionalities (Grace, 2009). This section delves into the use of self-study in investigating queer identities in education, with a particular emphasis on the intersections of personal and professional experiences of Queer teachers. It also recognises the growing use of autobiographical approaches to study the complexities of being gay/Queer in society, for instance, in autoethnography (Adams & Jones, 2011).

Due to the increased visibility and acceptance of Queer identities, there is a growing interest in understanding the experiences and challenges that Queer teachers face (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). Self-study, in the Queer teacher context, is useful in understanding how Queer identities influence Queer teachers' pedagogical practises, classroom interactions, and student relationships (Rasmussen, 2004). Queer teachers can better comprehend the effects of their identities on their professional lives through systematic self-reflection and discovering methods for creating inclusive and affirming learning environments (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). This is further demonstrated in Adams and Jones' (2011) work, who uses autobiographical techniques to explore the intricate interaction of personal and professional experiences in the context of Queer identity construction. Adams and Jones give a nuanced perspective of the opportunities and challenges experienced by Queer teachers as they negotiate the complexities of their identities and teaching practises by relying on his own experiences as a homosexual man and educator.

Self-study can also focus on how heteronormative classroom assumptions can be contested and disrupted by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender teachers (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). Queer educators can also seek out ways to promote inclusive, supportive, and equitable learning environments for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, by taking a close look at their own pedagogical practises (Rasmussen, 2004), for instance, by incorporating Queer topics into their curricula or using pedagogical strategies that go against standard gender norms and expectations (Adams & Jones, 2011).

In summary, teachers can effectively engage in self-study to enhance their professional growth by emphasising the personal nature of self-study, focusing on understanding and improving practise, addressing reliability and validity, and fostering collaboration (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). As teachers develop their self-confidence and embrace the reflective process, they can further their understanding of their practice, ultimately contributing to the generation of new knowledge in the field of education. As Loughran and Northfield (1998) have demonstrated, self-study can provide a valuable framework for the development of competence and the advancement of teaching practice while the work of researchers like Kitchen show how self-study can be theorized using a Queer lens, through the perspectives of Queer educators. By engaging in self-study (or, as with Adams, autoethnography), Queer educators can help identify fruitful areas for future research.

2.10 Writing to the Queer Self

I have always struggled with internalised homophobia as a Queer person. I was told as a child that being gay was wrong, even disgusting. I internalised those messages for years and despised myself for being gay. I still feel the effects of internalised homophobia to this day, even after coming out

and finding a supportive community. It manifests itself in the way I occasionally feel inadequate, as if there is something fundamentally wrong with me. It finds itself within me in moments when I am hesitant to hold my partner's hand in public or when I am concerned about what others will think of me if they discover I am Queer.

Grace discusses the importance of recognising and addressing Queer people's needs and concerns in educational settings through sharing about their personal and professional experiences of living as a Queer person in Canada. Grace, as a teacher educator, strives to incorporate their Queer experiences into their pedagogical practises in order to promote inclusive and transformative education. Sharing personal narratives and engaging in dialogue with other educators and educational interest groups to challenge anti-Queer stances and actions are part of this, just as in the present thesis, my own story is brought into dialogue with stories of other Queer educators by combining self-study with focus groups. Queer people can contribute to the development of a more inclusive and democratic society by sharing personal stories and challenging societal norms. In this way, writing the Queer Self becomes a political and pedagogical endeavour that aims to transform not only education, but also the larger culture and society. Such work can act as a catalyst for change, empowering people to confront oppressive structures and work towards a more equitable education system.

One of the most important aspects of writing to the Queer self is recognising that a teacher's practise is shaped at the intersection of the personal and the professional (Grace, Wells & Thomas 2019), work supported theoretically by Goodson as well as Alsup. Teachers' personal histories, attitudes, values, beliefs, and relationships all contribute to the formation of an emerging history

that influences their professional practise. Writing to one's Queer self can assist teachers in exploring, as well as comprehending, how their own experiences and identities intersect with their work in the classroom.

As a Queer teacher, I have chosen to write to my Queer self to figure out how I might become a better teacher. Writing to the Queer Self, according to Grace (2006), is an educative act that teaches the self about the challenges and possibilities associated with queer positionalities, representations, access, and accommodation. This process allows teacher educators to confront their own internalised and overt homophobia and work towards becoming self-accepting, inclusive educators who have overcome histories of discrimination and marginalisation. My intentions for this experience are thus not egocentric (Coombes, Cook & Danaher, 2013). I see writing the Queer self as a journey for exploring how my own developing knowledge, understanding, and experiences can enable me to be a self-accepting, inclusive educator who has overcome my own history of internalized homophobia.

2.11 Conclusion

Queer teachers' experiences are frequently marked by a distinct set of challenges and triumphs stemming from their identity and the intersectionality of other marginalised identities they may hold. Although there have been tremendous improvements in queer rights and acceptance, many Queer teachers still experience marginalisation, prejudice, and small-scale abuse in their classrooms and schools. Discrimination can take many different forms, such as being passed over for leadership roles and experiencing harassment or bullying from peers or students.

Despite these challenges, many Queer educators like their work and are able to give their kids welcoming spaces. By serving as prominent role models and supporters, they may aid in fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion for all students, particularly those who are having a hard time figuring out their own gender or sexual orientation. Additionally, the distinct viewpoints and life experiences of queer instructors can enhance all students' educational experiences and support the challenging of conventional norms and expectations. The experiences of Queer teachers serve as a powerful reminder of the continual need for advocacy and education on queer issues, as well as the value of providing all instructors with welcoming environments. In this chapter, I further considered how especially self-study, particularly in the form of writing to the Queer self, can provide a platform for Queer teachers - giving them a voice in the world of academia and allowing their experiences to be shared. Teachers can explore the complexities of their identities, experiences, and the interconnections of their personal, political, and pedagogical perspectives by writing to their Queer selves. This self-study approach can lead to a deeper knowledge of the difficulties experienced by the Queer community as well as the chances for change and progress within educational contexts by concentrating on the distinctive experiences of Queer individuals.

Chapter 3 - Methodology & Methods

3.1 Introduction

In the current study, in order to fully understand the subtleties and intricacies of these Queer teacher identity negotiations, I conducted a two-part qualitative research project with the goal of examining the struggles and experiences faced by Queer teachers. The first part was a self-study where I, the researcher, critically examined my own journey as a Queer person and teacher. This inquiry was largely inspired by Grace's idea of writing to the Queer self. The second component consisted of two focus group sessions in which the researcher and three other Queer teachers spoke openly about their shared experiences and particular difficulties of being Queer teachers teaching in schools.

Qualitative Research

The goal of qualitative research is to comprehend human experiences, behaviours, and social events from the participants' points of view (Creswell, 2014). This methodology is distinguished by its focus on the investigation of people's subjective meanings, perceptions, and experiences in their natural environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). By examining the rich nuances of daily life, qualitative research seeks to comprehend the intricacies of human experiences as contrasted to quantitative research, which is concerned with the measurement and interpretation of numerical data (Patton, 2015). Many theoretical stances, including interpretivism, constructivism, and critical theory, serve as the foundation for qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Interpretivism argues that the subjective experience is necessary for a thorough understanding of social processes and highlights the significance of knowing the world as it is experienced by the participants (Schwandt, 2000). According to constructivism, knowledge is socially built, and in order to

understand participants' experiences, researchers must examine the various realities they create for themselves. While promoting social reform and emancipation, critical theory, on the other hand, aims to expose the power relationships and social injustices that influence human experiences (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). My own research was primarily interpretive however drew on all three orientations.

To gain comprehensive data about the phenomena under study, qualitative researchers use a number of data collection techniques, including interviews, observations, focus groups, and document analysis (Creswell, 2013). The research question, the study's context, and the epistemological and theoretical viewpoints that are driving the investigation all influence the choice of data gathering methodology (Patton, 2015).

In the case of the current study, use of qualitative research, and specifically the combination of self-study with focus groups, allowed for a deeper examination of the process of negotiating Queer identity within the teaching profession, thereby generating a more compassionate and comprehensive understanding of the difficulties Queer educators regularly face, the ways in which they negotiate those difficulties and the resources they draw on.

Self-Study as Methodological Framework

Self-study was reviewed in depth in the previous chapter. Here I focus on its methodological implications for research design. Self-study is a type of autoethnographic research that focuses on the researcher's individual experiences and subjectivities (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The framework for self-study is based on the conviction that the researcher's experiences, identities,

and beliefs are crucial to the research process and that these experiences ought to be critically assessed and reflected upon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach is especially well suited for examining teacher identity, here Queer teachers' experiences navigating their identities in the educational setting.

Writing through self-study involves telling and theorizing through autobiographical inquiry. It allows me, and perhaps those who will read this thesis, to confront the complexities of striving to make sense of a Queer life autobiographically lived in the educational milieu (Pinar, 1994, 2012). Autobiographically informed, my study incorporated vignettes to provide unique insights into my negotiating of a Queer teacher self. Vignettes are succinct, evocative descriptions of circumstances or occurrences used as research tools to highlight a certain theme, phenomenon, or problem (Spalding & Phillips, 2007). They enable researchers to investigate difficult concepts or feelings in a clear and understandable way and are frequently presented as short stories or anecdotes. Because they give insight into teachers' real-world experiences and give a way to analyse the nuances of their professional and personal identities, vignettes can be very helpful in study on teacher identity (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). Writing vignettes can help the researcher arrive at a better grasp of who they are as people and as teachers (Loughran, 2014). More self-awareness can result from this process of reflection and introspection, which will ultimately promote both personal and professional development (Mitchell & Weber, 1999).

By combining self-study with other research methodologies like focus groups, various viewpoints on the same phenomenon are presented, thus increasing the validity and reliability of self-study

research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), thus offering a more complex and nuanced view of teacher identity.

Rationale for use of Focus Groups in Qualitative Research

As Grace explains (see chapter 2), queering the writing of the teacher self involves others. Given my research questions and in keeping with my intention to seek out avenues for advocacy and change, it only made sense that those others needed to be other Queer educators. I elected to engage these educators in focus group discussions because this methodological approach enables researchers to gather contextualised data through interactive dialogues, revealing insights that may not be available in interviews with individuals (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Focus groups are a sort of group interview where a select few people are brought together to discuss a certain topic under the guidance of a moderator (Morgan, 1996). Focus group data may also offer a more accurate reflection of individual views as there is no compulsion to tell a 'story' to please the interviewer. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest that focus groups can yield more accurate information about participants' thoughts than other research methods.

Another advantage of focus groups is that they can record the social aspects of human experiences as well as the processes by which meanings are developed and negotiated in a group (Bloor, et al., 2001). For instance, Husbands' et al. (2019) study aimed to explore race, masculinity, and heterosexuality in relation to HIV vulnerability and resilience. The focus group sessions, which lasted between 60 and 150 minutes, included discussions on how to navigate masculine identity. By observing group interactions and the discursive techniques employed by participants, researchers can identify underlying assumptions, shared viewpoints, and emerging themes that

shape general knowledge of a specific phenomenon (Kitzinger, 1995). Also, focus groups provide participants the ability to dispute, elucidate, or expand on one another's viewpoints, fostering a thorough and in-depth research of the subject (Morgan, 1996). Such research can therefore develop a deeper understanding of its central focus, exploring what participants think and why they think it (Kitzinger, 1994). As such, the goal is not necessarily to produce data that can be generalized to larger populations but to explore the range of attitudes, values and beliefs commonly held within the populace (those participants in the focus group), the strength of feeling and the reasons for those beliefs. While the focus group setting can challenge and probe the views and positions espoused by individual members, it does so in a non-threatening, relatively naturalized and safe social context; a safe social context was especially important to the present study.

Focus groups seek to capitalize on what Schutz and Luckman (1973) early on termed 'intersubjectivity'— a collective description of everyday reality and its interpretation. Critics of the focus group have argued that there is a tendency for the discussion to degenerate into a negative critique (Powney & Watts, 2018) or that participants are subject to a group dynamic that subtly imposes consensus (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Krueger and Casey (2014) have offered practical solutions to respond to these critiques. A knowledgeable moderator can assist in preserving the integrity of the discussion by directing the topic, posing open-ended questions, and encouraging different points of view. Krueger and Casey also speak to the fact that by recruiting participants from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and points of view, researchers can lessen the chance of imposed consensus or groupthink. Triangulation can also help validate findings and mitigate the limitations of any single method. All three of these were used in the present study: the presence of the researcher as participant and moderator, Queer teachers from different Quebec schools who

responded to the recruitment invitation, and the combining of focus groups with self-study. The fact that the focus group in the present study also took place virtually, while allowing for a flexible and accessible method of collecting data, particularly during a time when in-person meetings were limited due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, also answers to concerns about peer pressure. Woodyatt and Stephenson (2016) have recognized that online focus groups can help to reduce the impact of group dynamics, as participants can communicate from their own environments, thus the virtual setting may encourage more honest and open discussion.

Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) offer a robust illustration of the application of focus group methods in teacher identity research. The goal of this study was to examine how teachers construct their professional identities, with particular attention to how they see themselves and their roles in the teaching profession. Data was collected through focus group discussions. Focus group discussions allowed for in-depth and open dialogue amongst participants. The teachers in the focus groups underlined the value of maintaining a balance between their personal and professional lives. They acknowledged that their professional identities were significantly shaped by their personal convictions, ideals, and life experiences, and that teachers frequently encountered difficulties and tensions pertaining to their professional identities, including conflicts between their personal values and professional standards, and pressure to fit into preconceived notions or stereotypes. Teachers liked the chance to critically reflect on themselves and to interact with and learn from their peers. They were able to learn from others and develop deeper insights into their own identities thanks to this methodological approach.

3.2 Research Design, Ethics, and Research Positionality During the Research

Self Study Participant / Researcher Information

Over the last four years I have navigated Quebec's education system as a Queer, gay cis-gendered, male identifying teacher. My background as a high school science and technology teacher and as an English as a Second Language teacher have brought me to variety of schools in different socioeconomic and geographic regions of Quebec. My experience primarily includes teaching in both private and public French and English schools in the Montreal area, leading to my current position in a French public school in the lower Laurentian region.

Throughout my career as a teacher, I have been drawn to promoting inclusivity and advocating for Queer rights. Through my involvement in Queer-Straight Alliances at various schools, I have attempted to instill a sense of belonging and safety in all students. My involvement in sex-ed committees, governing boards and consultation committees has also been motivated by a desire to ensure Queer-inclusive content and environments are provided, which I believe is critical for fostering understanding and empathy among students.

Recognizing the significance of ongoing development and self-improvement, I have decided to choose self-study as one of my methodological approaches to answer the previously defined research questions. This introspective journey has allowed me to reflect on my past experiences and the challenges I've faced as a Queer teacher - and as an individual. I have gained a better understanding of the complexities that have shaped my identity and informed my teaching practise by examining these aspects of my life. I hope that by sharing my experiences, I will contribute to the ongoing discussion about Queer rights in education. My intention is to use the knowledge

gained from this self-study to promote greater understanding, inclusivity, and acceptance within my educational practice.

Focus Group Participants

According to the literature, there are different opinions about the appropriate number of participants for focus groups. The number varies from a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 12 (Creswell, 2002, 2014). However, performing these studies with a small number of participants is usually preferred. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), if the group is more than ten people, this may affect the discussion and thus the research findings.

The focus group was composed of four Queer teachers: myself and three other participants who were current teachers who openly self-identify as Queer, which include a range of sexual, romantic and gender identities. Both public and private school teachers from Quebec's English and French sectors were recruited to ensure a diverse range of experiences and perspectives (see next: Participant Recruitment).

The self-identifying Queer teachers and I participated in a focus group that met twice during the winter of 2023 (first in January 2023 and then in February 2023). Participants were invited to discuss their experiences negotiating their Queer identities professionally and personally. Questions were inspired by Appendix B: the same questions I had asked myself (see chapters 4, 5 and 6). Each focus group session lasted approximately 75 minutes where the pre-determined prompts or questions will be used to guide the participants' conversation. The focus group format allowed participants the chance to share examples drawn from their personal or professional

experiences with myself and one another, thus creating a rich data set. As mentioned, both focus groups took place virtually through a secure Zoom call associated with my McGill email account. Additional information on the teachers' Queer identity, years of experience, sector of employment and professional experience has been provided in Table 1 (see: Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Description of Participants

Teacher **(pseudonym)**	**Queer Identity**	**Years of Experience**	**Sector of Employment**	**Professional Experience**
Eli	Questioning / Non-Binary / Queer	3	Public English Sector	Secondary ELA / Elementary
Miles	Pansexual / Queer	5	Public English Sector	Secondary History / Social Studies
Vinh	Pansexual / Queer	3	Private Adult Education Sector	Adult ELA / ESL
Andrew	Gay / Queer	4	Public French Sector	Secondary Science / ESL

Participant Recruitment

Teacher participants were recruited through three streams - teacher Facebook groups, my personal social media and through my professional network. Teachers who participated in this study were required to be openly self-identified Queer individuals (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, non-binary, genderqueer, etc.). Teachers were recruited on a volunteer basis from the researcher's professional teaching network both in Quebec using the recruitment message found in Appendix A. This recruitment message (Appendix A) was posted

on the researcher's personal social media accounts and was sent by email to current work colleagues.

It is important to state that there was a relationship between some of the study participants and myself. Although we had never worked together, we did attend the same university in our undergraduate and graduate studies. Organizational or community approvals were not needed to recruit or access the target population as the recruitment was done through the researcher's personal and professional networks, however permission was asked from the principal of my current school as a courtesy prior to sending the recruitment message to the entirety of the teaching staff.

In order to obtain consent, participants were provided with a copy of Appendix B: Informed Consent Form. This form was shared through a short 1:1 meeting prior to the two focus group sessions. These meetings took place online through a secure Zoom call associated with my McGill account. The participant received the form (Appendix B) through Zoom chat and the participant returned the form to me by email. This initial meeting ensured that the participant understood everything within the consent form. The participant always had the right to withdraw at any time without any penalty or prejudice.

Ethical Considerations

Discussing topics such as Queer identity can be sensitive in nature and could be emotionally triggering for some participants. However, the potential harms and risks to participants, in my opinion, were minimal. As explained below, every precaution was taken to reduce and eliminate any potential harms.

Throughout this study, as a Queer educator myself, I was aware of potential issues and did my best to protect all participants' anonymity and privacy. The name of the participant's school has not been disclosed nor were their real names – instead, pseudonyms have been used to protect their privacy. All of the teacher participants who participated openly self-identified as Queer - reducing the risk of "outing" an individual. Local resources supporting Queer individuals were provided as necessary / if requested. Additionally, participation within this study was completely voluntary. No participants were pressured into participating and participants did not receive compensation or incentives for their participation in this study.

Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants in the research study. The names of the participants and any other identifiable information were not disclosed in any research reports or published articles. I manually de-identified and transcribed the focus group discussions. No transcription services or programs were used. The audio files from the focus group discussions were saved on my password-protected personal laptop and were not uploaded to any cloud platform. A password-protected record file linking participants' real names to their pseudonyms and institutions was also kept on my personal computer. All additional files containing identifiable materials were password protected.

Researcher Positionality

As already discussed in the previous chapter, self-study is a type of autoethnographic research that focuses on the researcher's individual experiences and subjectivities. Self-study is based on the conviction that the researcher's experiences, identities, and beliefs are crucial to the research

process and that these experiences ought to be critically assessed and reflected upon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I am both an insider and outsider with respect to my research and as the primary investigator on this project, I recognise the significance of self-reflexivity and transparency in conducting research. My positionality has shaped the research process and outcomes, and I believe it is critical to articulate my background, perspectives, and biases that may influence the research. As a cisgender, white male, from a middle-class family, I recognize the privilege that I have benefited from through my education and career opportunities. I recognise that my background and identity may have had an impact on my assumptions, interpretations, and interactions with research participants, particularly those from diverse backgrounds.

My interest in this research project stems from my personal experiences as a teacher, as well as my desire to comprehend the dynamics of group learning and individual reflection in the context of professional development. As the primary investigator, I chose to conduct a self-study to examine my own professional development as well as to participate in focus group discussions with other educators to investigate shared experiences and collective understanding. I recognise the possibility of subjectivity and bias when using self-study because I am both the researcher and the participant. To mitigate this, I kept audio recordings throughout the project to record my reflections, observations, and experiences. I also solicited feedback from peers, which assisted me in challenging my assumptions and maintaining reflexivity.

I facilitated the focus group component of the research, guiding the discussions among educators. I am aware of the power dynamics that comes with this position and worked hard to create a supportive and inclusive environment in which participants felt comfortable sharing their

experiences. I have also done some member-checking to make sure my interpretation of the focus group data matches the participants' intended meanings. Throughout the data analysis process, I was conscious of my positionality and how it might affect the interpretation of the findings. I used a combination of inductive and deductive coding to allow themes to emerge from the data while also taking into account the influence of my prior knowledge and beliefs, and where the rigorous process of the self-study helped me become aware of my own experiences and reflection on those experiences.

3.3 Methods

Self-Study: Autobiographical Narrative Vignettes

I began collecting the self-study data through writing vignettes and identifying key moments or experiences that had emerged from my memories as a Queer teacher. These included critical incidents, turning points, or any other event that held significance for me (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My vignettes were prompted by the same questions I asked my focus group participants. Once I had identified these key moments, I crafted vignettes that provided a rich, detailed, and evocative account of each experience.

When writing the vignettes, I paid close attention to the context, emotions, thoughts, and actions that characterized each experience (Mitchell and Weber, 1999). This process involved not only describing the events but also reflecting on the underlying feelings, assumptions, and beliefs that informed my actions and reactions at the time (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). Additionally, I considered the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts that may have shaped the experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For many of the questions, I had decided to record

myself speaking naturally. I felt as though that speaking my answer would deliver a more authentic account rather than immediately writing what came to mind. I often relistened to these recordings many times before embarking on the writing of a vignette.

As mentioned, I reflected on the same questions that I had developed for my focus group questions and wrote an autobiographical narrative based on my responses. The responses found in chapters 4, 5 and 6 were written over the course of two months while I simultaneously adapted to working in a new school in a more rural environment. Moving from the city to the countryside (close to Montreal) has been a big change in my life and I believe had a strong influence on my self-study. It had taken some significant time and effort for me to adjust my teaching strategies to be effective in this new environment, even though this environment is familiar to me in that I grew up there. The cultural differences and clashes have also been significant, and I have had to approach my work with patience.

Focus Group and Post Reflection Data Collection

The two focus group discussions took place over Zoom within one month of one another in the early part of 2023. The video discussions were recorded with the participants' permission. Questions/prompts (as also outlined in Appendix B) were used to guide the discussion and were provided to the teacher participants before the focus groups. The questions were organized into three categories:

Negotiating Personal and Professional Identities

1. How do you negotiate your personal and professional identities as a queer teacher? Can you give one or two examples?
2. What factors did you consider, prior to making the decision to come out to your school community?
3. Are you aware of any other openly Queer colleagues? How do you believe being Queer influences your school culture?
4. How did your decision to come out as a teacher influenced your "out of school" identity?

Supporting Queer Teachers

5. What challenges do Queer educators tend to encounter?
6. What kinds of actions or situations involving leadership or professional relationships with colleagues have most supported you and your Queer identity?
7. If you are/were in a leadership position, what/how would you change in order to produce a more Queer inclusive environment?

Queer Teacher Belonging

8. How do you believe a new Queer teacher would be accommodated into your school community?
9. At what moments have you felt most included, and excluded, from your school community? Can you give an example?

Following the two focus group sessions, participants were asked to send a short email (1-2 paragraphs) to my password-protected McGill email address that captured their post-reflection on

the focus group discussions. They were invited to send in an attached Word document, in response to the following three prompts:

1. What struck you the most from your experience of participating in this focus group?
2. What were you surprised (or unsurprised) to learn from this experience?
3. What needs to happen next to ensure that Queer teachers feel more comfortable as teachers teaching in schools?

The written communication (via email) between the researcher and participants provided an opportunity for the participants to reflect further on the focus group discussions. It also served as a debrief in which they could share any other pertinent information. The individual written communication also served as an opportunity for me to triangulate the focus group data.

Triangulation

The data from the self-study and the two focus groups methods were compared and contrasted, revealing similarities and differences in experiences, ultimately enriching the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The self-study revealed the researcher's personal struggles, accomplishments, and professional growth as a Queer teacher, providing a detailed and intimate view of the researcher's Queer teacher identity. The focus group, on the other hand, provided a broader perspective, highlighting the diverse experiences of multiple Queer teachers in various educational contexts. Both methods demonstrated the importance of supportive networks and safe spaces for Queer educators to express and explore their identities (Renn, 2010). The focus group, on the other hand, identified the impact of systemic barriers and biases that Queer teacher’s face,

which were not as prominent in the self-study findings. Overall, the triangulation process enabled a more thorough understanding of Queer teacher identity, demonstrating the interconnectedness of individual and collective experiences in shaping this identity (Flick, 2018). The post focus group written communication between myself and the participants additionally served to confirm many of the themes highlighted in the focus group discussions.

3.4 Data Analysis

A critical element in the research process involves interpreting and organizing qualitative data, also known as data analysis (Creswell, 2014). In order to turn the data into meaningful and pertinent conclusions, the work of data analysis turns the data into patterns, themes, through finding linkages among the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Numerous steps are frequently involved in qualitative data analysis, including data organization, data reduction, data display, conclusion generation, and conclusion validation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Researchers often transcribe and code the acquired data during the data organization stage in order to put it into a format that can be easily examined (Saldana, 2013). During the data reduction step, themes and patterns in the data are found and categorized (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The presentation of the data and findings occurs during the data display stage, frequently in the form of matrices, networks, or tables (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, the stage of deriving and confirming conclusions includes interpreting the data and confirming the results through triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A popular technique for assessing qualitative data is thematic analysis, especially in the field of education (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of thematic analysis entails finding, examining, and interpreting recurrent themes in a collection of qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998). This approach seeks to understand participant experiences and views while also revealing the data's underlying structure and meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

However, the subjective character of qualitative research necessitates that researchers carefully assess how their biases and opinions will affect the thematic analysis procedure (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

Self-Study Analysis

Once I had written the vignettes, I engaged in a process of analysis and interpretation. This involved examining the vignettes for patterns, themes, and contradictions, as well as considering the implications of these findings for my practice and understanding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Mitchell & Weber, 1999). I also used the vignettes as a basis for dialogue with the focus group participants who offered alternative perspectives and insights (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). Throughout the process of analyzing self-study data through vignettes, it was essential for me to maintain reflexivity. I continually questioned my assumptions, biases, and interpretations and considered the ways in which my positionality may have shaped the research process and findings (Finlay, 2002). The vignettes have been italicized in the self-study chapters in order to clearly demarcate them from the surrounding reflections.

Focus Group Analysis

Thematic analysis is a flexible technique that may be tailored to meet a given research endeavour's particular requirements and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be utilized in focus group settings to examine the information gathered through focus group discussions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The findings of a thematic analysis of focus group data can offer insightful information about the experiences and viewpoints of participants in that they can guide the creation of educational policies and initiatives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

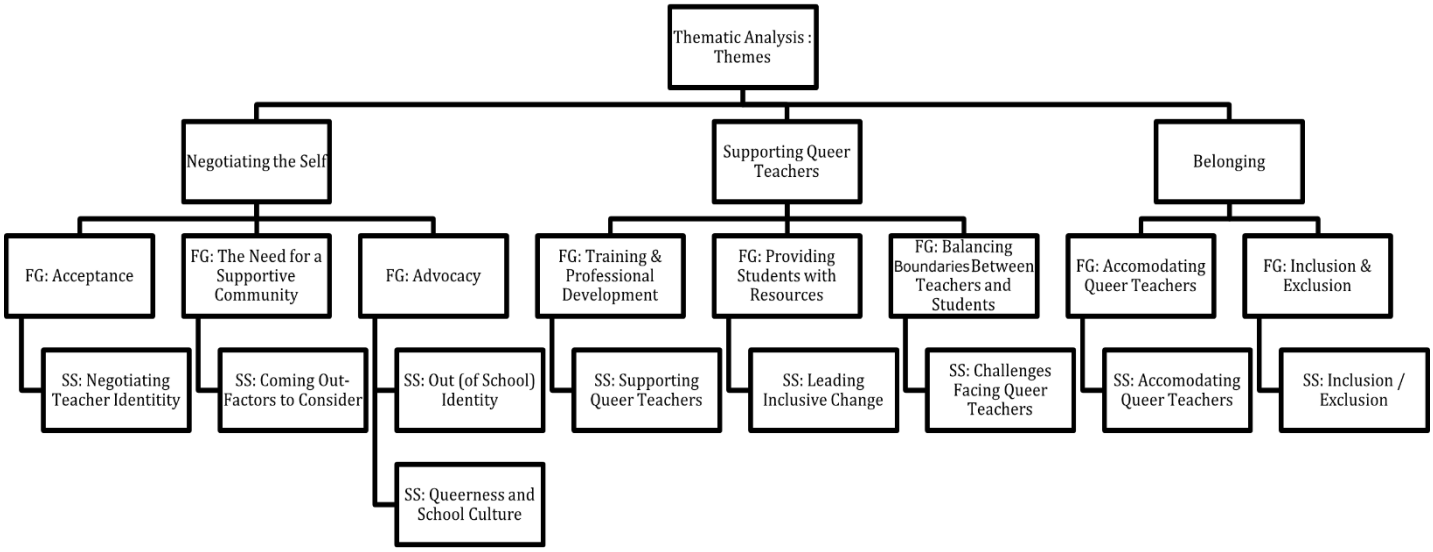
As I discussed in the section on researcher positionality, identifying the ways in which I monitored subjectivity throughout the self-study was critical. I regularly engaged in peer debriefing at the end of each session, and member checking throughout each meeting to maintain a level of reflexivity and minimise the influence of my personal biases. Member checking ensured that the participants' voices were accurately represented in the study. After identifying initial themes and patterns, I began a more systematic data analysis process. Transcribing the data began with converting the recorded interviews and observations into written text to allow for a thorough examination. After finishing the transcriptions, I listened to the audio recordings again and again to ensure accuracy and gain a better understanding of the participants' perspectives. Following that, I coded the data, assigning descriptive labels to the relevant text segments. This coding process was iterative; I returned to and revised the codes as needed to ensure that they accurately reflected the data. In addition, I used constant comparison to identify emerging patterns by examining the relationships and differences between the codes. Following that, I organised the data by grouping these patterns into broader themes. These themes encapsulated the essence of the participants' experiences while also providing a thorough understanding of the research questions. I triangulated the data to further

validate my analysis, comparing and contrasting information from various sources such as the written communications and my own self-study. Following that, I coded the data, assigning descriptive labels to the relevant text segments. This coding process was iterative; I returned to and revised the codes as needed to ensure that they accurately reflected the data. In addition, I used constant comparison to identify emerging patterns by examining the relationships and differences between the codes. Following that, I organised the data by grouping these patterns into broader themes. These themes encapsulated the essence of the participants' experiences while also providing a thorough understanding of the research questions.

The data analysis process included a number of rigorous and iterative steps, such as transcribing, relistening, coding, rereading, identifying patterns, and categorising them into themes as in this study I aimed to present an accurate and authentic representation of the participants' experiences by maintaining reflexivity and employing various strategies to monitor subjectivity. I was also interested to see how those themes reiterated themselves (or not) across the self-study.

Below, I have included the delineation of the themes covered in this study. The chart identifies themes from the focus group (FG) are related to the themes covered in my self-study (SS). In chapters seven and eight, I consider the connections between results arising from the self-study and focus groups.

Figure 1: Delineation of Themes



I turn next to the self-study, which is organized across three chapters—chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Chapter 4 - Negotiating the Self

The most beautiful part of your body

is where it's headed, & remember

loneliness is still time spent

with the world.

Ocean Vuong

The present chapter, along with chapters five and six, constitutes the self-study component of my thesis. I feel as though it is important to emphasize pre-emptively that the words contained herein reflect my experiences spanning a significant length of time, commencing from the start of my teaching career that began just a few months before the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and encompasses multiple school transfers, school board and service center changes, and most recently, geographical regions. The self-study was itself composed over the course of an entire year, during which my teacher identity evolved in response to the various educational contexts, student populations, and colleagues I encountered. As a member of the Queer community, I have chosen to share my personal narrative in a manner true to writing to the Queer self (Grace, 2009). By sharing my stories, I have sought to document and reflect on my experiences, thereby deepening my understanding and enhancing the development of my teacher identity, even as the stories act as a different source of information from the words and episodes shared by the Queer educators who participated in the focus groups.

4.1 Negotiating Teacher Identity

Question One: How do you negotiate your personal and professional identities as a Queer teacher? Can you give one or two examples?

There were two types of people I grew up with. Those who dreamed of staying in the small town that I grew up in, and those who counted the days until they could leave. Little did my younger self know that my Queerness would've already made the decision for me. You see, for many Queers like myself, growing up in a small rural town can be isolating. As a child with no Queer role models in his life, I made the decision to leave my town in search of the nearest big city.

As a way of paying for my schooling, I worked in summer camps where I fell in love with teaching. I am grateful to those summers to have shown me my passion and calling in life. In a way I found my love for teaching spending my days embracing my true authentic self. While hiking through the thick woods - swatting mosquitoes in the summer heat - I shared my stories with young people while they shared theirs. I learned for the first time how to help children see and seek their full potential - while finding my own. I was honest. I was myself. I learned that being authentic meant being vulnerable. I learned to make mistakes, which I now remember as growth.

Strong-Wilson et al. (2013) defines productive remembering as the process of reflecting on past experiences and using this process to inform present and future actions. Critical reflection is aided by narrative, which allows people to make sense of their experiences Individuals can identify patterns in their behaviour through productive remembering, learn from past mistakes, and make

more informed choices in the future. This is what I've been attempting to accomplish: engage in my reflection through productive remembering and "bringing memory forward." (Strong-Wilson, 2006)

After working for years in summer camps, I decided to formally change career paths, applying for a degree transfer to the Faculty of Education at McGill University. The years that would follow would form me into the teacher I am today. However, it soon became apparent my Queerness would become something difficult to restrain in this professional environment.

As I experienced what it was like to become a teacher for the very first time, I stood in front of the class introducing myself with the ***deepest*** *masculine voice I could manage to pull off naturally - while my cooperating teacher - the epitome of masculinity - scrutinised every part of me.*

I remember getting dressed for my first day of student teaching. I stared at myself for what seemed to be hours in my college-dorm-esque Walmart mirror. My nicest dress shirt which happened to be pink was left behind. I uncuffed my jeans, buttoned the last button of my shirt and glanced at myself once again thinking that my outfit was more fitting for a funeral than working with children. With the pressure surrounding me I repressed my Queerness in hopes of coming off as perfect. As clearly in my eyes being Queer was not yet.

It took me many years to begin questioning the nexus of professionalism and personalism with regards to my Queerness. Where did this idea come from that Queers can't be professional? How was I influenced to think this way?

As is common with many teacher preparation programs, my professional internship was accompanied by a concurrent professional seminar course intended to provide a safe space. This space for the most part was one that I felt I belonged in. Late one evening following a long day of student teaching and an even longer evening of class, I asked my Professor if they would be okay with discussing a more personal issue that I had been dealing with.

I described my life as it was, a Queer individual feeling like a fake. I suppose my straight acting hadn't been too successful as students (particularly the younger ones) began asking, "Sir, are you gay?" I asked my Professor for advice - hoping that somehow their words would set me free and give me the permission to open that hatch of the bird cage I had constructed around myself.

"Well … you never know what other people are going to think."

"I'm not sure that's appropriate."

"If I were you - I wouldn't."

Why are the thoughts of others so important in deciding who I'll be for the world to see? Don't those who ask sincere questions deserve sincere answers? Wasn't I taught that being a good teacher is teaching from the true authentic self? What was wrong with being Queer?

I walked down the hill that night with my head held low. I felt ashamed. Rejected. I would come back to class keeping myself to myself.

I did not belong here.

4.2 Coming Out - Factors to Consider

Question Two: What factors did you consider, prior to making the decision to come out to your school community?

I made the decision to come out as a teacher the day that I interviewed for my first official job. I had taken the bus off the island of Montreal where the question of coming out consumed me. At that moment I figured it may be easier to take advantage of the fresh start that had been given to me. No one to watch me but myself.

I was used to the usual nerves and jitters that came with job interviews. However, this time it felt different. This time, I was looking for something - or somewhere – a school that truly valued inclusivity and diversity, where I could be myself and thrive.

As we finalized the interview, and she asked if I had any questions - I responded, yes.

"How does your school ensure the inclusivity of everyone?"

This was a crucial question for me, as the battle for inclusivity is in fact a battle. One that must be challenged head on, focus on, and encouraged. The principal was quick to show me examples of

how the school supported inclusivity, including their annual diversity day. She smiled warmly and assured me that in her school everyone belonged and that there would be a place for me - should I want it.

I suppose that my decision to ask that question was also one of privilege - reflecting my relative young age, my lack of experience, whiteness or quite possibly my naïvete.

As a white person, being interviewed by another white person I knew that I had a certain level of privilege and safety to challenge the traditional norms associated with an interview. I know now that the intersectionality of my whiteness and Queerness cannot be avoided or separated when reflecting on own experiences.

I felt a sense of relief and gratitude wash over me as I left the interview. For the first time, I felt like I had a place where I could be my authentic self. As a Queer teacher, this was all I could have ever needed.

In education, and more specifically in educational leadership, we are told to view an individual or institution through a stakeholder lens. This means that rather than looking at conflicts through one dimension we should instead focus on everyone, all at once. Identify who is important and satisfy their needs.

My decision to come out was no different. What would my boss think? Would they support me when I would need it the most?

What about my colleagues? Would they laugh behind my back? Exclude me?

What about the parents? Would they complain about me? Would they think that I was pushing a Queer agenda onto my students - their perfect children?

What about my students? Would they see me as weaker? Less strict? Would my gayness be viewed as inappropriate and would they tattle to their parents? Would I be seen as less of a teacher? How would my male students respond?

Although many of these questions seem irrational now, they consumed me in that moment and others. They interfered with my teaching.

The most difficult obstacle was the lack of trust and assurance that I had been presented with throughout such a short period of time. I had grown up in the very same heteronormative system that I wished to serve.

The one factor that I did not consider was myself. In thinking about everyone around me, I forgot at that moment to think about myself.

4.3 Queerness and School Culture

Question Three: Are you aware of any other openly Queer colleagues? How do you believe being Queer influences your school culture?

As a Queer teacher, I think my identity has a big influence on the culture of the school. It's not simply about setting an example for Queer students and providing a secure environment for them, though those things are undoubtedly crucial. Also, it's about dispelling heteronormative presumptions and making room for more inclusive and diverse viewpoints.

One particular moment stands out to me as a powerful example of how being Queer influences the school culture. The students had been asking that I prepare a lesson on Queer history, and as such we explored topics ranging from Stonewall to the AIDS epidemic to modern Queer art. A week after the discussion, a student came up to me and thanked me. They told me that they had been struggling with their own gender identity and hadn't felt comfortable talking to anyone about it before. But hearing me share the stories of the Queer community had given them hope and courage. Their words marked me, and motivated my work as an advocate for my community.

Over the next few weeks, that student became more involved in Queer advocacy work at the school, joining the Queer-Straight Alliance I supervised and eventually came out to their family and friends.

Beyond individual students, I believe that being Queer influences the school culture in more subtle but important ways. It dismantles the prevalent gender and heterosexuality narratives and makes room for more inclusive and diverse viewpoints. It promotes empathy and understanding and aids in removing barriers between various student groups.

Of course, being Queer in a school setting has also been challenging. There are still plenty of individuals and groups who are resistant to Queer visibility and acceptance. But in my opinion, the benefits of fostering a more welcoming and varied school climate far exceed the drawbacks. And I also hope that by being there and speaking out, I can contribute to making the school a more inclusive and accepting place for all students, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

School as it is often referred to, is a microcosm of society. As such coming out as a teacher can be as much of a reflection of the social acceptance of Queer people outside the classroom as in. I have worked in schools where no colleagues were out, some schools where many were out - but only to the staff, but very rarely with individuals who were out to all members of the school community.

The degree of self-acceptance, importance of one's identity, degree of "outness" among friends and family, employment policies, and perceived support for homosexuality from employers are all associated with Queer employees' disclosure behaviours at work. Coming out at work and working for a company that is viewed as more welcoming of Queers has been neglected, in my mind, to higher job satisfaction and reduced workplace anxiety. The reactions of coworkers mediate the relationship between disclosure and attitudes toward Queer employees (Griffith and Hebl, 2002).

As of this moment in time, I am alone at my school in my Queerness. The staff room is a place where many conversations take place. Conversations about sexuality and Queerness, however, are rare. I suppose there is an occasional conversation about family and children, where I discuss living with my partner. This is the only way I've found of coming out without spilling my life onto the floor.

4.4 Out (of School) Identity

Question Four: How did your decision to come out as a teacher influenced your "out of school" identity?

A career in education can be quite demanding. The occupation at times has taken over my entire identity. I eat, sleep, and dream about school. But what I have learned is that that the person that I am in school and out of school is the same person. I don't go out in my pyjamas knowing that I might be spotted by a member of my school or my administration. Nor did I hold my boyfriend's hand knowing that anyone might discover my secret.

During my second student teaching internship, I worked at a small school in a tight knit suburb of Montréal. The conflict of in school and out of school identity was nauseating. I continuously felt the need to hide my Queerness.

In my short career, I have picked up on more homophobic comments than I would have ever wished. Spaces such as staff rooms are notorious for workplace toxicity and become even more so

when one is a Queer in sheep's clothing. Hearing coworkers, who are ostensibly professionals, make insulting remarks about your community is difficult. It hurts and is painful.

"Gays shouldn't teach young children.''

I won't let their intolerance to define who I am. I refuse to allow their ignorance and hatred pull me down because I am proud of who I am. Instead, I prefer to concentrate on the good things, like when I recognise a student who is having identity issues and can help them by providing a secure and encouraging environment. I decide to concentrate on the times when a co-worker confronts someone who is being unkind. I sense a glimpse of hope.

And I decide to keep moving forward and fighting for a society where individuals can be who they are without worrying about prejudice or judgement. Because I am aware that I am not the only one fighting this battle and that many other Queer educators are also doing their part to improve the lives of their pupils.

Coming out is complex and occurs more than just once. Every new school means testing new grounds and facing more judgement. Now that I have returned back to the rural community I had once grown up in, the influence of my in-school identity alters every trip out of my house, every show I go see and every person I meet. Small towns are in fact very small. My students work in every grocery store and shop I frequent. The parents walk their dogs on my street. They are the eyes that watch me, judge me and critique me.

I feel liberated knowing that there is nothing I need to hide, even though, like many other instructors, I prefer to disappear when I see a parent or kid in the shop. I still recall the first time one of my pupils witnessed me dating my boyfriend in public. I was initially anxious since I wasn't sure how they would respond to seeing me in a different setting. But when I noticed their expression of recognition, I felt as though a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I can be proud of who I am and the example I am establishing for my students when I see them out in public today. And I'm aware that my choice to come out as a teacher has had a significant influence on my outside-of-school identity as well as the lives of my students. It gives me freedom and peace.

Whichever school I find myself teaching at now, I come out to my students by speaking about my partner on the first day of every school year. I still wonder what they'll say. I still wonder what they'll think.

The division of our identity into a "public" and a "private" persona is not new; study into the management methods of Queer teachers demonstrates how a work/home life separation was historically required for the professional survival of the Queer teacher species. It was critical for teachers to conceal their Queer(ness) and 'live two lives,' as disclosing their sexuality or close relationships put them at risk of professional discrimination and dismissal (Ozeren, 2014).

Although these risks persist, particularly in religious settings, the discourse of corporate managerialism (Connell, 2012) that pervades education and that has transformed schools into "professional organisations" insists on “the separation of the public and private persona as normal and desirable.” By accepting this language, Queer teachers (among others) continue to separate

the self, resulting in the suppression of sexually diverse subjectivities inside the educational context.

Chapter 5 - Supporting Queer Teachers

Be who you are

and say what you feel,

because those who mind don't matter

and those who matter don't mind

Dr. Seuss

5.1 Challenges Facing Queer Teachers

Question Five: What challenges do Queer educators tend to encounter?

I've never experienced direct victimisation or abuse. My sexual orientation, however, has influenced my life and my career. Never would I have considered working in elementary school over the fear of being stereotyped. I am a secondary teacher.

I've been told: "A gay teacher like you would make a good English teacher."

Professional teachers can wear wedding rings at work, dress in gender-differentiated clothing, date their co-workers, display photos of their heterosexual nuclear family, bring their spouse to a staff event, and attend after-work parties at clubs – all without appearing the least bit 'sexual'. For Queers however, coming out can sometimes be seen more as a political stance than an

expression of identity. Much change needs to take place to transform the school into a place where Queer sexuality may be named without fear.

When I'm meeting new people, I feel the need to be cautious. I change the pronouns of my partner as a way of protecting my vulnerability. Then I think - a straight person doesn't have to edit or censor their life in that way, and I do. Why do I do that?

As an openly Queer teacher, I have adapted to the different roles within the schools I've worked at. As the only openly Queer teacher I have been asked if I would lead a Queer Straight Alliance. I've had more students come out to me than I can count. Each and every time, I have been expected to support them with the little resources I have. I have students who've asked me things that are so difficult to answer. I have found that the hardest part is giving advice without being personal. Giving advice knowing no other adult in their life knows.

I have a responsibility. The responsibility to be out and proud about who I am, and particularly as a teacher, for the hundreds of kids who are also gay, lesbian or bisexual - to be a role model. As Queer child, you always remember the teacher who was Queer, and every word they said and everything they did, because it was someone you could look up to, and realise that you're not alone.

Queer teachers may be particularly impacted by the interaction between identity and power in the classroom, according to Rasmussen's exploration of the idea that teachers' identity management in

the school is mediated by the varying circulations of power in the community, the classroom, the playground, and the staff room (Rasmussen 2006). According to Epstein and Johnson (1998), the school can be thought of as both a public and a private space, with shaky boundaries between them. Teachers may use various "identity management tactics" depending on where they are in the school (Brockenbrough, 2012). In my opinion, Queer teachers, like myself, frequently try to strike a balance between revealing their sexuality to the school community and protecting their privacy. Some may disclose their sexual orientation to specific staff members and older students, while others are aware that their sexual orientation and gender identity - although never explicitly stated - is assumed.

5.2 Supporting Queer Teachers

Question Six: What kinds of actions or situations involving leadership or professional relationships with colleagues have most supported you and your Queer identity?

The support and acceptance we receive from our peers, colleagues, and mentors drives our journey of exploring and connecting with our Queer identity. It is critical to be surrounded and supported by people who take the initiative to foster a culture of understanding and inclusivity in our professional, communal, and personal lives. Finally, leadership roles and relationships with our peers and colleagues fueled by empathy, allyship, and understanding are bound to result in a more fulfilling and integrated experience of our Queer identities.

Having given much thought to this question, there are a number of actions or situations that can support a Queer teacher's identity and sense of belonging within a school community. Some examples of such actions or situations might include:

A. Having open and inclusive policies and practices that support Queer individuals (staff and students);
B. Providing training and resources for staff on Queer inclusion and equity through pedagogical development;
C. Encouraging open and respectful dialogue and communication about diversity and inclusion within the school community;
D. Supporting the formation of Queer resource groups or affinity groups;
E. Providing support and resources for Queer students, such as gender-neutral restrooms and preferred name option policies;
F. Having visible and supportive Queer role models or allies in leadership positions;

Supportive and inclusive professional relationships with colleagues can also be important for a Queer teacher's sense of belonging and acceptance within a school community.

My students and I were sitting around the table at our weekly QSA meeting. I looked at them knowing that for every dance the school ever held they have been left out - the ones pushed to the side - the ones that received looks for slow dancing with people of the same gender. I asked for

their attention and asked them the question, "What would y'all think about hosting a Queer prom?"

I was beyond grateful for the support I received. Colleagues from around the school volunteered to help chaperone, do makeup and man the "bar". In the moment, I knew I would have never been able to give my students that opportunity without their help. Their help was as emotional as it was practical. They encouraged me to support a vision of love and fought on my side when we faced criticism together. They were proud to have contributed to the creation of a space in which we could all feel seen, heard, and celebrated.

As I saw the evening's events, I was certain that I had picked the ideal school for my job. The sense of belonging and support was strong, and it was obvious that my employees shared my commitment to fostering a welcoming environment. The Queer Prom was a success, but it was also a powerful illustration of the value of allies and cooperation.

Within a professional setting, there are a number of contributing factors that create a sense of belonging for a Queer person. A sense of safety, acceptance and understanding are paramount. It is important that the organisation structure, policies and procedures allow individuals to express their unique identity authentically (Clark, Dyson, & Millward, 1995). Seeking out and participating in inclusive events and activities such as networking lunches, Pride celebrations, and team socials can provide an individual with a sense of belonging, celebration and self-empowerment. Acknowledging the humanity, value and diversity of all individuals including those of Queer identity is essential in fostering an inclusive professional environment.

5.3 Leading Inclusive Change

Question Seven: If you are/were in a leadership position, what/how would you change in order to produce a more Queer inclusive environment?

I knew I wanted to start a Queer-Straight Alliance when I first started teaching at a new school. It was something that had long been close to my heart, and I wanted to create a space where students could feel safe and supported in their identities. However, I was concerned about how the administration would react.

They were incredibly supportive, much to my surprise. They not only agreed to the formation of the group, but also offered to assist me in any way they could. They provided resources, guidance, and even helped me secure a meeting space. They were committed to creating an inclusive environment for all students, and it was clear that they saw the importance of the QSA.

Together, we created a logo for the group: a horse turned unicorn with a majestic rainbow mane. It was a symbol of the beauty and power of embracing who we are, and it quickly became a source of pride for everyone involved. The administration even used the logo on Facebook, sharing it with the wider community as a sign of celebrating Pride Month every June.

The first meeting of the QSA was a huge success. We had students of all genders and sexual orientations who were eager to connect with others who understood their situations. We discussed

our struggles and victories, sharing stories of both pain and hope. And I knew that, with the administration's help, we had created something truly unique.

Although I don't teach at that school anymore, I still see the QSA thriving every time Pride Month rolls around. The horse turned unicorn logo is still proudly displayed on Facebook, and I know that the administration is still committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment for all students. I am grateful for their support and the opportunity to create something that will have a long-term impact on the lives of students.

As the world becomes more interconnected and diverse, it is critical for leaders around the world to consider how to create meaningful, equitable, and Queer-inclusive spaces and organisations; to think deeply about the changes that can be implemented to ensure a truly Queer-inclusive environment. Such changes may include, but are not limited to, rethinking traditional hierarchical systems, cultivating an open communication and respect culture, and re-conceptualizing leadership roles and responsibilities. Strong leaders have the obligation to incorporate inclusive practices and policies within their own individual organisations (Lloren & Parini, 2017). This involves actively engaging with community members, asking questions, and understanding the various challenges Queer individuals may face. Additionally, strong leaders should also create a more equitable power dynamic by providing Queer individuals with resources necessary to access leadership positions. By applying such approaches, Queer people can be better supported and respected within their environments, ultimately fostering more empowering and inclusive spaces.

By actively engaging with, and responding to, the needs of Queer people, strong leaders can help create a more equitable distribution of power within a society which has long marginalised Queer people (Fassinger, Shullman & Stevenson, 2010). Additionally, leaders must be conscious of the needs of marginalised populations within the Queer community, such as those of colour and trans individuals, to ensure equitable distribution of resources, so that every Queer person may benefit (Boswell, 2020).

In my experience, creating a truly inclusive workplace necessitates a concerted effort on the part of the organisation. Creating policies that promote equal opportunity is a critical first step. However, it is also critical to foster an open and accepting workplace culture, for example, by actively promoting communication and respect among employees and encouraging the free exchange of ideas. Furthermore, the organisation must provide employees with training and resources to help them understand diversity, equity, and inclusion topics such as implicit bias, class dynamics, and inter-sectional dynamics. Finally, it is critical to recognise that inclusion is a continuous process of self-reflection and transformation, rather than a one-time event.

As a leader, you must ensure that those who report to you are respected and welcomed regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Both Queer people's marginalisation can have long-term and negative consequences. The effects of such marginalization include decreased motivation, increased mental health conditions, and an overall hindrance from participating in various aspects of a work environment (Kaur, 2012). By failing to create and foster a safe and welcoming atmosphere for Queer individuals, current and potential employees may feel too uncomfortable to apply or remain in the workplace (Kaur, 2012).

Leadership has the power to bring about meaningful change that transcends boundaries. You can create a Queer inclusive environment by recognizing the unique experiences, needs, and challenges of the Queer community and providing resources that facilitate their success. Setting up active listening sessions, task forces, and other forms of dialogue to identify challenges and potential early interventions; promoting Queer visibility through media, events, and other outlets; and leveraging organisational resources and channels to advocate for progressive social change are all possibilities.

We can create a world where every member of the Queer community feels respected, accepted, and represented by fostering a Queer inclusive environment.

Chapter 6 - Belonging

We should indeed keep calm in the face of difference,
and live our lives in a state of inclusion
and wonder at the diversity of humanity.

George Takei

6.1 Accommodating Queer Teachers

Question Eight: How do you believe a new Queer teacher would be accommodated into your school community?

First day of school mixers stress my inner Queer. ***They force me to come out.***

On my first day of school, a man approached me and shook my hand. He welcomed me to the school and we began chatting. Naturally I shared the fact I had recently moved to the area with my partner after purchasing a home together. He then asked me how long my girlfriend and I had been dating. I froze. Do I correct him and explicitly mention that in fact my partner is a man and that I myself am Queer? Or do I just smile and continue the conversation - switching to heteronormative pronouns as we go?

I was a coward at that moment. So afraid of judgement in my first interaction that I answered "we've been together for four years." Four years of memories and love with the man of my life just erased from my teacher identity. I felt guilty. I felt wrong. I was a fraud.

In Canada, many workplaces seek to provide a diverse and inclusive environment. However, it is the heteronormative assumption that exists in all the schools I have ever worked at that make it awkward to escape. Coming out in my school community means taking a risk - with every person you meet.

More than ever before, I have recently felt an increased judgement and questioning on behalf of students and staff about my personal life with my boyfriend. At times I feel like a special exhibition at the zoo that everyone stares at.

6.2 Inclusion / Exclusion

Question Nine: At what moments have you felt most included, and excluded, from your school community? Can you give an example?

I feel excluded from my school community every day. As the lone Queer, my life is inevitably different than everyone else's. While my colleagues discuss their children, I listen and think how different raising a family will be for someone like me. When mentioning that I'm going to supervise the Queer-Straight Alliance, I'm asked : What's that? Isn't that for the gay kids? Or a stare that can only be described as disgust and confusion.

Not everything has been bad. But I suppose that is what it is to be human. To remember the bad more than the good.

In the past, I have been blessed with some extraordinary colleagues and administration who have welcomed me with open arms as I work to develop a more inclusive environment for all of us. Those that have sat down with me to find funds for a new Queer-Straight Alliance I was developing. Those colleagues that replaced me when I was sick and needed someone to supervise our Queer movie night. Friends that helped me decorate a room and order pizza for our Queer Prom. Colleagues who sat down and discussed the context of my research. Regardless of their sexual orientation these extraordinary people support me and my vision for equity. They made me feel like I belonged.

They are my allies.

Working in a professional setting as a Queer person can be a challenge, particularly when it comes to feeling a sense of belonging and having your identity respected. Of utmost importance for enabling a feeling of belonging is to be in an environment that is openly supportive of Queer people. This means that a sense of acceptance and appreciation of the Queer perspective should be fostered by the company's verbal and written policies. I think it is important for Queer representation to be visible within the workspace and organisation through policies such as funding for Queer-related events, allowing employees to use their preferred pronouns, and providing training in Queer sensitive topics. Finally, it is important for employees to be able to

communicate with their peers and employers openly and without fear of judgement. With these in place, a Queer person can feel empowered and respected within a professional workplace.

Reducing disclosure at work can also help many members of the Queer community feel safer, as the potential backlash from colleagues, students and administration can be significant. It can mean protecting an employee from stigmatising attitudes, decreased respect, and in some cases, physical threats. Despite the potential safety from remaining closeted, there are also significant risks associated with that, too. Queer individuals who need to remain closeted may experience different levels of stress and the potential of depression and anxiety due to resulting feelings of isolation, shame, and lack of belonging. Managers can overcome some of the issues such as discrimination, well-being and psychological health by implementing and promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives that are specifically focused on the Queer community (Lloren & Parini, 2017).

Reflecting back on my experiences as a Queer teacher has been an emotional journey, one that has led me to a deeper understanding of myself and a greater sense of pride in who I am. Conducting a self-study was a challenging process, but it allowed me to explore my experiences and reflect on how they have shaped my identity as a teacher. I was able to look back on the moments of struggle and triumph, to examine the ways in which my Queer identity intersected with my professional life. Through this process, I was able to gain a new perspective on my journey, and to see the ways in which my experiences have made me stronger and more resilient.

One of the biggest lessons I learned through this process was the importance of becoming more true to myself. In the past, I had struggled with the fear of being judged or rejected, and I had often

tried to hide or suppress my Queer identity. But through time and in many ways this self-study, I came to realize that embracing who I am is the key to finding happiness and fulfillment in both my personal and professional life. I learned to be proud of who I am, and to celebrate the unique perspective that my Queer identity brings to my teaching.

In the end, my experiences as a Queer teacher have taught me that we all have a unique story to tell, and that our differences should be celebrated rather than hidden away. By being true to ourselves, we can create a better, more inclusive world for everyone. And I am proud to be a part of that journey, both as a teacher and a Queer.

Chapter 7 - Findings and Thematic Analysis

The goal of this section is to discuss the collective wisdom and shared knowledge that emerged from the focus group sessions, while also bringing into relation the valuable insights of my self-study. As researcher-participant, my role in the focus group discussions was largely muted, which may initially appear counterintuitive to the emphasis on Queer teacher voice in this study. However, this muting was a somewhat deliberate decision, informed by a desire to foster an environment where the research participants felt, first, that the discussion was driven by them rather than by the researcher, thus providing a safe space to foster the sharing of experiences, thoughts, and opinions, and ensuring a richer and more nuanced understanding of the subject matter. While I actively participated in the discussions at times, my contributions were primarily to support the flow of the conversation, and to gently steer it in a direction that aligned with the research questions. However, from time to time, I felt prompted to interweave findings from my self-study into the conversations, using the self-work to enhance the group's discussions as well as generate trust with my participants.

7.1 Negotiating the Self

As a Queer teacher, negotiating personal and professional identities can be a complex and nuanced process. Through conducting a thematic analysis of the transcript data, three key themes emerge as crucial components of this negotiation of the self, notably: the importance of acceptance, the need for a supportive workplace environment, and the role of advocacy in Queer identity. Each theme is elaborated on in turn. Each theme also contains sub-themes.

Acceptance

"It took me a long time to be comfortable with who I am, both as a Queer person and as a teacher." - Miles

A theme of self-acceptance is related to a personal journey of self-discovery: the need for individuals to first accept themselves in order to negotiate their identities effectively in professional settings. Miles shared, "I think it's really important to be true to yourself … because if you're not, it affects your teaching." Teachers often serve as role models and mentors to their students, and their actions and behaviour can have a significant impact on students' learning outcomes and their attitudes towards education. As a result, teachers must be authentic in their classrooms in order to build trust and rapport, promote a positive classroom environment, and encourage students to embrace their own unique identities. Furthermore, modelling authenticity can help students develop their own sense of self-confidence and encourage them to be true to themselves, resulting in improved academic performance and personal growth. According to Honneth (1995), self-realization and self-esteem are deeply rooted in the recognition and validation of one's identity. This process of self-acknowledgment can be especially empowering for students from marginalised groups, who may struggle to see their experiences reflected in educational settings (Nieto & Bode, 2008). Authentic self-expression allows teachers to build trust and rapport with their students, potentially leading to more effective communication and higher student engagement (Hargreaves, 1998). Eli, shared with the group that they felt they would not be as good of a teacher if they were not their true self – everyday. Vinh shared that in schools that are inclusive and accepting of all, they felt safer, more effective and happier. Further, when educators share their own personal experiences and express their true selves, they provide

opportunities for students to learn from real-life examples and develop a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter (Boler, 1999).

I've discovered that embracing my personal authenticity can help foster meaningful connections with my students. I am able to create a more inclusive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and engaging with the course material. Modeling personal authenticity has also enabled me to advocate for and support students in the classroom who may feel marginalised or underrepresented. However, I also believe that authenticity, inevitably leads to vulnerability and as such in some cases - fear.

Miles further discussed their fear of being judged by their students' parents, which influenced their decision to keep their sexual orientation private for the first two years of their teaching career. They considered the implications for their professional life: they did not want a *"huge thing"* surrounding them. They then considered what *they* would have wanted as a student and decided to create a safe space for their students to feel comfortable discussing their sexual orientations. I expressed my own experience with this feeling of “being watched” and the fear associated with the sentiment of someone always “watching over you”. In my self study, I reflected on the various factors I too, considered before coming out to my school community, such as the opinions of my boss, colleagues, parents, and students. I admit that I did not consider my own well-being and happiness during this process, which is an important lesson learned.

Vinh shared with the group that they often followed a self proclaimed “policy”, where they didn’t bring up their sexuality if no one asked. Miles additionally discussed being discreet about their

sexuality in their homophobic work environment. "I keep my life very private to my sec III's because they are the most homophobic *things* I've ever seen in my life." Homophobia and transphobia as it was discussed in the focus group, is often most prevalent in students who are non-discrete about their thoughts. This power dynamic can turn the classroom into a hostile space for both Queer students and teachers who navigate the subtleties of normality, acceptance and belonging. Miles said:

> At school, everyone knows I'm not straight. I don't use labels because those are for them... it's either not fully understood or it's judged, so I prefer to leave it blank. That's fine because they know I'm not straight. My identity outside of school is how I feel. I dress more masculine at times and more feminine at others, but my identity is being a part of the community. - Miles

Eli believes that it is critical for Queer people to demonstrate their existence, particularly for young people and those who may be unable to recognise their differences due to cultural barriers.

> I am aware of other Queer colleagues, but I'm not aware of them being open or not. One colleague in particular has become especially problematic because he doesn't share any information about his personal life … unfortunately, one of the students found him on Grindr and catfished him, and it went really poorly for him. Ever since that event he's said: 'I don't owe them anything. I don't owe them any piece of me.' – Eli

Depending on the school and community in which the teacher works, coming out as a teacher can have a variety of negative consequences. Coming out as a teacher can result in discrimination, harassment, and even violence in some cases. In other cases, it can result in a hostile work environment in which teachers are treated differently than their peers and result in a loss of respect from students and parents. In my case, being Queer in a school setting has presented challenges, as there are those still those resistant to Queer visibility and acceptance. However, the benefits of cultivating a more welcoming and diverse school environment far outweigh the drawbacks. By being present and outspoken, I hope to contribute to making the school a more inclusive and accepting place for all students.

Self-acceptance and societal acceptance, though, are both critical for Queer teacher's well-being and happiness. Individuals can embrace their own sexual orientation and gender identity through self-acceptance, whereas societal acceptance gives them a sense of belonging and reduces the stigma and discrimination they may face. When society accepts and celebrates Queer identities, it creates an environment in which people can be themselves without fear of rejection or discrimination. As a result, the significance of acceptance on Queer identity cannot be overstated, and efforts should be made to create accepting work environments in schools which Queer teachers are recognised and valued—a place at which both I and the participants agreed we have yet to arrive.

The Need for a Supportive Community

Vinh emphasised the importance of a supportive workplace environment, saying, "I was fortunate enough to work in a school where my colleagues were supportive and accepting." This

demonstrates how important it is to have a workplace that not only tolerates but actively promotes diversity and inclusion. In the absence of this type of environment, a Queer teacher's personal and professional identities can be much more difficult to negotiate. "It can be really difficult to bring your whole self to work if you're not in an environment where you feel comfortable," Vinh explained.

The focus group teachers also mentioned on multiple occasions that many of the students that they teach are homophobic and that homophobia has seemed to recently increase. However, as someone in a position of authority, Eli states, “Most of the students see me as a teacher before seeing me as a Queer person.” Vinh shared similar feelings as their experience mostly comprised of working with adults who they describe as being more professional than teenage students.

Eli mentioned that their Queer relationships were more supportive outside of their working environment in university, and that they do not have any professional relationships with Queer people. Eli expressed their feeling that they are shaping their own environment because they are "very loud and out there" and "speak for themselves." Brockenborough (2009) speaks to the struggles between teachers and students in under-resourced urban school districts, where stress and conflict are prevalent. In such places, the delicate balance between secrecy and disclosure of Queer teachers' sexualities can become a battleground for students challenging teacher authority. Students utilize various speech acts, such as homophobic innuendos or direct inquiries about teachers' sexual identities, to heighten the visibility of Queer teachers' suspected queerness. The disturbing narratives brought forward by Brockenborough demonstrate how disrespect can be normalized, evident through the caustic language used by both students and teachers, ultimately

compromising the safety of everyone involved. Miles and I both shared our experiences of students asking us about our sexual orientations. Miles shared that in their experience (like Brockenborough's findings), students often asked them about their sexual orientation in order to test their authority while I shared that these debates were often used to disrupt the class.

Before coming out to their school community, Eli shared how they considered the cultural and social norms of the area they lived in. Eli mentioned that they live in Montreal, Quebec, where they assumed their Queer identity wouldn't be an issue. The participants discussed the political and cultural differences of Montreal versus rural regions of Quebec and how community values are reflected within their schools. Queer acceptance in Quebec is a complex issue that varies significantly between different regions and communities. The province is known for its distinct culture and identity, with a history of social and political activism that has shaped its attitudes towards social issues, including Queer acceptance (Charbonnier, & Graziani, 2012). According to a study conducted by Chamberland et al. (2011), students living in rural areas of Quebec were more likely to be victims of homophobia and transphobia than those in urban areas. The perceptions of Quebecois students on their parents' level of acceptance of the Queer community received an average rating of bad to medium in a study conducted by Charbonnier and Graziani (2012). This difference in attitudes can be attributed to a range of factors, including demographic differences, cultural norms, and education levels. Rural areas tend to be more homogeneous in terms of demographics, with fewer opportunities for exposure to diverse viewpoints. Conversely, urban areas like Montreal are often characterised by greater cultural diversity, which can lead to greater acceptance of Queer identities (Chanaday, 2022). Coming out as a teacher is a complex process that occurs more than once. Each new school that I have worked at in the province has

meant testing new grounds and facing judgment. Returning to the rural community I grew up in, I have found that my in-school identity affects every aspect of my life and I have endured more homophobic comments than I ever had before.

Montreal is widely regarded as a progressive and an inclusive hub for Queer culture, with a strong Queer community and visible Queer representation in politics and media. However, some argue that Montreal's reputation as a Queer-friendly city is overstated and that there is still much work to be done to address issues like discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia (Chanaday, 2022). On the other hand, some regions of Quebec may have a more conservative outlook and therefore be less accepting of Queer identities. This divide can also be observed in schools throughout Quebec, where the level of Queer acceptance and inclusion can vary significantly depending on the community's values (Richard, 2014). For example, some religious schools may have policies that discriminate against Queer individuals, while others may have supportive initiatives and programs aimed at promoting inclusion and understanding (Richard, 2014). This highlights the need for continued efforts to promote education and awareness-raising to foster a more inclusive society for all.

In my self-study I shared the importance of inclusivity, stating that Queer teachers can feel supported by inclusive policies, resources, and professional relationships with colleagues like when I organized a Queer prom and "I was beyond grateful for the support I received." I also emphasize the importance of leadership in creating a Queer-inclusive environment, such as the administration's support for my Queer-Straight Alliance initiative where "they provided resources, guidance, and even helped me secure a meeting space."

The ongoing struggle for Queer acceptance in Quebec emphasises the importance of promoting diversity and tolerance, recognizing the unique challenges faced by Queer individuals and working towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

Advocacy

One of the participants, Vinh, is an early career teacher who currently teaches adults at a private adult school. Vinh's experiences are thus distinct from those of the other participants and Vinh was able to shed light on the effects the curriculum has on them as a Queer individual. They talked about their experiences navigating their identity at work and how the current curriculum is heteronormative and binary, lacking inclusivity. Vinh recognises the need for change and plans to bring it up again when they are more confident in their job security status. They intend to make recommendations to include more inclusive language in the curriculum and representation and recognize doing so may be seen as taking a risk. For example, Vinh spoke about a class they taught on family structure, in which students identified the nuclear family as the norm. Vinh stated, "I also think it's really important to be an advocate for change and to create a more inclusive environment for all teachers, regardless of their sexual orientation." Vinh's words demonstrate the critical role that Queer teachers can play in advocating for positive change in their workplace and beyond. For instance, teaching the use of they/them pronouns remains grounds for debate particularly amongst ESL and ELA teachers, Vinh and Miles stated. I shared with the group that these workbooks that are provided to us are covered with heteronormative situations and that there's no representation of Queer people. I further shared my sentiment that, "in science books, particularly in section on sexuality and STBBI's the talk of Queer relations is non-existent, and that many Queer students do not receive the sexual education that they need to make the best

decision for themselves." Queer teachers can help create more inclusive environments for all individuals and reduce the challenges associated with negotiating personal and professional identities by being change agents. However, more often than not, these changes are not easily accepted within the educational milieu.

Advocating for Queer rights as a Queer teacher can be difficult, especially when one's employment status is uncertain or temporary. Temporary or substitute teachers may be reluctant to speak out on behalf of their Queer students for fear of being fired or not being rehired. A permanent job position, on the other hand, can provide more control and stability in advocating for the needs of Queer students. Schneider and Dimito (2008) discovered that permanent teachers who identified as Queer were more likely than temporary teachers to advocate for Queer students. Their findings stated that only approximately 20% of participants associated job security to their coming out. Furthermore, Schneider and Dimito (2008) discovered that the "individuals who were more out were more likely to be active, to report harassment, to be aware of resources, and to feel supported and protected." (p. 64) However, they go on to say that "nearly half of teacher participants indicated that they needed more information about effective strategies." (p. 62) Of the teacher participants in the focus group, Miles occupied a permanent teaching role, while myself and Vinh hold long term (non-permanent) replacements. Eli primarily works as a substitute teacher.

Miles spoke about an experience where they wanted to hold an inclusive writing workshop, but the administration prevented them from doing so, this despite Miles' permanent position. This demonstrates the need for more proactive measures to promote workplace inclusion.

> The first thing that I did at the beginning of the year was to see my vice principal and I told him I wanted to do a workshop about inclusive writing. He said to wait and make sure we got the approval from the school board's sexologist … All I wanted to do was a writing workshop - there's nothing sexual about that. - Miles

For the focus group participants, advocacy can look as simple as adding their pronouns to an email signature or introducing themselves to new groups in a way that highlights their comfort and respect for others.

> For us, what we decided to do is include our pronouns in our signature. That is either going to make the parents question themselves, or either our colleagues question themselves - why did they include that? - Miles

Eli uses their classroom as a space for advocacy serving as a safe haven for many Queer students. They consider themselves an open book; their identity does not change at work, but they do not provide information if no one asks. Queerness is not a personality trait; it is simply a part of their identity.

In my self-study I mentioned that by being present and outspoken, I hope to contribute to making the school a more inclusive and accepting place for all students. My identity can thereby significantly impact the school culture. It's not just about setting an example for Queer students and providing a safe environment for them, but also about challenging heteronormative assumptions and creating space for more inclusive and diverse perspectives. I acknowledged in

my situation the responsibility of being an openly Queer teacher and a role model for students: "As Queer child, you always remember the teacher who was Queer, and every word they said and everything they did, because it was someone you could look up to, and realise that you're not alone." For me - this is advocacy.

The participants unanimously concluded that it is critical for schools to foster a safe and welcoming environment in which all teachers, regardless of employment status, feel empowered to advocate for their Queer students.

7.2 Supporting Queer Teachers

The "Token Queer Person" Experience

Eli mentioned that they often become the "token Queer person" among their colleagues, which they described as being frequently approached with questions about the Queer experience. This can be both a challenge and a responsibility, as they feel obligated to educate others while also acknowledging that their experience does not represent all Queer people.

> I kind of become the token Queer person in the sense that if they have any questions about anything regarding Queer them or just like, they just always come to me, you know? … For our colleagues to just come to you rather than do the research themselves, which can get a little annoying … Makes the Queer experience smaller because ultimately, they're just talking to me about my Queer experience, and I know that mine is not the same as [someone else]'s - Eli

Both Eli and Vinh raised the issue of those who identify as Queer bearing the burden of educating others about the Queer experience. They believe that it is not the responsibility of Queer people to educate others, and that this should be a global effort.

> I feel like I am being the whistleblower kind of person; the one that's on the soapbox. It should not fall upon people that identify as Queer, to be the only ones who are being the voice – Vinh

Eli and Vinh mentioned that when colleagues seek information from a single Queer person, it can lead to a limited understanding of what it means to be Queer. This can be frustrating because they believe their colleagues should be conducting their own research to gain a better understanding of the diverse experiences of the Queer community.

> I cannot speak about being a gay man because I'm not gay and I'm not a man. So I can't speak about that. I can only speak about my experience. - Vinh

Being the only Queer teacher in a school can be isolating and overwhelming. When the responsibility of advocating for Queer rights is placed solely on the shoulders of a single Queer teacher, it can result in enormous pressure and emotional labour. The participating teachers were frequently viewed as the school's token Queer person and called upon to speak on behalf of all Queer students. This burden can be especially difficult for educators who are still struggling with their own identities and may have not had the opportunity to fully process their own experiences of discrimination and marginalisation. Tokenism and "the pressure to represent the Queer

community can be an exhausting experience," stated Miles. It is critical for schools to recognise the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment for all Queer students, rather than relying solely on one person to advocate for their rights. Schools can relieve the pressure on Queer teachers and create a more supportive environment for everyone involved by implementing policies and practices that promote inclusion and equity for all. In my self-study I shared how as the only "out" Queer person in my school community, I frequently feel excluded and different from my colleagues. This isolation can be emotionally challenging, as I navigate my daily experiences and interactions with the knowledge that my life experiences and perspective are fundamentally different from those around me.

In the focus group sessions, I also spoke about the emotional work that comes with being Queer teacher and the "need" to support all Queer students, accommodate them through their disclosure of coming out and in many cases help them manage their emotional trauma. All of the focus group participants agreed that more resources need to be provided to these students in order to alleviate the pressure on Queer teachers and themselves alike.

Training & Professional Development

Training and professional development were essential components for establishing safe and welcoming schools for all students, including Queer students. Miles had pointed out that school administrators were frequently overburdened with responsibilities and might not have prioritized supporting Queer students and teachers. This was where professional development could come in. As Vinh had suggested, schools could use existing professional development days to host workshops that provided teachers with the resources they needed to answer students' questions

about Queer identities and issues. This benefited not only Queer students and staff but also created a more welcoming environment for all.

Providing opportunities for professional development sent a strong message to Queer teachers that they were valued and supported. According to Vinh, it was critical for school leaders to take action and demonstrate their commitment to creating an inclusive environment. This could be accomplished by providing teachers with resources and training to help them understand and support Queer students. Feeling heard and being taken into account as a Queer teacher could be a powerful motivator and lead to increased confidence in advocating for Queer rights within the school.

> And it would also show the rest of the staff that they take it to heart, and that they care and about everyone being on the same page... it would just feel like as a Queer teacher, that you're being heard and that you're being taken into consideration. That's one thing I think is really lacking and really important - Vinh

Professional development could also help Queer students gain parental and family support. As Eli had pointed out, requiring parental approval could be a deterrent for students who felt unsafe coming out at home. Professional development could help teachers communicate effectively with parents while also fostering understanding and support for Queer students.

The teachers had emphasised the importance of inclusivity and support for Queer students in the school setting. Vinh and Eli both emphasised the importance of providing teachers with resources

and support in order to create a safe and accepting environment for all students. "Things like [providing resources for teachers] would...solve the problem of not putting Queer teachers in the spotlight of having to always address it, because any teacher would be able to," Vinh had said. This statement emphasised the burden placed on Queer teachers to be the sole advocates for Queer students, as well as the importance of equipping all teachers with the knowledge and resources to support these students.

The significance of inclusive sex education was also emphasised in the discussion. Miles had discussed their positive experience with a sex education workshop that included information on Queer topics. "It was included in the Sex Education Teachers' Toolkit. It included not only sex education, but also Queer information." Eli added to this by expressing surprise at the inclusion of gender-inclusive sex education, saying, "they go over how to not gender Sex Ed too, which blew my mind completely because I had never thought about that." I shared with the group the surprising sentiment that I had heard colleagues share, such as, "It’s not our job to teach this gay stuff."

The discussion also touched on gender identity acceptance in schools. Vinh and Eli had talked about their experiences with trans students and the varying levels of support they had received in various school boards and service centers. Vinh emphasised the importance of accepting and accommodating a student's gender identity, whether or not their name had been legally changed, stating that "if someone identifies as a certain gender, then that's what they are." Eli, on the other hand, gave examples of teachers who had refused to recognise a student's preferred name and gender identity, highlighting the need for more education and support in this area.

For my part, I had had the chance to interact with numerous teachers that were passionate about their students. To my surprise, several of these teachers had stated a tremendous desire to find out more about Queer students in order to find ways to help them more effectively. This pattern had emerged at numerous schools, demonstrating an increasing awareness of and dedication to diversity. Professional development on topics like pronouns, sexual orientation, gender identity, and coming out was something teachers were requesting. I had heard from many teachers who said they simply didn't feel confident enough to handle these situations. Seeing so many teachers pursuing their education on their own initiative, without institutional support, was both heartening and disappointing. Schools must, in my opinion, recognise this need and take the appropriate steps to provide teachers with the support and resources they required. How teachers might confront and stop homophobic and transphobic speech and behaviour both within and outside the classroom should be covered in teacher training and professional development. By providing teachers with the knowledge and tools they required to support their Queer students more effectively, we could foster a learning climate that was more tolerant and understanding for everyone. Considering the rising need for such training, it was my view and recommendation that schools, school boards, and service centers took action and made investments in the long-term success of both teachers and students.

Overall, the discussion emphasised the importance of ongoing teacher training and professional development in order to provide inclusive and supportive environments for Queer students. "It's important to recognise that students may not have the support they need at home," Eli said, "and that schools have a responsibility to provide that support."

Providing Students with Resources

According to research, creating an inclusive and supportive school environment for queer students had improved the emotional well-being of queer teachers. Fish and Russell (2020) had discovered that when schools had policies and practices that promoted Queer inclusion, teachers and students experienced lower levels of burnout, depression, and anxiety. Furthermore, when their schools provided resources and support for Queer students, Queer teachers reported feeling more supported and affirmed (Kosciw et al., 2020). According to Marx and Kettrey (2016), Queer student groups were associated with a more positive school climate, which was linked to greater well-being among Queer students. This positive climate also benefited queer teachers, who then faced less discrimination and felt more at ease discussing their identities (Kosciw et al. 2016). Overall, providing resources and support for Queer students benefited not only them directly, but also helped to create a more supportive and welcoming school environment for Queer teachers.

As this thesis had reviewed, there had been a growing awareness in recent years of the importance of providing a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students, including those who identified as Queer. While there had been progress in terms of recognizing and accepting Queer students, there was still a long way to go in terms of supporting Queer teachers.

The teachers emphasised the importance of providing students with resources and information on sex education and Queer issues. Vinh believed that providing resources to students would demonstrate to staff that they cared about everyone being on the same page. "And it would also demonstrate to the rest of the staff that they take it seriously and care about everyone being on the

same page," Miles had said, “So that is what I would do as well, and it would work. As a Queer teacher, you just want to know that you're being heard and taken seriously.”

Schools could empower students with accurate and reliable information and support them in their personal and educational journeys by providing them with resources. Students could be encouraged to attend workshops and discussions to learn how to support Queer teachers and peers. Furthermore, schools could provide students with access to Queer-affirming books, films, and other materials to help them better understand their Queer identities and experiences.

It was critical to provide education and training for both staff and students in order to promote gender identity acceptance in schools. Staff could be trained to use inclusive language and to recognize and address transphobia. Furthermore, schools could provide resources to help students understand gender identity and become supportive allies to their Queer peers.

Balancing boundaries between teachers and students

Setting boundaries can be difficult for Queer teachers when providing advice and resources to their students, especially when dealing with sensitive topics like sex education and Queer issues. Teachers who provide social support to Queer students tend to experience more emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lower personal accomplishment (Russell & Fish, 2016). To avoid personal and emotional burnout, it is critical to establish clear boundaries between teachers and students. Queer teachers must learn to strike a balance between being supportive and maintaining a professional relationship with their students. "We're not their friends," Vinh says. “We are not among them. It’s as if we are not their teachers. As a result, if they ask specific

questions, we cannot cross the line." The teachers agreed that Queer teachers are often challenged at maintaining an appropriate distance from their students while still providing a supportive environment.

I have always tried to maintain a sense of professionalism and respect within my classroom, but I can't help but feel a lack of respect when students inquire about my sexual orientation. This behavior, which feels to me highly inappropriate, has become increasingly normal and acceptable, which is disheartening. There seems to be a double standard compared to my heterosexual colleagues, where students do not attempt to gain power over them through invasive questioning. Recently, I experienced a classroom situation where students were asking me questions unrelated to the lesson, such as my opinion on the number of genders, whether trans women are real women, and other provocative queries seemingly designed to anger me. This occurred during a class focused on solutions and concentration, making these questions wholly inappropriate. When I communicated my concerns with the parents, they defended their child's behavior, stating that such questions were not inappropriate to ask a teacher. The fact that these personal and sensitive topics have become normalized as points of discussion in an irrelevant context is disconcerting and highlights the need for a greater understanding of boundaries and respect within the classroom, ensuring that all teachers, regardless of their sexual or gender orientation, can maintain a professional and supportive learning environment.

Inclusive policies and curriculums that promote acceptance and diversity can assist Queer teachers in establishing boundaries and creating an environment in which students can feel safe and supported. According to a study conducted by Kosciw et al. (2019), schools with comprehensive

policies protecting Queer students and staff experienced fewer incidents of bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, student-led organisations such as gay-straight alliances can provide a safe space for Queer students while also promoting a positive school climate (Kosciw et al., 2019).

It is critical to set clear boundaries while also providing a safe environment for all students. Inclusive policies and curriculums can contribute to the creation of a safe and respectful environment for all students, including those who identify as queer. To avoid emotional exhaustion and personal burnout, teachers must strike a balance between support and professionalism.

7.3 Belonging

Accommodating Queer Teachers

"I think the best you can offer is your support. You being there and listening and trying to figure out a solution."- Miles

The importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for new Queer teachers is highlighted in this section. Vinh stated that they perceived the school environment for new Queer teachers to be "super smooth," implying that they did not anticipate any difficulties or challenges for their new colleagues.

Eli, on the other hand, warned of the possibility of a hostile environment for new Queer teachers. They stated that the school board for which they work is not good at accommodating new teachers,

and they would not want to be a new Queer teacher in this environment. This suggests that some school boards or service centers may not be providing adequate support and accommodations for new teachers, which can make it difficult for Queer teachers.

It is important to note, however, that the lack of support and accommodation for new teachers is not unique to Queer teachers. Miles agreed that their school board for which they work is generally poor at accommodating new teachers, highlighting a larger issue in the school system. Improving support systems for new teachers is critical because it can contribute to the creation of a welcoming and supportive environment for all teachers, regardless of sexual orientation or identity.

Miles stated that they would offer support and listen to any issues that the new teacher may face, emphasising the importance of creating a community that is willing to listen and help. Eli also spoke about their personal experience serving as a "welcome waggon" for a new Queer teacher at their school. This type of assistance can be critical in creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for new Queer teachers because it demonstrates that the school community is willing to go above and beyond to provide support and assistance.

While some schools may not provide adequate support and accommodations for new teachers, it is critical to foster a community that is willing to listen and assist. Offering support and acting as a "welcome waggon" for new Queer teachers, as well as improving support systems for all new teachers, can be part of this. Schools can attract and retain a diverse range of talented teachers by creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, ultimately benefiting the entire school community.

Inclusion & Exclusion

Inclusion and exclusion in the school environment are two sides of a complex and multifaceted issue. Vinh spoke about feeling excluded from the government's Ministry of Education. According to Vinh, "the government, the Ministry of Education... is where I find that this sense of school community to be lacking, where they are always complaining about teacher shortages, and yet they literally have a law in Quebec, to exclude people from working in this field." Vinh also mentioned that the recent changes in the Ethics and Religious Cultures course are not encouraging for Queer teachers or minority teachers, as they feel they are "not even protected at the highest possible level." Vinh also felt that certain school board policies, even if implemented, are never followed up on or supported - making them more often than not, useless.

Miles, on the other hand, shared their experience of feeling included in their school environment. Miles mentioned a moment when a science teacher asked them and their ex-girlfriend to explain the process of having a child as a same-sex couple. Miles expressed that "it warmed my heart that they were willing to do that and take the time" and that this moment made them feel visible and included in the school community. However, Miles also shared a moment of exclusion when the school did not take any action on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Lesbophobia and Transphobia. Miles stated, "on the day of 17th of May, which was the day against homophobia, they didn't do anything. They felt like it wasn't important." I personally shared in my self-study that I have felt this feeling many times, "some schools just don't think that these days are important - they just want to look good for Facebook."

I also spoke to the moments of inclusion, stating that throughout my journey, I have been fortunate to encounter allies who have actively supported my vision for equity and inclusion. These individuals, regardless of their own sexual orientation, have contributed to creating a more inclusive environment for me by offering encouragement and support. Their presence has been invaluable in helping me feel like I belong in the school community.

The experiences of inclusion and exclusion in school environments vary greatly and can range from the micro-level of immediate school communities to the macro-level of government policies and actions. In conclusion, these experiences show that while there are moments of inclusion for Queer teachers in schools, there are also moments of exclusion, especially at the macro-level, and it is important for schools and the government to recognize and address these issues.

7.4 Post-Focus Group Reflections

Vinh, Eli and Miles noted that despite differences in teaching environments, a common thread existed among the experiences of Queer teachers. Vinh mentioned how it was "upsetting to hear" about derogatory comments towards the Queer community, while Eli pointed out that the "hetero-normative standard still exists and affects various Queers similarly." The experiences of Queer teachers are not unique to their individual contexts, but rather shaped by larger societal norms and values.

Both Miles and Eli pointed out that school administrators and the education system as a whole make it difficult to be inclusive of Queer teachers and maintain a safe environment for students. Vinh noted that "the fact that these events are happening and aren’t given any consequences is

concerning," while Eli pointed out the "level of apathy and lack of initiative on their part shows where others priorities lie." Addressing issues related to Queer teachers in schools requires systemic change, rather than just individual efforts.

Both Vinh and Eli highlighted the need for education and training to address issues related to Queer teachers in schools. Vinh pointed out that "if society, at the macro level, is not inclusive when it comes to Queer individuals, we cannot expect organizations, at the meso level, and individuals, at the micro level, to be the same," while Eli argued that "measures need to be taken to educate the adults in charge of the formative years of today's youth." Education and training are important for creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for Queer teachers and students.

Both Vinh and Eli noted that participating in the Queer teacher focus group in the present study verged on being a therapeutic experience. Eli mentioned that "simply speaking with other Queer teachers was almost therapeutic," while Vinh noted that the experience was fulfilling because they had not had the opportunity to meet other Queer teachers in their school community. This suggests that creating spaces for Queer teachers to connect and share their experiences can have positive emotional and psychological effects.

"It made me realize that I am not alone in my challenges." - *Eli*

Overall, the participants' responses highlighted the importance of systemic change, education and training, and creating supportive spaces for Queer teachers in schools. By addressing these issues, we can create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for Queer teachers and students alike.

Chapter 8 - Discussion & Conclusion

8.1 Review of Findings

This chapter presents the findings of my research, both from the self-study and focus group portions of this project. As discussed in chapter 7, the research was conducted with Queer teacher participants in diverse school contexts - exploring the ways in which they negotiate their identities, come out, experience school culture, find support, and advocate for inclusive change. My research questions were as follows:

> (1) How do Queer teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities with respect to their Queerness?
>
> (2) How do Queer teachers feel supported with respect to their identities, or find support?

Negotiating personal and professional identities with respect to Queerness

The participants reported that negotiating their personal and professional identities was often a complex process, influenced by factors such as their level of outness, the school culture, and their own self-acceptance. Myself and some of the participants have previously experienced the feeling of walking on eggshells, trying to balance being true to myself and not risking my job or relationships with colleagues. This tension often led the Queer teachers to feeling like they had to conceal or downplay their Queer identity or limit their advocacy for Queer students and issues.

Queer teachers often engage in "identity work" - a process of constructing, reconstructing, and negotiating their identity in response to the social and cultural contexts they inhabit (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). This identity work can be both empowering and challenging, as Queer teachers strive

to reconcile their authentic selves with the expectations and norms of the teaching profession. It also highlights the importance of creating safe and supportive school environments where Queer teachers can express their full selves without fear of backlash or discrimination.

In Chapter 4 of my self-study, I delved into my personal journey as a Queer individual navigating my identity as a teacher, highlighting experiences from working at summer camps, studying at McGill University, and stepping into my first teaching role. During my early teaching career, I struggled with the balance between professionalism and personalism concerning my Queerness. I recounted an experience with a professor who did not support my openness about my identity, leading to feelings of rejection and not belonging. I shared my decision to come out as a Queer teacher during a job interview, emphasizing the importance of finding a school that values inclusivity and diversity. I acknowledged the intersectionality of my whiteness and Queerness, recognizing the privileges that enabled me to ask about inclusivity during the interview. Reflecting on the factors I considered before coming out to my school community, I admitted that I did not consider my own well-being and happiness during the process, which was an important lesson learned.

The decision to come out as Queer is a highly personal and context-dependent process, influenced by a range of factors such as the school culture, the community context, and the individual's own safety and well-being. Queer teachers in the study noted that coming out was often a gradual and ongoing process, involving careful consideration of the potential risks and benefits. Miles shared, "I came out to a few close colleagues first, and then gradually started being more open about it. It was scary, but also liberating to be able to bring my full self to work." Coming out can have both

positive and negative effects on the well-being and job satisfaction of Queer teachers. While being out can lead to greater authenticity and connectedness, it can also result in increased stigma, discrimination, and harassment (Vaccaro, 2012). Schools can play an important role in creating supportive environments where Queer teachers feel comfortable coming out and are protected from discrimination and harassment.

Queer teachers in the study reported that their identity and experiences outside of school were also important factors in their negotiation of their professional identity. In my own case, my Queer identity is not just a part of who I am at work - it's a part of my whole self, and it affects how I interact with colleagues, students, and parents. All of the Queer teachers in this study also reported seeking out Queer community and support outside of school, in order to find validation and connection.

Through the process of self-study, I learned the importance of embracing my Queer identity and being true to myself. I discovered that acknowledging and accepting myself allowed me to find happiness and fulfillment in both my personal and professional life.

Queer teachers in the study navigated their personal and professional identities in a variety of ways, often seeking out support and community both within and outside of school. They grappled with the tension between their personal identities and the expectations and norms of their professional roles, and often had to make difficult decisions about when and how to disclose their identities. Queer teachers often experience a tension between their personal identities and their professional roles, and must navigate complex dynamics in order to reconcile the two (Brockenbrough, 2012).

This can include challenges around disclosure, navigating relationships with colleagues and students, and balancing personal values with institutional expectations.

Supporting and Finding Support for Queer Teachers

The school culture can have a significant impact on the experiences of Queer teachers, including their sense of belonging, professional development opportunities, and the support and advocacy they receive. Queer teachers in the study reported a range of experiences with school culture, from supportive and inclusive to hostile and discriminatory. Vinh noted, "I feel like I'm always on the lookout for signs of homophobia or transphobia, and it can be exhausting. But when I do find allies and supportive colleagues, it makes all the difference."

Research has shown that school culture is a critical factor in creating inclusive environments for Queer students and teachers (Kosciw et al., 2020). Schools with a strong commitment to equity and diversity, and explicit policies and practices for Queer inclusion, are more likely to attract and retain Queer teachers and provide a sense of community and support. However, even in schools with positive cultures, there can be challenges and microaggressions that require ongoing advocacy and education.

In Chapter 5 of my self-study, I explored the unique challenges Queer teachers often face, such as censoring their lives and feeling the responsibility of being an openly Queer teacher and a role model for students. I acknowledged the support Queer teachers can receive from inclusive policies, resources, and professional relationships with colleagues, drawing on my experience of organizing

a Queer prom. I emphasized the crucial role of leadership in creating a Queer-inclusive environment, sharing the administration's support for my Queer-Straight Alliance initiative.

Queer teachers in the study identified a range of supports that were helpful in navigating their personal and professional identities, including mentorship, allyship, professional development opportunities, and Queer affinity groups. Research has shown that support and mentorship can be critical factors in the success and retention of Queer teachers in the profession (Kosciw et al. 2016). Schools can provide this support through initiatives such as Queer affinity groups, allyship training, and mentorship programs that connect Queer teachers with experienced mentors. Providing opportunities for professional development and leadership can also help queer teachers feel valued and empowered in their roles.

Despite the many supports and opportunities for advocacy, Queer teachers in the study also identified a range of challenges and barriers to their inclusion in schools. These challenges included microaggressions and discrimination, lack of institutional support, fear of retaliation or backlash, and concerns about job security. Vinh noted, "I'm always worried that if I speak out too much, or make too much noise about Queer issues, I'll become a target." Queer teachers continue to face significant challenges and barriers to their full inclusion in schools, including discrimination, harassment, and a lack of institutional support (Kosciw et al., 2016). These challenges can lead to high levels of stress and burnout and can have a negative impact on the well-being and job satisfactions. Addressing these challenges requires systemic change and a commitment to equity and inclusion at all levels of the educational system.

Queer teachers in the study identified a strong desire to be leaders and advocates for Queer inclusion in schools, both for themselves and for their students. Eli noted, "I feel like I have a responsibility to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for Queer students and colleagues - it's not just about me, it's about creating a better future for everyone." Queer teachers can be powerful agents of change in promoting Queer inclusion in schools, particularly when they are supported and empowered to lead (Brockenbrough, 2012). Schools can support this leadership by providing opportunities for professional development and leadership, and by creating spaces for Queer teachers to share their experiences and advocate for change. Creating a culture of inclusivity and respect can also encourage all educators to become advocates for Queer inclusion. In Chapter 6 of my self-study, I shared my experiences as a Queer teacher, discussing moments of exclusion and awkwardness, such as being forced to "come out" during school mixers and feeling like a "special exhibition at the zoo" when my personal life was scrutinized. I also mentioned my feelings of isolation and difference due to being the lone Queer person in my school community. However, I shared moments of inclusion and support, particularly from colleagues and administration who actively worked to create a more inclusive environment, such as finding funds for a Queer-Straight Alliance and organizing Queer events like movie nights and proms.

Queer teachers in the study also spoke about the importance of schools accommodating their needs, particularly in terms of their identities and experiences. This includes access to gender-neutral bathrooms and changing rooms, sensitivity training for colleagues, and flexible policies around dress and appearance. At times I have felt like I'm always having to explain or justify my identity, and it would be so much easier if the school had policies and practices in place that recognized and respected me.

Queer teachers in the study reported experiencing both inclusion and exclusion in their schools, depending on the context and individuals involved. While many schools have policies and initiatives in place to promote Queer inclusion, Queer teachers still reported experiencing microaggressions, discrimination, and exclusion from certain social circles. At times we have all felt like there's a divide between the people who are actively working towards Queer inclusion and the people who don't really care or actively resist it.

8.2 Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study is the small sample size of the focus group. With only three participants plus myself, the study's findings are certainly not representative of all Queer teachers' experiences. However, given the similar geographical location and varieties of schools, the study does offer a portrait of the lives of Queer teachers in Greater Montreal. A larger sample size would have allowed for greater variation in experiences and a better understanding of the population of interest's range of opinions and perspectives. The small sample size, however, is not uncommon in qualitative research, which prioritises in-depth exploration of a smaller group over broader generalizability.

Another limitation of this study is that it only included teachers from a similar geographic area. Although I am located in a more rural area compared to the participants who teach in Montreal, we are all located within a 100 km radius in Quebec. While this was not done intentionally, it reduces regional differences thus limited generalizability. Teachers' experiences in different regions and different countries may differ from one to another and the findings may not be

applicable to all Queer teachers. To better understand regional differences in experiences, future research could include a broader range of geographical areas, including linguistic and religious based school boards and service centers.

Another limitation of research in this area is the tendency to focus on white, middle-class, and able-bodied individuals, which can result in a lack of understanding of the experiences of individuals from marginalized communities as well as intersectional identities. This study, although not intentional, only examined the experiences of white Queer individuals whose experiences may fail to capture the experiences of Queer people of color who face different forms of discrimination and marginalization. Future research should aim to reach out more to these communities in the recruitment phase.

Another limitation that could have influenced the study's findings is selection bias. The focus group was limited to English-speaking teachers. Teachers who exclusively spoke French were excluded from the study, which may have skewed the results and limited the diversity of perspectives included. Future research should aim to include participants who speak different languages or provide translations for participants who are not fluent in English to reduce selection bias.

When considering Queer experiences, one significant concern is the potential for tokenism, wherein Queer identities are oversimplified or reduced to stereotypes in the educational context. Additionally, focusing solely on the experiences of Queer teachers may inadvertently marginalize other intersectional identities. It is also worth noting that Queer experiences and identities are not

monolithic, and so a single narrative/self-study cannot hope to fully encapsulate the complexity and diversity within the Queer community.

8.3 Implications

According to the findings of this study, there is a need for more support and inclusion for Queer teachers in school settings. This study provides insight into the need for policy and practice changes within schools to promote diversity and support all members of the school community by highlighting the challenges that Queer teachers face in navigating their identities.

One implication of this research is the need to establish Queer teacher focus groups and spaces. These spaces can offer a safe space for Queer teachers to share their experiences and strategies for navigating their identities in the classroom. Furthermore, these focus groups can be used as a platform for school advocacy and change, promoting the creation of more inclusive and supportive environments for all members of the school community.

Another implication of this study is that schools must recognise and address the challenges that Queer teachers face. By training administrators and colleagues on how to be allies to Queer individuals, schools can develop more inclusive policies and practices that promote diversity and support Queer teachers. This training can help to make the school environment more supportive and inclusive for all members of the school community.

Furthermore, this study emphasises the importance of ongoing research into the experiences of Queer teachers in school settings. Researchers can identify additional strategies for creating

supportive and inclusive school environments for Queer teachers and their students by further investigating the experiences of Queer teachers.

The findings of this study have important implications for Queer teachers and the broader education community. Schools can create more inclusive policies and practices that promote diversity and support all members of the school community by recognising and addressing the challenges faced by Queer teachers. The proposed Queer teacher focus groups and spaces have the potential to create a supportive community as well as a platform for advocacy and change, resulting in positive change for Queer teachers and their students.

8.4 Future Directions

I am passionate about promoting diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of life and feel as though this study has begun to shed some light on the experiences of Queer teachers, highlighting the challenges they face in the classroom and the strategies they employ to navigate their identities. It is clear that Queer teachers require more support and inclusion in school settings, and this study can help guide future efforts to address this issue.

The idea of forming Queer teacher focus groups and spaces appeals to the participants and myself greatly. I, personally, understand how isolating it can feel to navigate your identity in spaces where you don't see yourself represented as a member of the Queer community. These focus groups and spaces show promise in offering a supportive community for Queer teachers to share their experiences and strategies for navigating their identities in schools. This is critical in creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment for Queer teachers and students.

It's exciting to consider future research into the effectiveness of these focus groups in various contexts, such as schools with varying levels of support for Queer people. Furthermore, virtual Queer teacher focus groups are intriguing because they could provide support to Queer teachers who are unable to attend in-person meetings and provide support to underserved and isolated areas.

The study's findings have significant implications for institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities. As an education professional, I believe that colleges and universities would benefit from incorporating the study's findings into their policies and practices. Creating Queer faculty focus groups and spaces can provide support and advocacy opportunities for Queer faculty while also promoting diversity and inclusivity on campus.

Similarly, teaching administrators and colleagues how to be allies to Queer people can help to create a more supportive and inclusive school environment for all members of the school community. Institutions must continue to prioritise diversity and inclusivity in order to create a welcoming environment for all.

This study's findings have broader implications for academia. I believe that incorporating Queer diversity and inclusion training into teacher education programmes is critical in preparing future teachers to create inclusive classroom environments that celebrate diversity. Incorporating Queer teacher narratives into coursework can also provide future teachers with a more complete understanding of the challenges that Queer teachers face.

Future research could look into the experiences of Queer teachers in a variety of academic settings, including colleges and universities. Furthermore, research into the impact of Queer teacher identity on academic outcomes such as student engagement and academic achievement could provide important insights into the value of diversity and inclusivity in schools.

8.5 Recommendations

The findings of the study on Queer teachers' identity navigation in school settings inspired me as someone who is passionate about promoting diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of life. The study highlighted the difficulties Queer teachers faced in navigating their identities in school settings, as well as the strategies they used to overcome these difficulties. Based on these findings, I have further suggestions that I believe could help promote a more inclusive and supportive environment for Queer teachers.

Recommendation #1: Establish Queer Teacher Focus Groups and Spaces

Based on this research, one of my recommendations is to establish Queer teacher focus groups and spaces. According to the study, Queer teachers frequently feel isolated and unsupported in school settings. Creating Queer-specific focus groups and spaces could provide a supportive community for Queer teachers to share their experiences and strategies for navigating their identities in schools. These focus groups and spaces can also serve as a venue for Queer teachers to advocate for change and promote diversity and inclusivity in the classroom. According to Ferfolja (2009), creating Queer teacher networks can provide a supportive community for Queer teachers while also advocating for Queer issues in schools. This recommendation is consistent with the research on social support and its beneficial effects on well-being and resilience (Heinrich & Gullone,

2006). Furthermore, the establishment of Queer teacher networks can be a powerful tool for effecting change in schools (Vaccaro, 2012).

Recommendation #2: Include Queer Diversity and Inclusion Training in Teacher Education Programs

My second recommendation is to incorporate Queer diversity and inclusion training into teacher education programmes. It is critical to prepare future teachers to create inclusive classroom environments that celebrate diversity in order to promote a more inclusive and supportive environment for Queer teachers and their students. Incorporating Queer teacher narratives into coursework can provide future teachers with a more in-depth understanding of the challenges that Queer teachers face, as well as how they can create more inclusive and supportive environments in their classrooms (Grace and Hill, 2004). According to research, including Queer students in teacher education programmes is critical for promoting a more inclusive school environment (Rodgers and Scott, 2009). They present evidence-based strategies for incorporating Queer inclusion into teacher education programmes, such as developing Queer-inclusive curricula and providing Queer awareness training to teachers. Similarly, Beemyn and Rankin (2011) propose practical strategies for increasing Queer inclusion in higher education settings, such as incorporating Queer issues into the curriculum, establishing Queer student organisations, and providing Queer sensitivity training for faculty and staff.

Recommendation #3: Make diversity and inclusivity a priority in institutional policies and practises

My third suggestion is that institutional policies and practices prioritise diversity and inclusivity. Institutional policies and practices can have a significant impact on Queer employees' workplace experiences (Griffith, 2002). Lloren & Parini (2017), provides examples of successful Queer inclusion initiatives in organisations, such as Queer employee resource groups and training for colleagues on Queer issues. Similarly, Russel et al. (2010) argue that promoting diversity and inclusivity in higher education necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes Queer friendly policies.

8.6 Conclusion

This study on Queer teachers' identity navigation in school settings highlighted the difficulties and success that Queer teachers face when navigating their identities in school settings. Based on these findings, I have identified personal recommendations for creating a more inclusive and the continuation of building supportive environment for Queer teachers, such as creating Queer teacher focus groups and spaces, incorporating Queer diversity and inclusion training into teacher education programmes, and prioritising diversity and inclusivity in institutional policies and practices. We can effect positive change for Queer teachers and students by implementing these recommendations, which promote diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of school life.

Ethics Board Approval

McGill University
Research Ethics Board Office
www.mcgill.ca/research/research/compliance/human

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

REB File Number:	22-08-044
Project Title:	Navigating Queer Teacher Identity: Perceptions and Realities
Student Principal Investigator:	Andrew Laplante
Department:	Integrated Studies in Education
Supervisor Name:	Professor Teresa Strong-Wilson
Sponsor/Funding Agency (if applicable):	

Research Team (if applicable):

Name	Affiliation

Approval Period:

FROM	TO
09-Jan-2023	08-Jan-2024

The *REB-2* reviewed and approved this project by Delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans.

* Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described.
* The PI must inform the REB if there is a termination or interruption of their affiliation with the University. The McGill REB approval is no longer valid once the PI is no longer a student or employee.
* An **Amendment** form must be used to submit any proposed modifications to the approved research. Modifications to the approved research must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented. Changes to funding or adding new funding to a previously unfunded study must be submitted as an Amendment.
* A **Continuing Review** form must be submitted before the above expiry date. Research cannot be conducted without a current ethics approval. Submit 2-3 weeks ahead of the expiry date.
A total of 5 renewals are permitted after which time a new application will need to be submitted.
* A **Termination** form must be submitted to inform the REB when a project has been completed or terminated.
* A **Reportable New Information** form must be submitted to report any unanticipated issues that may increase the risk level to participants or that may have other ethical implications or to report any protocol deviations that did not receive prior REB approval.
* The REB must be promptly notified of any new information that may affect the welfare or consent of participants.
* The REB must be notified of any suspension or cancellation imposed by a funding agency or regulatory body that is related to this study.
* The REB must be notified of any findings that may have ethical implications or may affect the decision of the REB.

Appendix A: Recruitment Message

Recruitment Message

Dear colleagues,

I am conducting a study that will look at how openly Queer teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities, their sense of belonging within schools and the ways Queer teachers feel supported in their school environments as part of my Master's thesis at the Faculty of Education, Department of Integrated Studies at McGill University.

My research investigates how Queer teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities. Participants will participate in two focus groups where 4-7 Queer teachers (along with myself), will discuss experiences of working as a Queer teacher, navigating personal and professional identities, the challenges facing Queer teachers and how to best support Queer teachers. The focus group will occur in Winter 2023 (ex. Late January 2023 and Early February 2023). Each focus group will last 45-60 minutes. Both focus groups will take place virtually, through a secured Zoom call that will be recorded for data analysis purposes. Additionally, the participant will be asked to engage in a follow up communication with the researcher through the form of an email in response to 3 prompts. The total time commitment is therefore approximately 2.5 to 3 hours.

Your views and insights will be very helpful in helping to understand how Queer teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities, something about which little is known. This will help inform others (e.g., other teachers, Queer and non-Queer; teacher leaders; policy makers) as well as establish directions for further research in the field of Queer teacher identity. The information collected will be presented to participants of our focus group and in the form of my Master's thesis, to the greater educational milieu.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (Andrew Laplante) at andrew.laplante@mail.mcgill.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson at teresa.strongwilson@mcgill.ca.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Andrew Laplante

McGill University

Department of Integrated Studies in Education

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Teacher Participants

Title of Research: Navigating Queer Teacher Identity: Perceptions and Realities

Researcher: Andrew Laplante
Department: Integrated Studies in Education
Contact Information: andrew.laplante@mail.mcgill.ca
Supervisor: Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson

Dear Participant,

I am conducting a study that will look at how openly Queer teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities, their sense of belonging within schools and the ways Queer teachers feel supported in their school environments as part of my Master's thesis at the Faculty of Education, Department of Integrated Studies at McGill University. Your participation in this study will help provide a valuable Queer perspective and practical suggestions for the field of education. Your input is critical in assisting researchers, educational leaders and practitioners in better understanding how Queer educators negotiate their personal and professional identities.

Teacher participants can be current and/or former-teachers who openly self-identify as Queer (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, nonbinary, genderqueer, +). Both public and private school teachers have been invited for this study. Four to seven teacher participants will participate in two focus groups (along with myself) to discuss experiences of being a Queer teacher, navigating personal and professional identities, the challenges facing Queer teachers and how to best support Queer teachers. The questions are provided below.

Two focus groups composed of the same 4-7 openly Queer teachers will happen in the Winter 2023 (e.g, one in January 2023 and one in February 2023). Each focus group will last 45-60 minutes. Both focus groups will take place virtually, through a secured Zoom call that will be recorded through Zoom. The recordings will be used for transcription and data analysis purposes only. Additionally, the participant will be asked to engage in a follow up communication with the researcher through the form of an email in response to 3 prompts (see below). The total time commitment is therefore approximately 2.5 to 3 hours.

Together as a group, in the focus groups, you will be asked semi-structured questions about how, as a self-identified Queer teacher, you negotiate your personal and professional identities. There is no correct or incorrect answer. You are encouraged to engage with the other participants, add your opinion or offer a different experience.

The recordings and transcriptions of the focus groups linking your real names to the pseudonyms and the institution name will be stored on my personal computer that is password protected. Only I, the researcher, will have access to the identifiable data (i.e., video files and record file). You will be de-identified (i.e., given a pseudonym) to protect your identity. The primary investigator will manually transcribe the focus group recordings; no cloud service will be used. The master file and the recordings will be destroyed 2 years after data collection for the study is completed. Your name and any other identifiable information will not be disclosed in research reports and published articles. Given the nature of focus groups, the use of your webcam is **strongly suggested**, however it is not required, and you may choose to leave your camera turned off if you wish.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. Please know that if you feel uncomfortable with any questions during either of the focus groups or in response to the prompts in the post-focus group email, you do not have to answer those questions. You always have the right to withdraw at any time without any penalty or prejudice. If you choose to withdraw from the focus group, you may decide to have parts of the data including your voice and comments to be redacted. The questions can be found below.

Privacy and confidentiality is not fully guaranteed due to the nature of focus group discussions. Participants will be asked to refrain from sharing any information with others outside the group

Your views and insights will be very helpful in helping to understand how Queer teachers negotiate their personal and professional identities, something about which little is known. This will help inform others (e.g., other teachers, Queer and non-Queer; teacher leaders; policy makers) as well as establish directions for further research in the field of Queer teacher identity. The information collected will be presented to participants of our focus group and in the form of my Master's thesis, to the greater educational milieu.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS:

Negotiating Personal and Professional Identities

1. How do you negotiate your personal and professional identities as a Queer teacher? Can you give one or two examples?
2. What factors did you consider, prior to making the decision to come out to your school community?
3. Are you aware of any other openly Queer colleagues? How do you believe being Queer influences your school culture?
4. How did your decision to come out as a teacher influenced your "out of school" identity?

Supporting Queer Teachers

5. What challenges do Queer educators tend to encounter?
6. What kinds of actions or situations involving leadership or professional relationships with colleagues have most supported you and your Queer identity?
7. If you are/were in a leadership position, what/how would you change in order to produce a more Queer inclusive environment?

Queer Teacher Belonging

8. How do you believe a new Queer teacher would be accommodated into your school community?

9. At what moments have you felt most included, and excluded, from your school community? Can you give an example?

Post-Focus Group Reflection Prompts (Email):

1. What struck you the most from your experience of participating in this focus group?
2. What were you surprised (or unsurprised) to learn from this experience?
3. What needs to happen next to ensure that Queer teachers feel more comfortable as teachers, teaching in schools?

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (Andrew Laplante) at andrew.laplante@mail.mcgill.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson at teresa.strongwilson@mcgill.ca.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Andrew Laplante
Department of Integrated Studies in Education

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form (cont.)

For the researcher: I have discussed with _____ (participant's name) the details in the informed consent form. I have asked if any questions remain and have answered their questions as best as possible.

_____ _____

Date Investigator's Signature

To the participants:

Please write yes or no for the following statements if you consent to participate in this study.

_____ I will participate in the first focus group.
_____ I will participate in the second focus group.
_____ I would like to participate without the use of my camera.
_____ I will participate in the writing of an email in response to 3 prompts.
_____ I consent that my de-identified data may be used for future, unspecified uses

Please read this document before agreeing to participate. Signing and submitting the consent form indicates that you consent to participate in this study. Please save or print a copy of this document to keep for your own reference. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information.

Name (in print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

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