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# Towards a More Inclusive Music Education: Experiences of LGBTQQIAA Students in Music Teacher Education Programs Across Pennsylvania

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**Roles**

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# Towards a More Inclusive Music Education: Experiences of LGBTQQIAA Students in Music Teacher Education Programs Across Pennsylvania

## **Abstract**

During the past decade, the field of music education has seen an increase in the amount of scholarship surrounding LGBTQ studies in music teaching and learning. For example, the University of Illinois hosted three symposia for the field of music education dedicated to LGBTQ studies (2010, 2012, 2016), and proceedings from these symposia were published in three separate issues of the of the Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education (2011, 2014, 2016). Other notable scholarship has been published in Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education (Gould 2005); the Music Educators Journal (Bergonzi, 2009; Carter, 2011; McBride, 2016); the Journal of Research in Music Education (Carter, 2013; Nicholas, 2013); and UPDATE: Applications of Research in Music Education (Garrett, 2012). (*excerpt*)

## **Keywords**

LGBTQ, LGBTQQIAA, Music Education, Teacher Education, Pennsylvania

## **Disciplines**

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies | Music Education | Teacher Education and Professional Development

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# Towards a More Inclusive Music Education:

## Experiences of LGBTQQIAA Students in Music Teacher Education Programs Across Pennsylvania

2016); the *Journal of Research in Music Education* (Carter, 2013; Nichols, 2013); and *UPDATE: Applications of Research in Music Education* (Garrett, 2012). Additionally, a number of book chapters in the *Oxford Handbook on Social Justice in Music Education* (Lamb & Dhokai, 2015; Bergonzi, 2015) and in *Marginalized Voices in Music Education* (Talbot, 2018; Bartolome & Sanford, 2018; Taylor, 2018) have been dedicated to LGBTQ studies in music education.

During the 2015-2016 academic year Gettysburg College, like many institutions of higher education, requested that all members of their campus complete a climate survey dedicated to examining diversity, equity, and inclusion at our institution. After completing this climate survey, we (the authors) were left with further questions about the climate and experiences for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and allied (LGBTQQIAA) students in music teacher education programs on our campus and across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Drawing upon this survey, we sought to answer the following questions: (1) What particular socio-cultural, environmental, and/or curricular practices lend themselves to LGBTQQIAA inclusion and safety among students, faculty, and staff? (2) In what ways do students, faculty, and staff who identify as LGBTQQIAA actively create and foster inclusive and supportive environments for music learning?

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We drew upon Kevin K. Kumashiro's theory of anti-oppressive education as outlined in his work *Toward a Theory of Anti-Oppressive Education* (2000) to create our own climate survey and subsequent interview questions. Kumashiro's theory centers on four different approaches to educating: (1) education for the other, (2) education about the other, (3) education that is critical and privileging of othering, and (4) education that changes students and society. Kumashiro defines other as referring "to those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society, i.e., that are other than the norm, such as students of color, students from under- or unemployed families, students who are female, or male but not stereotypically 'masculine,' and students who are, or are perceived to be, queer." (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 26).

### SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The LGBTQQIAA Climate Survey for Music Teacher Education Programs in Pennsylvania was distributed to pre-service music teachers in Pennsylvania through the PCMEA Facebook Page and through coordinators and professors of music education programs. The survey instrument consisted of 43 questions in five sections. Participants were invited to provide demographic information, such as gender expression, sexual orientation, and size of school; they were asked to respond to a number of agreement statements on a 1-5 Likert scale (5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree); and

**D**uring the past decade, the field of music education has seen an increase in the amount of scholarship surrounding LGBTQ studies in music teaching and learning. For example, the University of Illinois hosted three symposia for the field of music education dedicated to LGBTQ studies (2010, 2012, 2016), and proceedings from these symposia were published in three separate issues of the *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* (2011, 2014, 2016). Other notable scholarship has been published in *Action, Criticism and Theory for Music Education* (Gould, 2005); the *Music Educators Journal* (Bergonzi, 2009; Carter, 2011; McBride,

they were invited to further expand on their experiences through open-response boxes at the end of each section. The survey closed with an invitation for participants to provide contact information if they wished to participate in a follow up interview.

To learn about the climate for LGBTQQIAA pre-service music teachers in higher education, we asked participants if they knew any faculty or staff members associated with their music education programs who identify as LGBTQQIAA. We also asked participants to respond to a number of questions regarding their perceptions of the impact these faculty and staff members have had on the climate of their program. Additionally, we provided participants the option to further elaborate on their experiences with faculty and staff.

In another section, we asked participants to indicate their level of comfort in expressing their sexual orientation or gender expression towards various groups (students, faculty, staff, and administration) on campus, and whether they felt their institution provided adequate resources for LGBTQQIAA students. We also asked participants whether they felt the students, the faculty and staff, and the administration, respectively were accepting of LGBTQQIAA individuals at their institution.

Lastly, we asked participants whether they felt prepared to be a resource for LGBTQQIAA students in their future careers; whether they felt their professors made a conscious effort to discuss or avoid topics of gender and sexuality in their curricula; and to indicate the types of LGBTQQIAA inclusive practices they had experienced in their music education program.

### **SURVEY RESULTS**

Of the 73 participants who took the survey, 7 identified as non-binary in their gender expression and 38 identified as LGBTQQIA (removing the last A for allies, who typically identify as heterosexual). Of the 38 students who identified as non-heterosexual, most indicated (55%) that they were out to fellow

students at the school; however, some students (38%) indicated that they were not out to their music education, music, and non-music faculty and staff.

75% of participants agreed that their “institution has adequate resources for LGBTQQIAA students.” 67.7% of participants felt “comfortable expressing their gender and sexuality to students in their music education program” and 60.6% felt “comfortable expressing their gender and sexuality to faculty in music education.” 87.7% said they “could identify faculty or staff who were LGBTQQIAA,” while 12.3% said they “could not identify faculty or staff who

were LGBTQQIAA.” Relationships with these faculty and staff varied, with 47.8% of participants responding that they could “identify a music education course instructor who publicly identified as LGBTQQIAA.”

Most respondents felt that faculty or staff work to foster an inclusive environment for LGBTQQIAA students across campus and in their music education program. However, the open responses to this question provided a variety of answers, ranging from one respondent who said, “I have not seen any professors contributing to the creation of any kind of safe space for such students,” to another who said, “My advisor/music education professor has encouraged LGBTQQIAA discussions in class, and has offered for us to come and continue the conversation if we feel so inclined. It’s cool to see him so involved.”

While 44.4% of students agreed that professors brought up topics of gender and sexuality when it was relevant to the curriculum, only 16.9% thought their “professors made a conscious effort to include these topics.” When asked if their professors avoided these topics, 16.7% agreed or strongly agreed that their professors “did not make a conscious effort to include these topics.”

When asked if students “felt prepared to be a resource to students who have questions about gender expression or sexual orientation,” 31% agreed or strongly agreed, 29.6% felt neutral, and 39.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed. However,

# There is always diversity in a group, and that one story, lesson, or voice can never be representative of all.

61.9% agreed or strongly agreed that they were “prepared to create socially conscious programming in their future music classrooms.”

### **INTERVIEW RESULTS**

Of the 35 students who disclosed their email, five were chosen based on the size of their institution, whether or not the institution was private or public, and whether or not the respondent identified as LGBTQQIA. Interviewees answered questions that included topics such as inclusive practices and mentoring. In addition to responding to the interview questions, participants spoke about their experiences in and perceptions of their programs and at their institutions. Respondents spoke in further detail about the climate for LGBTQQIAA students on their campus, their preparedness to enter their careers, and suggestions for how to improve inclusion in

their music education programs. The following are some of the themes that emerged from the interviews.

#### **CLIMATE**

Many of the respondents talked about the approachability of faculty and staff members. One respondent used the term red flags to indicate identity markers that make them uncomfortable in expressing themselves in front of others. Some of these red flags include whether the faculty or staff member is older, professors' openness about their reli-

gious life, what part of the country the professor is from (northern or southern states), and their political affiliation. training included summer jobs, extra-curricular reading and research on the subject, and inclusive training programs provided by their institution. Additionally, many felt that their experience as an LGBTQQIAA student helped them to formulate their teaching philosophy around inclusion and safety for "othered" students. Interviewees who were in the process of student teaching remarked that they felt completely unprepared to handle issues of discrimination or discussion of LGBTQQIAA topics in their placements. These respondents ad-

## **We believe that music education research can be central to the process of change and is one example of the type of disruptive knowledge for which Kumashiro advocates.**

gious life, what part of the country the professor is from (northern or southern states), and their political affiliation.

We specifically asked interviewees if they felt their program discussed LGBTQQIAA topics enough. All five interviews said that the topic did not come up at all or was not brought up nearly enough, and almost all said that they felt their program had not prepared them for the situations they may encounter in their careers, leading them to seek supplemental training and professional development elsewhere.

#### **PREPAREDNESS**

All five respondents felt undereducated about how LGBTQQIAA topics relate to music teaching and learning. If they felt any level of preparedness, they indicated it was a result of receiving training from a source outside of their music education program. Examples of this type of

vocated for training for these situations in preparation for student teaching and future careers in schools.

#### **SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING MORE INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING**

Finally, we asked interviewees about suggested changes they would make to their music teacher education programs. One respondent suggested that professors should make an effort to "layer" discussion of marginalized groups into every unit in their education classes, and to approach all topics from the lens of students from minority races, students with disabilities, and students who identify as LGBTQQIAA.

#### **FINDINGS**

We found a statistically significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ) between students' perception of "the inclusiveness of their programs" and whether or not the faculty at their institutions are "open

about LGBTQQIAA topics." This led us to conclude that when students perceive their faculty as being open about LGBTQQIAA topics they are likely to also perceive their music education program as being inclusive.

We also found statistically significant relationships between ( $p < .01$ ) students who were comfortable expressing their gender "on campus" and in their "music education program" and students who were comfortable expressing their sexual orientation "on campus" and in their "music education program." We also collapsed the variables "on campus" and "in their music education program" and found a statistically significant relationship ( $p < .01$ ) between those variables in regard to gender expression and sexual orientation, indicating that students who are comfortable expressing their gender on campus and in their music education program are also comfortable expressing their sexual orientation on campus and in their music education program. The same was true for students who did not feel comfortable expressing their gender or sexuality on campus and in their music education program.

When professors are perceived as being more open about their support for LGBTQQIAA topics and educate their students about LGBTQQIAA topics, all students benefit in becoming more prepared for their careers and LGBTQQIAA students are made more comfortable in expressing their gender and sexual orientation.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION**

Faculty who work with pre-service music teachers in any capacity need to take time to discuss responding to situations of discrimination and bigotry in the classroom. As a result, pre-service teachers may feel more prepared to act as role models for their own students in their careers. In addition, faculty and staff in higher education who support the LGBTQQIAA community need to be vocal about their support. Simple actions like having a "Safe Space" sticker or including a short note about one's support and accessibility in class syl-



labi help students perceive their professors as resources on these topics.

Even with the inclusion of LGBTQIAA topics in college and university classrooms, students may still have a stigmatized experience and perceive the inclusive climate as too radical. When pre-service music teachers critically reflect and examine their educational histories, they become more self-aware and enabled to see the constraints that exist on music teaching and learning. Such awareness is vital if music teachers are to courageously break free from those constraints, and through dialogue with students, construct a flexible and relevant music curriculum. Teachers need to take on the role of “messmates at a table,” dialectically co-constructing our understandings and in turn, our philosophies as teachers and equals (Talbot & Reynolds, 2016).

Changing oppression, as Kumashiro (2000) indicates:

[R]equires disruptive knowledge, not simply more knowledge. [Students, teachers, and researchers] need to learn that what is being learned can never tell the whole story, that there is always more to be sought out, and in particular, that there is always diversity in a group, and that one story, lesson, or voice can never be representative of all ... the goal is not final knowledge (and satisfaction), but disruption, dissatisfaction and the desire for more change [and further understanding]. (p. 34)

**W**e believe that music education research can be central to the process of change and is one example of the type of disruptive knowledge for which Kumashiro advocates. Engaging with this type of research in our music teacher education program has helped us create a more inclusive teaching and learning space. It is our goal, as we continue to explore our own practices and positionalities, to elevate the voices of those who may be experiencing oppression in/through the field of music education and to enact the positive change we wish to see in our field. ▀

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