# The Impact of Ontario Education Policies on Queer Issues in High School Curriculum

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# The Impact of Ontario Education Policies on Queer Issues in High School Curriculum

For:

## Ontario Public Interest Research Group Peterborough

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Advanced Studies in Social Justice and Feminism

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the healthy living sections of Ontario's Health and Physical Education curriculum for grades nine through twelve. It also looks at Ontario's Safe School Act as a foundation for individual Boards to create safe learning environments for all students. Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board's Equity and Diversity policy, Safe Schools Policy and the Selection of Learning Resources Policy are examined. It is concluded that O.P.I.R.G.'s proposed 'Queer Workshops' can be implemented in Peterborough high schools.

The curriculum and policies are conducive to the human rights of Queer students in local high schools. However, there needs to be more concrete wording of these documents to further protect their human rights and provide a more inclusive education for all students. This report recommends that provincial curriculum be more inclusive in providing 'Queer content'. The reason for this is because there is no direct acknowledgment of sexual orientation nor gender identity in the provincial curriculum. The primary recommendation suggested for the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board is to create an explicit anti-homophobia policy and to improve inclusiveness regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

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## Introduction

This report is a part of the "Queer Workshop" initiative of O.P.I.R.G. (Ontario Public Interest Research Group Peterborough). The intent of the report is to provide background information on local and provincial educational policies, along with the provincial curriculum that relate to queer youth in Ontario high schools. This report is contextualized by recent changes in 1995 and onwards in the Ontario education system. The intent of the report is to examine the policies and curriculum to determine how the content and structure of O.P.I.R.G.' s proposed "Queer Workshops" will be framed.

## A.1: Defining Key Terms

In a meeting in which I was present, language used in the classroom was a topic that arose during a round table discussion with teachers and community members from the Kawartha Pine Ridge District (2003). Teachers had different comfort levels when discussing queer issues in the classroom. Some teachers were only comfortable using the terms gay, lesbian and straight. Different teachers use a variety of terms pending on their own comfort levels and that of their students.

"Sexual orientation refers to the choice of sexual partners and is distinct from gender identity" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 1999:10). According to Margaret Schneider who works with queer youth in Toronto,

> Sexual orientation describes the degree to which an individual is attracted, erotically and romantically, to people of the same sex, to people of both sexes. Most cultures recognize two, and sometimes three, sexual orientations - homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality(1997:12).

She further explains that,

> Homosexuals are attracted primarily to people of the same sex; heterosexuals are attracted primarily to people of the opposite sex; bisexuals are attracted to both sexes. These definitions reflect the way in which sexual orientation is conceptualized in most cultures particularly in Western cultures(1997:62).

In the case of those who identify under the broad term of transgender, the terms used to describe sexual orientation may or may not be applicable.

It is important to note that gender identity is not the same as sexual orientation. Gender identity can be defined as:

> those characteristics that are linked to an individual' s intrinsic sense of self that is based on attributes reflected in the person' spsychological, behavioural and/or cognitive state. Gender identity may also refer to one' sintrinsic sense of manhood or womanhood. It is fundamentally different from, and not determinative of, sexual orientation (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 1999:9).

It is vital to note that gender identity can be a basis for discrimination.

> Transgender can be used as a general term for those people who are not comfortable with or who reject, in whole or in part, their birth-assigned gender identities. The category includes transsexuals, cross-dressers, intersexed individuals, ' drag queens' ,' drag kings' , and may also include female impersonators. It should be noted that each of these groups has distinct issues in relation to discrimination in society. The term 'transgendered' is, in effect, a form of shorthand that refers to a wide range of people and experiences (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 1999:8).

A report entitled "One Umbrella, Many People" from the Education Department of GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) notes that "[l]esbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are often grouped together because they are all targets of similar forms of discrimination (usually based on with the way they love and express their gender)". It is important to note that there is great diversity within ' LGBT' communities therefore one term may not be applicable to all.

It is important to define heterosexism, homophobia and transphobia when

discussing queer issues. The Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network' sweb page under the ' ResourceCenter' offers such definitions in the "Talking the Talk" information sheet. Homophobia "refers to a fear or hatred of homosexuality, especially in others, but also in oneself (internalized homophobia)" (January 14th, 2003). Transphobia is defined as "fear or hatred of transgender people; transphobia is manifested in a number of ways, including violence, harassment, and discrimination" (2003). It should be noted that those who experience homophobia, like transphobia may experience such similar negative effects. Heterosexism is defined as, "[b]ias against non-heterosexuals based on a belief in the superiority of heterosexuality. Heterosexism does not imply the same fear and hatred as homophobia" (2003).

Historically, the word queer has been used as degrading to those who are differ from sexual and gender ' norms'The Canadian Oxford Paperback Dictionary defines queer as:

> queer: 1. unnatural ; odd; eccentric 2. slang a (esp. of a man) homosexual. b of or pertaining to a homosexual or homosexuals. Although in recent years some homosexuals have reappropriated the word queer to refer to themselves; its use by others is still often offensive (Bisset, 2000: 836).

In this report the term ' queer' will be used in a positive manner as an umbrella term that encompasses sexual and gender identities such as lesbian, bisexual, gay, transsexual and transgender.

## Section A.2: Why Address Queer Issues?

It is often assumed that school settings are 'hetero space' .This means that there is the assumption that all teachers, students and staff are heterosexual. This statement was reflected in an informal meeting by concerned teachers of the Kawartha

Pine Ridge District School Board who were well aware of the the heterosexism and homophobia present within their classrooms (2003). "The reality remains that most schools are not gay-friendly environments" (Galt, 1998).

There are many reasons why youth are silenced in regards to their sexual identity. Jackie West claims that dominant heterosexual norms inhibit youth from fully expressing their sexual identities. Furthermore, social inequalities relating to race, class, gender, faith, ethnicity and ability are also interconnected to sexual identities. West also demonstrates that the regulation of sexuality is connected to peers, sex education programs (schooling), the mass media, sexual health clinics and family (West, 1999).

At the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, there has been a course offered called ' Inqueeries'This course encourages teachers to integrate anti-homophobia practices within public classrooms. However, students felt that there were many reasons why they did not feel comfortable in engaging in anti-homophobia principles and practices in public schools (Goldstein, 2003). Some of these reasons cited were their relationships with other teachers, religious objections and worries about the responses from parents who did not agree. "While most teachers and administrators are willing to take action against those who use discriminatory language of a racial, sexual or religious nature, there remains some reticence to condemn the use of derogatory names for gay males and lesbians" (Rivers, 1997:43).

Homophobia and heterosexism can come from classmates and teachers in implicit and explicit ways. Examples range from harassment to the exclusion of ' queer' content in what is being taught. Queer youth also have to deal with the biases of what is being taught in schools . This bias in teaching can be present in classes ranging from English to Biology. "[S]chool curriculum was shown to have a significant influence on intolerance toward young lesbian and gay men" (Rivers, 1997: 34). The curriculum

discriminates against students who do not prescribe to gender norms and those who are not heterosexual.

Not only is the content of the curriculum important; so are the support services for queer youth. Tim McCaskell suggests that queer students are often more isolated than other ' minority'students because they have a more difficult time finding others like them. This lack of peer-support therefore creates a dependence on the institutional structures of the school for protection from harassment (1999).

Community support is also vital for queer students. However, within the school there can be a lack of awareness of the outside support systems that can indeed assist in the well being of the queer students. Liza, a student from Peterborough explains:

> Peterborough is no metropolis, but it does offer services through PARN, the Women' sHealth Center, PFLAG, and other community groups. However, despite the existing resources, much of my community didn' know how to steer me to them. Many gay youth aren' table (for whatever reason) to find the resources available to them. Connecting the youth with the services, and the youth with other youth is a major issue in rural areas (Rainbow Youth Coalition, 2001).

Without these services for queer students it is a challenge for these students to ' comeout' (self-disclose). Homophobia within schools can perpetuate harassment and violence. Furthermore, it can also cause silence, "This silence may come in the form of avoidance of discussions of homosexuality or in the absence of any positive information or images of lesbigay individuals. Silence which contributes to a lack of understanding about gay, and lesbian and bisexual people denies all students significant educational opportunities" (Monahan, 1997: 209). This in turn causes trouble for queer students because they feel that they have to hide parts of themselves. These students are well aware of the negative comments and the violence towards other students. These students, "may exhibit ' genderatypical' behaviour, but find themselves too afraid to speak out, or

even speak about it to anyone. The homophobia is therefore internalized and often manifests itself in a poor self-image, depression, self-destructive behaviour, substance abuse and even suicide " (McCaskell, 1999). McCaskell also points out that "[s]tudies reveal that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth continue to be victimized in schools and are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers" (1999). McCaskell suggests that "Children who nobody suspects are gay may also be suffering the effects of homophobic violence in ways just as devastating as those may who are physically attacked or verbally harassed" (1999). These comments too often go unchallenged by both teachers and students.

Rivers suggests that, "teachers need to be given guidance on how to support gay and lesbian students in school, especially in cases where the students feel unable to approach their parents for fear of rejection" (1997: 35). It is important to note that it is not the sole responsibility of teachers to make their classrooms ' queerfriendly' because there are institutional structures that affect both the teachers and students in the classroom. McCaskell argues that much more needs to be done in order to make queer students more comfortable at school.

> The violence faced by lesbian and gay youth, both individual and systemic, will not be solved by any simple anti-bullying programs. Schools must be prepared to tackle homophobia publicly and visibly in the area of leadership, curriculum, community partnerships, guidance, employment practices, staff development and harassment (1999).

In a piece entitled, "Walls", a Peterborough queer student wrote about the fear and guilt they experienced . "They kept everybody from seeing me for the horrible person that I was convinced I was. They kept me safe from the world, and the world safe me" (Rainbow Youth Coalition, 2001). To me, this piece illustrated the isolation felt by this student. The well being of students is important in achieving their full potential. This

example illustrates the necessity of addressing queer issues in local high school classrooms.

## Section A.3: Education Cuts

Many social programs have been vulnerable to support and funding cuts . Federal and provincial cuts are reflective of the larger global economy. Canada' seconomy is influenced "through interlocking formal corporate and government institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization" (O' Neill,1998:3). The changing global market has given transnational corporations more influence over the economy of Canada. This has happened thought such trade agreements as NAFTA and GATT.

> To make their countries investor friendly, governments locally, nationally and globally appear to be abdicating responsibility for their role in ensuring that the basic rights of its citizens in terms of employment, housing, education, health care, environment protection, and social equality are met (O' Neill, 1998:3).

This responsibility of governments is lessened through the restructuring of social programs. Patricia McAdie quotes Jim Laxer about this restructuring, "Cost cutting, of course, is not socially neutral phenomenon. It establishes a very clear hierarchy of winners and losers. It is based on a precise notion about what is essential and what is secondary in contemporary society " (1998 :63).

When there is a shift to the interests of corporations, and a lessening of social programs, human rights are questioned. Cuts in social spending undermine citizens' "protection from violence, exploitation and discrimination" (O' Neill, 1998:3). When restructuring takes place on many levels of government, citizens have "less access to government locally [because of]... tighter control of funds from the top down?" (1998:3).

In November 1995, the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario cut grants to school boards by $1 billion over a full year (Ralph et. al., 1997). These cuts affect the human rights of all students and staff. Patricia McAdie asks, "How long will relatively progressive boards be able to hold onto positions that promote student equality and affirmative action? How will we able to update sexist curricular materials and biased library holdings if there is no money?" (1998:64).

McAdie further explains that, "[t]here has also been a cut in the amount of money and time being devoted to professional development for teachers. This will limit a teacher' sability to improve her skills in ensuring equity for her students" (1998:64). The money that was cut by the provincial government in turn placed pressure on school boards to work with less money. The Boards have to "rethink and restructure" (Gidney, 1999:242). School boards had to adapt to the teaching new curriculum. In 1998 the process of "rewriting the high school curriculum, course by course" began (Gidney, 1999: 239). "This new curriculum shifted from interdisciplinary area of study to a more traditional focus on discrete subject context" (1999: 241). It could be suggested that this traditional focus lead to a uniform curriculum with the assumption of a uniform student body. Curriculum that assumes all students are the same does not fully address the diverse student body Ontario' s schools.

**Section A.4: Ontario Human Rights Commission**

The Ontario Human Rights Commission aims to protect the human rights of the citizens of Ontario. The Commission strives to attain this goal through the ongoing development of policies to increase human rights. The Ontario Human Rights Commission created a Policy on Discrimination and Harassment Because of Sexual Orientation. This policy is applicable to those attending and working at schools (2000:6). According to this

policy,

> Sexual orientation is more than simply a "status" that an individual possesses; it is an immutable personal characteristic that forms part of an individual' score identity. Sexual orientation encompasses the range of human sexuality from gay and lesbian to bisexual to heterosexual orientations. The protection of the Code extends to all individuals who are denied equal treatment because of sexual orientation. (2000:7)

The Commission embraced many recommendations from the unpublished Sexual Orientation Options Paper (1996). One suggestion is specifically applicable to public education in Ontario. It calls for "[e]nhancing public education activities to include references to the ground of sexual orientation" (2000:3).

The Policy on Discrimination and Harassment Because of Sexual Orientation does not cover the rights of all queer students because sexual orientation is not the same as gender identity. The Ontario Human Rights Commission wrote the discussion paper, Toward a Commission Policy on Gender Identity (October 1999), partly because there are different issues for those who are transgendered. Gender identity is not listed under the Ontario Human Rights Code. However, in the Code " ' sex' is not limited to biological/genetic sex, but has been extended to include gender characteristics" (1999: 24).

The discussion paper Toward a Commission Policy on Gender Identity highlights the Ontario Human Rights Commission' sPolicy on Sexual Harassment and Inappropriate Gender-based Comment and Conduct. The discussion paper illustrates how the mentioned policy supports many aspects of gender identity. An example given is:
Freedom from sexual harassment and other forms of unequal treatment expressed through demeaning comments and action based on gender is, therefore, a fundamental human

right? Sex discrimination may also include harassing comments or conduct made to a person because of his or her gender. (1999:24).

In writing the discussion paper Toward a Commission Policy on Gender Identity, the Commission interviewed transgendered people. One of the topics of concern was that of education, both public and professional. The paper therefore suggests that, "Broad-based education on the issues faced by transgendered people is critical to the long-term prevention of human rights violations against them" (1999: 28). One of the ways of combating this is through educating others about the people who are transgendered. One way of doing this is through eradicating "[c]ommon myths [that] equate transgendered identity with sexual orientation" (1999:28). Education can also include changing "viewing [of] trasngendered people as unbalanced and mentally unstable" (1999:28).

The Policy on the Discrimination and Harassment Because of Sexual Orientation, the unpublished Options Paper, and Discussion Paper Toward a Commission Policy on Gender Identity all illustrate the need for changing education curriculum and policies to improve the needs of queer students. These policy and papers are all justifications to implement the ' Queer Workshops' into local high schools.

## SECTION B: PROVINCIAL LEVEL

### B1: Safe Schools Act

The Education Act dictated the foundation onto which school Boards should create their own policies and guidelines in regards to behaviour of their students. The province provided these guidelines for the Ontario public schools in the means of the Safe School Act (2000) . The Safe School Act can be viewed as a foundation for implementing the ' QueerWorkshops' into local high schools because of the following highlighted sections of the Act. The purpose of the Safe School Act, found in 301 (2) of Bill 81, 2000 :

1. To ensure that all members of the school community, especially people in positions of authority, are treated with respect and dignity,
2. To promote responsible citizenship by encouraging appropriate participation in the civic life of the school community.
3. To maintain an environment where conflict and difference can be addressed in a manner characterized by respect and civility.
4. To encourage the use of non-violent means to resolve conflict.
5. To promote the safety of people in the schools.
6. To discourage the use of alcohol and illegal drugs

In creating their own policies, Boards are also required to consider the views of school councils about the policies and guidelines under section 302 of the Education Act, (2000).

### B2: Reason for curriculum use

Queer content can be a part of any subject in the high school curriculum. Queer content should not only be discussed in regards to sexuality. However, for the purpose of this report, the Health and Physical Education Curriculum will be utilized to

examine how the proposed workshops can be implemented. There are four sections in which the majority of the curriculum is organized: physical activity, active living, healthy living, and living skills. However, there are curriculum for grades 11 and 12 that do differ from these four themes. The healthy living theme is the primary focus in this report because it is the one strand that addresses sexuality.

### B3: Health and Physical Education Curriculum 9-10

In the introduction of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum for grades nine and ten, there is a rational for its purpose. It states that "informal decision making related to healthy sexuality [among other expectations] are central to this curriculum" (1999:2). It promises that it will present "students with learning opportunities that will help them make positive decisions about all aspects of their health and encourage them to lead healthy and active lives" (1999:2).

The overall expectations for the student in the Healthy Active Living section for Grade 9, is for the student to, "explain the consequences of sexual decisions on the individual, family and community" (1999:10). The specific expectations of the Healthy Growth and Sexuality section allow for ' QueeWorkshops' to be implemented. For each of these expectations are related to queer issues.

> -identify the developmental stages of sexuality throughout life;
> -describe the factors that lead to responsible sexual relationships;
> -describe the relative effectiveness of methods of preventing pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (e.g., abstinence, condoms, oral contraceptives);
> -demonstrate understanding of how to use decision-making and assertiveness skills effectively to promote healthy sexuality (e.g., healthy human relationships, avoiding unwanted pregnancies and STDs (such as HIV/AIDS);
> -demonstrate understanding of the pressures on teens to be sexually active;
> -identify community support services related to sexual health concerns. (1999:10)

The Healthy Active Living, Grade 10 section expects students to "demonstrate understanding of the factors affecting human sexuality as it relates to themselves and others" (1999:15). From examining this section, it is clear that the ' QueerWorkshops' can be carried out in local high schools. Important in this curriculum to queer high school students is the third section about finding information and support services. Under the Healthy Growth and Sexuality section the specific sections are as listed on page 15 of the curriculum:

> -describe environmental influences on sexuality (e.g., cultural, social, and media influences);
> -explain the effects (e.g., STDs, HIV/AIDS) of choices related to sexual intimacy (e.g., abstinence, using birth control);
> -identify available information and support services related to sexual health concerns;
> -demonstrate understanding of how to use decision making skills effectively to support choices related to responsible sexuality. (1999)

In the last pages of the grade nine and ten curriculum there are explanatory notes. The definitions listed that specifically relate to healthy sexuality are as follows:

> Abstinence: A conscious decision to refrain from sexual intercourse;
> AIDS: Acquired immune deficiency syndrome;
> HIV: Human immuno-deficiency virus;
> STDs: Sexually transmitted diseases (1999:23).

There are no definitions about sexuality or gender identities. In many of the sections of the curriculum, however, is a heterosexist assumption that every student is heterosexual. For example in the above definition of abstinence, states that abstinence in relation to sexual intercourse. However, sexual intercourse is not defined, but can be assumed as an act that can take place between a heterosexual woman and man. The definition of abstinence that includes sexual intercourse is not inclusive of all queer students.

**B3.2: Health and Physical Education Curriculum 11-12**

The Healthy Active Living, Grade 11 curriculum is another part of the curriculum that is able to incorporate ' queercontent' One of the overall expectations of the curriculum is to "demonstrate an understanding of sexual and reproductive health" (2000:11). The specific expectations of the Healthy Growth and Sexuality section are as follows:

> -describe factors (e.g., environmental, hormonal, nutritional) affecting reproductive health in males and females;
> -demonstrate an understanding of causes and issues related to infertility;
> -demonstrate the skills needed to sustain honest, respectful, and responsible relationships;
> -describe sources of information on and services related to sexual and reproductive health;
> -assess reproductive and sexual health care information and services.

Even though there is a strong focus on reproductive health (that does not apply to all queer youth), queer content is still applicable in this curriculum because of the focus on sexual health. There are sexual health risks for heterosexual and queer students alike. The Healthy Active Living Education, Grade 12 curriculum will be examined next . The overall expectation of the course is to "describe how society and culture affect individual perceptions and expressions of sexuality" (2000:22). The specific expectations of the Healthy Growth and Sexuality are as follows:

> -analyse the factors (e.g., culture, media) that affect gender roles and sexuality;
> -demonstrate an understanding of the factors (e.g., attitudes, values, and beliefs about gender roles and sexuality) that affect the prevention of behaviour related to STDs, AIDS, and pregnancy;
> -describe the factors (e.g., healthful eating, abstinence from smoking and alcohol) that contribute to healthy pregnancy and birth;
> -describe the characteristics of healthy, respectful, and long-lasting relationships;
> -assess the skills needed to maintain healthy, respectful, and long-lasting relationships;

-describe the communication skills needed to discuss sexual intimacy and sexuality in a relationship (2000:22).

This section has outlined how the overall and specific expectations from the healthy living strands of the Health and Physical Education curriculum for grades nine through twelve. Overall, the provincial curriculum allows for O.P.I.R.G.' s proposed workshops.

## SECTION C: PETERBOROUGH LEVEL

### C1: Area of Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board has guidelines from the provincial government on how to create policies in regards to the safety of the staff and students of their schools. The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board can build on the guidelines from the Safe School Act (2000). Schools in this district have the duty of enforcing such policies dictated by the government and the board. Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board does have the ability to expand and create their own policies in regards to human rights.

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board encompasses the districts that "the previous Peterborough County Board of Education and the Northumberland-Clarington Board of Education" (2002) covered. "The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board has 85 elementary schools, 15 secondary schools and 6 adult learning centers to serve its urban and rural communities" (2002). High schools located in Peterborough can be considered in an urban setting, most importantly because of the availability of services for queer youth.

### C2: Policies

Outlined next are the policies that are applicable to human rights for the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. Examined in this section are the Safe School Policy, Equity and Diversity and Selection of Learning Resources policies.

The Safe School Policy (ES-1.1) is under the Educational Services, Student Welfare Section. Throughout this policy the Board draws on the Education Act and the

Safe School Act. The goal of this policy is to "maintain safe and secure learning environments for students, staff and community members involved in school programs"(2002:1). Listed in this policy is what not tolerated nor accepted. Those related to human rights and specifically the workshops are as listed:

> 1.3- behaviours that infringe on the physical or emotional well-being of students, staff and/or community members;
> 1.5- conduct in the community which negatively impacts on the school community members (2002:1).

In this policy, there is recognition of the guidelines that the provincial government has set out in terms of the Safe School Act. The Board' sSafe Schools policy states that Administrative Regulations still needs to be written. The Boards promises that these regulations will reflect these sections:

> 8.2- each individual is important and unique and should be empowered to contribute positively to the school community;
> 8.7- the fair treatment of others, regardless of their races, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic stats, age or disability is an expectation from all school members (2002:2).

The Equity and Diversity (B-3.2) policy under the Board and Community section, outlines Board' saim "to create a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person" (2002:1). The principles of equity are outlined as follows:

> 1.1- promoting the dignity of staff and students,
> 1.2- fairness,
> 1.3- respect for self and others.
> 1.4- valuing diversity
> 1.5- inclusiveness
> 1.6- equity in processes to achieve an equitable outcome for staff and students, and
> 1.7- ongoing critical review of policies and procedures (2002:1).

The Board further explains how equity and diversity can be incorporated into their schools.

> [E]quity and diversity in educational service refers to integrating the principles of equity in all policies and programs for students and the provision of educational services that maximizes learning opportunities for all students. In the Board, equity and diversity in human resources refers ... equal learning opportunities by valuing diversity and reflecting the diversity of the community we serve (2002:1).

The aim and the listed sections of the Equity and Diversity Policy, provides grounds for and justifications for the proposed Queer workshops. The proposed workshops will also be offering resources for the students and the teachers. The Equity and Diversity Objectives that further promote the implementation of the ' Queer workshops' are as listed:

> 2.1- to ensure that all human resources, business and educational services are provided in an equitable manner that promotes and values the principles of equity including diversity, inclusiveness, respect, and fairness and ongoing critical review of policies and procedures
> 2.9- to provide students with positive role models and to eliminate the perpetuation of stereotypes;
> 2.1.1- to liaise with the diverse community that the Board serves including, but not limited to aboriginal/native and racial/ethnic communities (2002:2).

The Selection of Learning Resources is a policy under the Educational Services section of Programs and Curriculum (ES-3.3). In this policy the Board lists the beliefs of Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board:

> intellectual freedom is fundamental to the educational process. The Board also believes all students have the right to learning resources that promote open inquiry, critical thinking, diversity in thought and expression, and respect for others. These beliefs are supported by The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, The Ontario Human Rights Code, the Canadian and Ontario Library Associations, and by the Board' s adopted program principles (2001:1).
>
> Learning resources are selected to implement, enrich, and support the ever-changing educational program. Materials must serve both the breadth of the

curriculum, and programs based on the needs and interests of individual students. It is recognized that as students grow, their need to develop a wider experience of the world grows as well (2001:1).

Although this policy does not specifically suggests resources that are ' queer friendly' , it does provide the space for queer issues to be addressed.

## SECTION D: WHAT HAS WORKED and WHY?

The next section briefly outlines examples of what has worked in order to challenge heterosexism and homophobia within high schools. The first example provides a framework on how to effectively change schools. The second example is about positive policies from the Toronto District Board of Education. The Triangle Program, which is under the Toronto District School Board, illustrates how such a classroom can be effectively queer friendly.

### D1: G.L.S.E.N.

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, is an American organization that strives to dissolve anti-gay bias in schools. It does this by improving the safety for all in schools ranging from kindergarten to grade twelve.

> GLSEN combats the harassment and discrimination leveled against students and school personnel. GLSEN creates learning environments that affirm the inherent dignity of all students, and, in so doing, teaches them to respect and accept all of their classmates-- regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. GLSEN believes that the key to ending anti-gay prejudice and hate-motivated violence is education. And it' sfor this reason that GLSEN brings together students, educators, families and other community members--of any sexual orientation or gender identity/expression--to reform America' s educational system (2003)

The methods in which GLSEN makes changes in the education systems is through organizing at the local level, influencing policies, teaching the educators and assists students in creating their own support systems.

At the Hearts and Minds Conference (March 8th, 2003) Kevin Jennings, the founder of GLSEN was one of the keynote speakers. In his address he spoke from his

experiences about how to successfully implement long-term change in elementary schools and high schools. Jennings talked about the importance of combining policies, practices and programs. He stressed the significance of combining these three aspects because without one of them it is more difficult to have a long lasting impact on schools. The importance of using this model is shown in the example of a school adopting a queer friendly policy. However, if there is no such training for teachers to adhere to new practices or the curriculum this will make it more difficult to enact change. For example, Jennings said that while there could be some very keen students involved in making the school ' queerfriendly' if there is not any support in the practices of the teachers, the policies, or the programs, the school might loose momentum in effecting change.

**D2: Toronto District School Board Policies**

The Toronto District School Board exemplifies excellent policies in relation to human rights. In this section, policies listed from the Toronto District School Board will illustrate examples that are positive in relation to human rights and that are inclusive of queer students.

The Equity Foundation policy (b03) is a prime example for it acknowledges how our society treats people differently based on a variety of biases. This policy outlines the Board' sattempt to accomplish equality through such examples ranging from hiring policies, community contributions and curriculum. This policy is necessary for it provides the basics of equitable schools.

The Toronto District School Board attempts to meet the rights of everyone involved in the schools of that district. The Human Rights policy (f04) follows the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code (2000). This in turn provides an environment that prevents "discrimination and harassment through greater

awareness of and responsiveness to their deleterious effects?" (2000:1).

Many of the clauses in this policy set out to accomplish the goals of the Ontario Human Rights policy. Some examples of how it undertakes this is through the Duties and Responsibilities section that includes teachers and administrative staff. Section 3.1 states that "The Human Resources Services Department of the Toronto District School Board has the responsibility to designate resources for ensuring the implementation of and compliance with this policy and procedures" (2000:2).

The Human Rights policy is important for it lists many grounds and forms of discrimination. On this list it includes gender, gender identity and sexual orientation (Section 4.1, 2001:3). What is of significant note is the extensive list of how discrimination can occur under section 4.3. This is vital for the Board gives many different examples so students and staff are aware of their human rights. Toronto School Board' sSafe School Policy (c06) draws on the mission of the Board to ensure that schools "are safe, nurturing positive and respectful" (2000:1). The goal of this Safe School policy is as follows:

> Such learning environments are peaceful and welcoming for all. They must be free of negative factors such as abuse, bullying, discrimination, intimidation, hateful words and deeds and physical violence in any form. They must also clearly demonstrate respect for human rights and social justice and promote the values needed to develop responsible members of a democratic society (2001:1).

The Toronto District School Board' sSafe School policy is in co-ordination with Ontario' sSafe School Act. The Board' sSafe Schools policy is also in accordance with their Human Rights policy. What is exemplary about the Toronto District School Board is their Code of Conduct (c.010).

> The purpose of the TDSB Code of Conduct is to further promote the mission of the TDSB and to provide a framework for individual schools to develop local, school-based codes of conduct or to modify existing codes of behaviour. The TDSB Code of Conduct is to be read in conjunction with the Safe Schools

Policy and all related TDSB policies (2002:1).

In this Code of Conduct there is an extensive section on the Roles and Responsibilities of those students and staff. Important for the human rights of all students is an extensive list of definitions that assist those in authority to abide by the Safe School Act (2000). These definitions are not listed in the province' sSafe School Act. They act to better protect the human rights of students. Some examples are:

> Homophobic Harassment: is a form of sexual harassment based on gender or sexual orientation. It involves a request for sexual favours, expressing a bias on sex or sexual orientation or the display of pornographic or exploitative pictures.
>
> Sexual Harassment: sexual harassment occurs when a person receives unwelcome sexual attention from another person whose comments or conduct are inappropriate, intimidating, hostile and unwelcomed. It also includes an environment in which sexist or homophobic jokes and materials are allowed (2002:14).

These examples and the clauses on gender identity and sexual orientation show how policies protect queer students.

**D3: T.E.A.C.H. (Planned Parenthood)**

An example of a good program from Planned Parenthood in Toronto is (T.E.A.C.H.) Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia. In 1993, this anti-homophobia group initiated an education program in schools. It aimed to start workshops in schools because this location was said to be the most oppressive for youth. The T.E.A.C.H. program is not a part of the curriculum at the Toronto District School Board. It is only through invitations from teachers that allow the peer lead group to present workshops in secondary school classrooms. Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia is a good

program because it provides the students and teachers with youth lead informal workshop.

One of the main reasons why T.E.A.C.H. is a great program is because the workshops involve, "interactive activities and sharing personal stories to encourage workshop participants to think critically about homophobia and heterosexism" (1999). The T.E.A.C.H. program can be linked with the Ontario' sprovincial Safe School Act. "Links are also made to other forms of oppression and discrimination as well as increasing awareness and discussing strategies for the prevention of homophobic harassment and violence" (1999). Planned Parenthood of Toronto' sT.E.A.C.H. program is important because it advocates for both the human rights of queer students because it demands students and staff to change their thinking and behaviour.

**D4: Triangle Program**

The Triangle Program is a classroom that is a part of the Oasis Alternative Secondary School. This school and unique classroom is under the Toronto District School Board. It calls itself ' Canada' sonly high school classroom for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students' .On their web site they list curriculum examples. The Triangle Program is an inclusive classroom that provides a safe space for queer students who have experienced difficulty in mainstream schools. "It is a place where all will be respected and treated equally regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, ability or sexual orientation. Racist, sexist, homophobic and other oppressive behaviour, language and /or symbols are not tolerated" (2003).

The Triangle Program combines the policies of the Toronto District School Board' s,incorporates inclusive curriculum and practices. The classroom is a prime example of what Jennings the founder of GLSEN calls the 3 P' sin order to incorporate ' queer' content into the classroom.

## SECTION E: CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

### E1: Provincial Level, Curriculum and Policy

Through examining the Health and Physical Education Curriculum for grades nine and ten, the ' QueeWorkshops' may be implemented in local high schools. However, there are some improvements that can be made to better serve the needs of queer youth. Youth in grades nine through twelve are at a stage when many are exploring themselves in regards to sexual and gendered identities.

The wording of the curriculum is often very vague. There are no references to the gendered and heterosexual assumptions that are often accompanied when discussing ' healthysexuality' .There are no references to the sexualities or gendered identities of queer students. Due to the wording of the provincial curriculum, a lot can be left up to the teacher to decide what will be taught. Their interpretation on what is ' healthysexuality' is based on individual notions of the teachers. The provincial curriculum therefore, does not adequately address the issues of queer students.

The Ontario curriculum should add the definitions that are inclusive of ' healthy sexuality' .To expand this, the curriculum should include such terms as sexual orientation and gender identity. Included in the definitions is an expansion of the term abstinence. Sexual intercourse is a term not applicable to all queer students. All grades of the curriculum shall include a broadening of what consists of sexual behaviour. Especially during a time when many students are beginning to discover themselves sexually, it is important for these students to learn about their diverse experiences.

The curriculum should be more specific in teaching the possible risks that students face sexually. Listing high risk, low risk and no risk activities that are applicable to all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identities is a good example of what

to include.

Throughout the curriculum implicit language is used to suggest that all of the students are heterosexual. In order for the curriculum to be more ' queerfriendly' it should first start to explain definitions and issues related to queer students.

## E2: Local Level Policies

The policies of the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board do not fully address the needs of queer students. However, these policies do provide a general framework for the workshops because they provide a foundation for recognizing the needs of queer students. Local policies, much like the provincial curriculum use general wording. The language used can be interpreted differently depending on the reader.

The Safe Schools Policy provides a good foundation because it strives to protect all students from harm while attending school. Through this policy queer students can be deemed safe because of sections 1.3 and 1.5 in this policy (2002). However, it is important to note that it does take more than a school to call itself safe for queer students to feel empowered.

Under the Safe Schools policy, it acknowledges the province' sguidelines on how to enact a safe space for all students. The Board states that Administrative Regulations still have to be written. Under this section they provide a positive framework (e.g. sections 8.2 and 8.7) (2002). This illustrates the need to further develop policies to implement human rights in regards to Administrative Regulations.

A way to improve the Safe School policy is to embody what the Toronto District School Board has in their policies. An example of this is the extensive definitions it provides. The Toronto district is very thorough because it is in accordance with the province' sSafe Schools Act but it also compliments their own Board' sHuman Rights policy

(f04). This Human Rights policy is important because it provides the grounds on which one can be discriminated against. This includes gender identity and sexual orientation. The Toronto District School Board' sCode of Conduct Policy is a positive example to provide a strong protection of queer students. One of the reasons for this is that it provides examples of the many ways one can be harassed.

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School policy on Equity and Diversity provides an excellent base protecting the human rights of all students. This principles listed 1.1 to 1.7 are all exemplary of the Board' saim in providing the best environment for their students to reach their potential (2002). However, once again, these principles are left open to interpretation.

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board should be praised in their discussion of how their Equity and Diversity policy can be utilized in their schools. It calls for "integrating the principles of equity in all policies and programs for students and the provision of educational services that maximizes learning opportunities for all students" (2002:1-2). If this is accomplished in regards to equity and queer issues, the Board will have completed what the founder of GLSEN calls change that is ' embodied(2003). This is because this policy states how equity can be put into policies, practices and programs.

Under the Equity and Diversity sections 2.10 and 2.9., are examples of policies that directly support the implementation of the ' QueerWorkshops' (2002). An important part of this policy is section 2.10 which emphasizes the importance of creating liaisons with the diverse community. Section 2.9 is also important for it is about eliminating stereotypes and providing students with positive role models. Through providing the ' Queer Workshops' O.P.I.R.G. and the schools involved will benefit from the connections formed with the students and staff of the schools. Section 2.10 of this policy states that schools should liaison with community groups not limited to ' aboriginal/nativeand racial/ethnic

communities' (2002). However, the Board should expand on what could be constituted as the part of the diverse community. This would include people of various gender identities and sexual orientations.

The Selection Learning Resources policy should be praised because it strives to promote diversity and respect for others. This is backed up with referencing of The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code. It also states that learning resources should "support the ever-changing educational program. Materials must serve both the breadth of the curriculum" (2001:1). It further states that "the needs and interests of individual students" (2001:1) should be used to determine the programs. This section about the beliefs of the Board can be open to interpretation because of the connections it states with provincial curriculum. As previously demonstrated, curriculum can also be read in a variety of ways.

Overall, the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board has provided a foundation for implementing the proposed Queer workshops. The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board has demonstrated a willingness in providing students and staff, schools that are safe and open to diversity through their policies. In order to be more effective in addressing the human rights of queer students, policies have to become more thorough such as the examples shown from the Toronto District School Board.

There are many things that the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board can do to improve their policies. These policies can be a starting point for their Board to create ' queer friendly' schools.

Some of the recommendation are:

- that the Board expand their Safe School Policy. An anti-homophobia section should be added that gives explicit definitions of what should not be tolerated. This should also include definitions and examples of what constitutes harassment;
- when new Administrative Regulations are written in their Safe Schools Policy,

gender identity should be added under section 8.7. which is about treating others regardless of a variety of differences;
- that the Equity and Diversity policy change because not all of the principles of equity are met through the listing of the objectives. One way of meeting their equity goals is to include sexual orientation and gender identity when listing members of diverse backgrounds and communities in sections 2.2 and 2.11. ;
- that the Equity and Diversity policy be expanded and or a new ' HumarRights' policy be created to be in accordance with all of the other policies at the Kawartha Pine Ridge District;
- that the Selection of Learning Resources Policy, section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 should list the in more detail what the learning resources should reflect and be inclusive of (sexual orientation and gender identity).

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