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GLBTIQ teachers in Australian education policy: protections, suspicions, and restrictions

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Recognition of human rights on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status by the United Nations has led to the development of new policies concerning homophobia and transphobia in educational contexts. This paper examines new Australian education policies impacting gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (GLBTIQ) teachers. A policy review uncovered a range of protections for GLBTIQ teachers in contexts such as the State of Victoria, alongside restrictions. Experiences of policy discussed in pilot study data from surveys of 63 Victorian GLBTIQ teachers, and in-depth interviews with nine Victorian GLBTIQ teachers, revealed that GLBTIQ teachers were relatively unaware of the protections available to them, compared to their awareness of protections for students. Many teachers were out as lesbian or gay to some staff members but fewer had come out to students. Teachers in religious schools had more difficulties, causing some to leave the sector. Further promotion of protections and more research are recommended.

Keywords: GLBTIQ; teachers; gender; sexuality; policy; Australia

Introduction

Historically, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (GLBTIQ) teachers have not been well served by education policies. They have either been overlooked, banned or cast as deviants seeking to convert or spread homosexual propaganda to ‘innocent’ (heterosexual) students (Angelides 2008; Blair and Monk 2009). However, at a global level, GLBTIQ teachers are receiving more attention by human rights bodies than ever before. Since 2010, advocacy on issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status has started to have greater impact within the United Nations (UN) system, and the right to non-discrimination in employment and non-violence has been recognised in UN global rights commitments (Vance 2011).

In 2011, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) held the First International Consultation on GLBTIQ issues in Educational Institutions in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The event was attended by government and non-government representatives and education research experts from all continents (including the lead author, TJ), and together they drafted the Rio Statement on the tenth International Human Rights Day (UNESCO 2011). The statement asserted that GLBTIQ people in educational institutions must not be ‘curtailed by discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity’. This framing of GLBTIQ people’s rights in education contexts has subsequently been supported by the UN as a body, with the release of the

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UN's GLBTIQ-focussed *Born Free and Equal* policy (UN 2012). This document outlines the UN's position in interpreting GLBTIQ rights as central to human rights for the first time, and argues for the protection of all people against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status via legislative protections in all nations. A Global Network Against Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Education Institutions (or the Global Safe Schools Network for short) has been formed through a series of meetings in various countries, funded and supported by UNESCO and other organisations (Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy 2013). GLBTIQ teachers and researchers have been represented in the network, and have helped in the development of broader policy guidelines and recommendations for schools and education sector responses (UNESCO 2012a, 2012b). The spirit of such work has focussed on making schools safe and supportive spaces for GLBTIQ people to teach in and attend.

Backlash to the international movement

This international movement and allied processes have influenced the context within which GLBTIQ teachers work in different ways. For example, the USA, the UK and Australia developed foreign policies of diplomatic pressure, boycotts and restriction of aid, based on countries' GLBTIQ anti-discrimination achievements (Pace 2013; Pollard 2013; Robinson 2011). The USA in particular has contributed funds to the Global Network's gatherings – gaining a privileged role in determining who is involved, which goals would be pursued and how (Jimenez 2013). However, there has been significant resistance and backlash to the movement. New laws have been passed in Russia, for example, banning the distribution of 'homosexual propaganda' in schools, with President Putin directly aiming to prevent 'interference' by 'certain countries' in Russian governance (Jenkin 2012). Several African governments have been outraged by attempts at Western influence (Douglas 2012; Pflanz 2011; Rehman et al. 1999; Robinson 2011). Ugandan politicians cited foreign influence as a motivation for the Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act 2014 (Fisher 2012; Phoon 2010), and Nigerian educators have construed homosexual identities as a foreign import (Igwe 2009). India rejected advice to combat school homophobic violence and Poland committed to protect 'the family and marriage' from GLBTIQ advocacy (Fisher 2012). This has created a complex and varied international terrain for GLBTIQ teachers, as well as in Australian debates over marriage and education. Some Australian politicians such as the Labor Party's Penny Wong responded by putting forth draft bills with potential benefits to GLBTIQ teachers, whilst the Liberal Party Education Minister Christopher Pyne subsequently sought out academics considered biased against GLBTIQ people to review the national curriculum (Tovey 2014).

Research on GLBTIQ teachers

The body of work on educators and GLBTIQ issues includes both quantitative and qualitative studies of teachers' capacity to affect homophobia (Bryant 2003; Herek and Capitanio 1995) and coverage of sexuality or GLBTIQ issues (Farrelly, O'Brien, and Prain 2007; Goldman 2010; Macgillivray and Jennings 2008; McLaren 1992; Ollis 2007; Smith et al. 2011). There have additionally been historical investigations into sexuality education discourses and constructions both internationally (Egan and Hawkes 2010; Irvine 2002; Moran 2000) and in Australia (Angelides 2008; Pearce 2004; Swain, Warne, and Hillel 2004). Many of these highlighted the historic association of gay identity with potential

deviant/paedophilic teacher seduction of students (informed by older psychological and psychiatric discourses which falsely construed homosexuals as mentally ill, infectious predators). Some research stresses how teachers can be unwilling or under-prepared to engage with GLBTIQ-inclusive syllabi (Dankmeijer, Olders, and Schouten 2009; Ollis 2007; Rasmussen 2003; Tierney and Dilley 1998), for fear of being labelled deviant (Barnard 1994; Bochenek and Brown 2001; Ferfolja 1998), or finding themselves in a precarious position when tackling GLBTIQ issues (Athanases and Larrabee 2003; Blackburn and Donelson 2004; Macgillivray and Jennings 2008; Ollis 2007; Robinson 2002; Sears 1992, 2005; Sherwin and Jennings 2006).

Relatively little research has explored the experiences of GLBTIQ school teachers, and the studies which do exist come mainly from the USA (Endo, Chamness Reece-Miller, and Santavicca 2010; Griffin 1992; Harbeck 1992; Jennings 1994) and the UK (DePalma and Atkinson 2009; Nixon and Givens 2002; Rudoe 2010). Within the Australasian context, the work of Hardie (2012) and Ferfolja (2009) has recently offered insights into the New Zealand and New South Wales (Australia) contexts, respectively. The literature suggests that gay and lesbian teachers often struggle to address homophobia or GLBTIQ student issues, sometimes expressing concern about employment security (Blackburn and Donelson 2004; Rudoe 2010). To exist as a GLBTIQ teacher is to navigate complex terrain negotiating tricky private and professional boundaries (Hardie 2012), and to move into the 'risky business of choosing visibility' (Grace and Benson 2000, 92).

Such professional concerns are compounded by the fact that there are few positive historical representations of GLBTIQ teachers on which teachers can draw. As a result, such teachers are often viewed with the suspicion reserved for the criminally deviant (Rudoe 2010). However, within existing research (which mainly involved interviews or narratives of a few individual teachers), there has been no textual or survey-based research on the position of GLBTIQ teachers in relation to education policies (Davies and McInnes 2012). This is a gap both in research internationally, and in work completed in Australia. Given the shifting policy contexts surrounding GLBTIQ teachers internationally, and the lack of research on GLBTIQ teachers in policy in Australia, in this study we aimed to uncover the position of Australian GLBTIQ teachers in Australian education policies. We particularly focus on the ways in which education policies are experienced in practice. Our objectives were to firstly scope the education policy field for GLBTIQ teachers, and secondly consider one key context in the pilot study – the Australian State of Victoria – for which the policies were the most interesting, and consider the experiences of teachers therein.

Theory on GLBTIQ identity in schools

GLBTIQ teacher identity, like all forms of identity, is constructed through the location of the self within a particular discursive framework (Grace and Benson 2000; Lasky 2005). However, unlike other identities, specific meanings are attached to the categories 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual' and 'transgender' and so on, so subjective experiences of GLBTIQ as identity are shaped by the relationship between power and knowledge that (re) produce these as social categories of being (Butler 1990; Foucault 1976; Paechter 2007). Within this paradigm, the meanings that are attached to GLBTIQ identities are largely understood in terms of the way in which dominant social structures position individuals as 'other'. Therefore, to 'be' GLBTIQ is to subscribe to an identity laced with negative meanings that shift over time and context (Brandzel 2005; Butler 1990). Within social institutions such as schools, disciplinary power is operationalised through processes that

act to normalise some identities and mark others as particular (Foucault 1976; Jones 2011a), as well as through the knowledges that are valued and promoted (or not) within classrooms. Power then actively (re)produces spaces of exclusion (Foucault 1976) and within schools as social institutions the discursive mechanisms that (re)produce heteronormativity can exile the GLBTIQ teacher to an exclusionary space. However, it is also important to see GLBTIQ teachers as agentic (Rudoe 2010), as subjects and professionals capable of resistance or interrupting the dominant heteronormative discourse of their workplaces and the education policies affecting this.

GLBTIQ identity in education policy

Education policy can be defined in a variety of ways, and there is often variation within a single study (Ozga 1990). Policy can be seen as a series of decisions (Ham and Hill 1984), actions that allocate values (Easton 1965) or the allocation of resources (Codd 1988). However, it is problematic to define policy in a way that overlooks implementation; policy may even be regarded as a process in itself (Ball 1993; Lingard 1993). Elsewhere, the first author has theorised education policy as potentially mobilising GLBTIQ identities in efforts which are conservative (maintaining the traditional heterosexual male and female status quo as the 'norm'), liberal (aiming to protect and tolerate choice and the rights of the individual), critical (promoting social change and protection of marginalised GLBTIQ groups) or postmodern (promoting broader diversity and the deconstruction of traditional notions of sex/gender/sexuality) (Jones 2011a, 2011b, 2013b). These four framings of GLBTIQ identity can be mobilised in education policy texts and documents, interactions (development and implementation) and contexts; sometimes in conflicting or inconsistent ways. These four frames of GLBTIQ identities in education policy were previously examined in relation to students (Jones and Hillier 2012); in the present study they were instead applied to teachers. Using this frame, it was important to collect data that considered education policy as involving both texts and their implementation, and their applications in different schooling contexts.

Methodology

The *Out/In Front* pilot study, funded by The University of New England's School of Education and Monash University's Seed Grant Scheme, began in March 2013 and was completed in July that year. Ethics approval was obtained from all three participating institutions (UNE, Monash and RMIT). The study deployed mixed methods data collection techniques, including a policy review, a survey and interviews.

Policy review

Over 60 Australian laws and education policy documents that related directly or indirectly to GLBTIQ teachers were considered in a thematic policy analysis, in terms of their scope, textual features, relevance to GLBTIQ issues and specific protections for teachers. These were sourced from parliamentary websites, national and state-specific government education department websites, and independent education provider websites. A few individual school policies were also sourced from websites, although school-level policies were notably not the main review source.

Survey

An online survey of an opportunistic sample of 63 GLBTIQ teachers was also conducted, hosted by Qualtrics. This consisted of 36 items, including both quantitative and qualitative questions, focussed on social demographics, school settings, school policies, professional learning on GLBTIQ issues, school support features and so on. The questionnaires took approximately 15 minutes to complete and were advertised through the Australian Education Union's emails, Facebook, newsletters and so on. The survey was limited to teachers in Victoria (which had the most policies that were relevant) to provide a pilot project case study on how the more extensive policy protections in this context were experienced. This was done with a view to expanding the participant pool in future years to gain comparative data. Survey participants could remain anonymous or make their contact details available to participate in an interview.

Interviews

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers who identified as lesbian, gay, transgender and/or queer. Participants volunteered to engage in interviews by providing their email address at the end of the survey tool. The interviews were transcribed and then coded and analysed thematically. Participants' anonymity was assured by removing any identifying place names, schools or other identifying factors. In addition, participants either chose or were assigned a pseudonym.

Findings

National, state and territory laws

International rights advocacy movements have reinforced progress towards recognition of GLBTIQ rights in the Australian context, alongside the work of the Australian Human Rights Commission, and sustained long-term efforts by local advocacy groups, researchers and their allies. In June 2013, the Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) (Australian Parliament 2013) provided protections against discrimination for all Australians on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status. In the law, gender identity is defined as the gender-related identity, appearance or mannerisms, or other gender-related characteristics of a person (4(1)). This includes the way people express or present their gender and recognises that a person's gender identity may be an identity other than male or female. Notably, the direct use of labels such as transgender was specifically avoided in the law for fear they might be 'offensive or inaccurate' (The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee 2013, 16); reasons for that claim were not supplied. However, the law was intended to cover these identities and more (Jones 2012, 2013a), and to do so at a 'higher level' than any current state-based laws.

The Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) provides protection from discrimination in employment in educational institutions – including for teachers – regardless of the sex the person was assigned at birth, their orientation, their gender expression or whether the person has undergone any medical intervention on the basis of their gender. All states and territories had previously prohibited discrimination on some basis related to sexual orientation and transgender issues (ACT Parliamentary Counsel 2010; NSW Parliamentary Counsel 2010; NT Parliamentary Counsel 2010; QLD Parliamentary Counsel 2010; SA Parliamentary Council 2010; TAS Parliamentary Counsel 2010; VIC Parliamentary Counsel 2010; WA Parliamentary Counsel 2010). As with the state laws,

the new national law also includes exemptions to the protections for teachers (and other employees) in religious schools – meaning religious schools can claim the right to refuse to hire, or the right to fire, an employee on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity. Thus, the rights of institutions such as the Catholic Church supersede *some* individual rights in Australia. However, the exemptions do not apply to intersex teachers against whom no religious organisation could provide an argument, as their differences are ‘justified’ as medical/biological and not behavioural or a ‘choice’.

Education policies

Direct policy protection

At the national level, there is no education policy protecting GLBTIQ teachers to support the new legislative protections. The Australian Education Union’s *Policy on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People* (2003) was only an external vision statement, aiming to pressure federal education bodies to protect such teachers. Despite its highly critical ideals, it cannot offer teachers ‘actual’ protection.

Of all the states and territories, Victoria has the most (and longest) policies exclusively devoted to directly supporting GLBTIQ teachers. This includes a large (14 pages) Human Resources policy on same-sex-attracted employees containing ‘vignettes’ illustrating how a principal should handle (for example) a parent’s complaint against or bullying of a gay teacher on the basis of their sexuality (VIC Government 2010), and an HR policy on gender identity (3 pages) for teachers discussing issues such as how gender transition may best be supported (VIC Government 2009).

Western Australia has a more modest policy protection for staff, banning discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender history (WA Government 2004, 7; WA Government Department of Health and Department of Education and Association of Independent Schools WA 2002, 4).

The NSW *Complaints Handling Policy Guidelines* (NSW Government 2008) directs discrimination complaints on the basis of homosexuality or transgender status towards Legal Services (p. 14), whilst the *Controversial Issues Policy* (NSW Government 1983) directly discourages teachers from teaching (voicing) their own opinion on controversial topics. South Australia has government policies that support the diverse sexual orientations of staff (Shone 1999, 2). The independent school sectors within these states (non-government religious and alternative schools) provide no specific state-level guides on these issues, so individual schools make their own determinations.

Indirect policy protection

In Tasmania, the three relevant indirect government education policies focus on discrimination. They include ‘sexuality’ in the list of characteristics not to be discriminated against: broadly in the state *Anti-discrimination and Anti-harassment Policy* (TAS Government 2008a, rationale, 1.1, 1.2), as well as in policy schooling access in *Equity in Schooling: Policy & Implementation Plan* (TAS Government 2008b, Introduction) and regarding support materials in *Supportive School Communities Policy Framework 2003–2007* (TAS Government 2003, 12). There are no official state-level policies in this area for Tasmania’s independent sector.

In the ACT, the three relevant indirect policies focus more on promoting protection from harassment for all people in schools. *Countering Bullying, Harassment and Violence in ACT Public Schools* includes ‘sexual orientation’ in a list of characteristics associated

with harassment (ACT Government 2007a, 2). *Countering Sexual Harassment in Public Schools* uses the term ‘homophobia’ in its definition of sexual harassment and defines homophobia in relation to hostility and violence (ACT Government 2007b, 2). The *Equity and Diversity Plan 2007–2009* (ACT Government 2007c) uses the term ‘sexuality’ to define diversity in relation to harassment. There are no relevant state-level independent sector policies.

No policy protection

One state and one territory offer no policy protections for GLBTIQ teachers in state schools, direct or indirect. Queensland’s government and independent sectors have no specific state-level protections available for GLBTIQ teachers at the time of the study. The Northern Territory also has no protections, but further has a policy preventing teachers promoting their own political or personal views on matters considered controversial – *Principles for Dealing with Controversial Issues in Schools* (NT Government 1998). Again, the independent sector governing bodies of these (and the other states) similarly offer no protection from discrimination at the state level.

School-level policies

Whilst school-level policies on the topic of GLBTIQ teachers were not the main focus of the review, the researchers did look for readily accessible examples of relevant school-level policies that were publicly available online. We found several that were either developed in support of, or restriction of, GLBTIQ teachers’ rights. For example, several individual schools from different states had online policies that actually specifically required that staff reflect the schools’ religious ethos in their sexual lives – within the confines of heterosexual marriage only (although further research is needed to measure how common these policies are overall). The new Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) (Australian Parliament 2013) law prevents non-religious schools from creating such policies, and bodies such as the Safe School Coalition in Victoria actively aid government schools in protecting GLBTIQ teachers and students through supplying sample policy protection documents.

GLBTIQ teachers’ experiences of policy in Victoria

Most of the survey participants (50%) were aged 30–49 years, 37% were aged 18–29 and 13% were 50–69. The participants included female (48%), male (44%), transgender (2%) and gender queer (6%) respondents.¹ Overall, 33% of the participants identified as gay men, 25% as lesbians, 18% as queer and 14% as bisexual. Some of the transgender and gender queer respondents identified as straight or pansexual.² In total, 18% came from minority ethnic backgrounds and 4% were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Most of the teachers had heard about the survey through their colleagues/peers, Facebook or the Victorian Safe Schools Coalition (a non-government organisation promoting GLBTIQ rights in schools); others had heard about it on the radio, through newsletters and so on. The data were used to gather descriptive statistics and make basic chi square correlations, and written comments were subjected to a basic thematic analysis.

Many of the GLBTIQ teachers responding to the survey had only been working in schools for 1–5 years (48%). However, there were also those who had taught for longer – 19% had worked for 6–10 years, 12% had worked for 11–15 years, 6% had worked for

16–20 years, and 15% had worked for over 20 years. Most were currently working full-time in education (56%), some were working part-time (17%) or casually (12%), 6% were in pre-service teaching-related roles and 2% had retired. A further 8% had left the field of teaching and were seeking another career through study or direct job-seeking. Most worked (or had most recently worked) in schools located in outer urban areas (50%), 27% were rural and 23% were in inner urban areas. The overwhelming majority were working as teachers (87%), but 2% were vice principals and 11% were in senior leadership roles. Most of the respondents were in government-run secondary schools (63%) or primary schools (8%), which came under the protective state-level HR policies for GLBTIQ staff. A further 12% worked in the Catholic school system, and 15% worked in other independent secondary, primary or early childhood settings. These latter groups did not automatically have the protections those in government schools had at the state level, due to the exemptions.

Experiences of policy

Many of the teachers surveyed (42%) did not know if their school had policy/ies protecting GLBTIQ staff against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender diversity. Only 27% said their school did offer this policy protection, which is perhaps surprising, given that well over half were under state-level protection. This suggests that the existence of state-level policy was not being promoted at school level (during staff inductions, professional development activities, etc.). In addition, 25% said their school did not have policy protection, and 6% said they worked in schools which had a policy actively attempting to prevent people of diverse sexual orientation or gender diversity from working there. By comparison, 38% attended schools with anti-homophobia/transphobia policies for students – affording greater reported protection for students than reported protection for staff.

Only 19% of the GLBTIQ teachers worked in schools with professional learning for staff members against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender diversity and only 36% worked at schools where they knew for certain there was administrative equality in terms of being able to name their partners on forms, or use the gender of their choice. The majority of schools (56%) did not support/allow staff to be ‘out’ as GLBTIQ, while 44% did so. Comments indicated that preventing such support were policies, implied policies and concerns over reactions from school clienteles. Regardless of this lack of support, 60% of the teachers were out about their GLBTIQ status to at least some staff members. These included transgender staff who had come out after taking hormones and changing names, a pre-service teacher who was out during their placement, staff who were out to a few close friends, and those who had waited 10 years or more before they were sure they were safe to disclose their sexuality. Those who were not out to staff expressed concern about the ‘extremely homophobic atmosphere in the school’ or fear of being judged by other staff who had ‘expressed opinions that were not favourable toward GLBTIQ people’.

On the other hand, only 26% of the GLBTIQ teachers were out to the students – and this group was mainly out only to a select number of individual students. However, there were teachers who were out completely at school due to a gender transition, local newspaper coverage on their sexuality or, in rare cases, choice. For example, one teacher said they felt ‘supported and accepted by staff, and respected by students’ and so therefore able to disclose their identity. Another disclosed as a means of providing an alternative representation of gay people to the negative imagery around gay marriage over a decade

ago during the conservative Howard Liberal Government's reign (1996–2007). Those who were not out often expressed fear of students' reactions, fear of parents' reactions, and in some cases fear of losing their job.

The overwhelming majority (79%) had felt uncomfortable whilst working at a school because of their gender or sexual diversity – commenting that initiatives to recognise gender transitions were not adequately supported (with too much acceptance of staff and students using old personal pronouns, such as still calling a transgender woman 'he'), with principals and other staff talking about sexual diversity negatively or as a taboo topic, or subtle or overt homophobic bullying. Many participants said working in religious school environments (particularly Islamic, Jewish and Catholic) made them feel shame about who they were, so that they not only hid their identity at school but also became more restrained in expressing their sexuality generally. One reflected, 'I worked in Catholic schools for many years and didn't realise how much it impacted on my own sexuality until I worked in a school that was much more accepting'. Due to the homophobia and transphobia in school environments, 27% stopped participating in aspects of work life or activities, 24% took extra sick days, 17% moved schools and several left the field of education altogether. A further 17% became involved in education activism, such as joining the Safe Schools Coalition Victoria, which encourages schools to develop anti-homophobia policies and initiatives. Several teachers commented that they wanted their schools to create explicit school-level policies supporting diversity, and others wanted private schools to be prevented from using GLBTIQ status as a 'loophole' for firing someone.

Linking policy and experience

To explore the relationship between policy and experience, we focused on the interview data. Of the nine interviewees, five females were identified as lesbian, and of the four males two were identified as gay and two as queer. One male was currently transitioning (transgender f-m). Five participants were currently teaching within Victorian schools, and the remaining four had taught until recently and currently worked within the education sector more broadly. All had been or were classroom teachers.

For Jody³ (lesbian, 35 years), whose difficult semi-rural government school had exposed her to many homophobic comments from students, the existence of policy had been a protective and enabling factor. A series of homophobic incidents at the school had led its leadership to register the school in a programme through the Safe Schools Coalition Victoria, which involved the development of anti-homophobia policy, a professional development session and other training programmes with a gay social worker. Since the development of the policy and the various measures related to it, Jody had come out to some colleagues and allowed the 'assumption' that she was gay (by other staff) to be affirmed. She was also more likely to stick up for herself and others around homophobic abuse: 'increasingly I'm thinking yeah, now that they have this programme in place and they're a bit more equipped and educated, well now is the time to be a role model.'

Chris (gay, 36 years) worked in an affluent urban private school, and found the system's supportive policy a pleasant surprise after over 20 years in the more conservative Catholic system, where policy had always been a dormant but ever-present threat; 'you do know that if you got into trouble with the administration, and you were openly gay... [they could get rid of you].' He suggested that GLBTIQ teachers were made complicit in this as 'you do sign for every position that you undertake in a Catholic position, that you're going to uphold the ethos'. He had previously experienced much discrimination at

Catholic schools after being outed by a student neighbour, and had even faced homophobic harassment from students when shopping outside of work hours, and had had boys damage property on his farm. The school and police had derided his complaints. This made him 'question my lifestyle' and stop teaching for a year. When he signed his contract with his new (non-religious) school, the leadership communicated their policy against discrimination on the basis of 'gender, religion, sexual orientation or preference' during the signing, and he was elated. He felt enabled to teach about issues of sexuality in his English class in a more sophisticated and complex way.

Some broader school-level equity policies were interpreted to apply to GLBTIQ issues. For example, Chloe (lesbian, 37 years) worked at a school with a general equity policy, where a librarian made a derogatory comment about herself and another teacher who happened to be lesbian standing near each other. The librarian was made to apologise. Similarly, SN (lesbian, 31 years) worked at a school with a policy based on respect, and found she could bring her partner to events and said, 'when there has been issues [of homophobia] in the past, the principal is straight on it'.

A lack of policy (direct or indirect) made it difficult to engage in activism for some interviewees. For example, Jessica (lesbian, in her 20s) said that none of the five schools she had attended had mentioned GLBTIQ issues in any policy. She had tried to encourage her principal at a Catholic school to make provision for same-sex-attracted students and prevent homophobia, but without policy to enable her argument she found it difficult to convince him, and he 'passed the buck' by blaming the Catholic education system. She ultimately resigned. Margaret (lesbian, in her 30s) said that at one school, a member of the leadership team with whom she was friends, who was gay, 'told me that we're not allowed to tell the kids that we're gay or lesbian or whatever. That we can't do it, don't do it, because that's seen as influencing them.'

Michael (gay, 34 years) had worked in the Northern Territory with Indigenous students and felt he could not bring up GLBTIQ issues with his students as the elders had suggested to him that these were a 'white fella thing', and there was no policy precedent. In a small urban Victorian school, however, he felt he could go to his principal and address homophobic language he was experiencing at the school because of departmental policies, although in retrospect he wished he had used the policies more directly to enable his actions:

I should have really been speaking to the leadership staff and getting them to implement policies and practices from the top down to create a culture around me which would have made it safer for me to then address those issues in class.

Instead, the situation was dealt with less strongly than it could have been. The principal mentioned homophobia in an assembly to the school, but due to his own discomfort, he kept the discussion fairly broad, discussing the illegality of discrimination rather than particularly supporting GLBTIQ people.

Discussion

Many participants who worked in government schools were not aware of the policy protections available to them as GLBTIQ teachers at both the national and state levels. This is perhaps due to a lack of school-level human resources policies directly enumerating these protections, lack of proper implementation, or even the ignorance or discomfort of principals/other school leadership who have not mentioned or sought to act upon these provisions. With many of the teacher respondents only hired in the last few years, it seems schools are missing an opportunity to make sure that all staff (whether out

or not) know they are welcome, regardless of their GLBTIQ diversity, in early meetings. There is a need to disseminate information about teachers' rights in administrative and broader school inductions, and/or professional development sessions specifically focussed on GLBTIQ issues (which were largely not occurring). Teachers were more aware of policy protections for students than they were for themselves, and it seems clear that the focus on GLBTIQ issues in schools in Australian rights movements may have overlooked teachers in favour of the more 'media-friendly' topic of bullied students for perhaps too long.

There was also (in teachers' own reported experience) a lack of support for teachers to come out as GLBTIQ across all sectors, which was problematic because 'outing' is not always a choice. Some transgender people, for example, need to transition during their teaching career, some GLB people were outed through media or accidental incidents, some teachers were suspected as gay whether they claimed a gay identity or not. Additionally, the lack of support suggested that there was something innately wrong with GLBTIQ identity, that it should be ignored or tolerated but not embraced. This attitude went against the more embracing critical spirit of the Victorian education policy documents and suggested a more conservative-liberal aesthetic to their implementation (influenced by school leaders and staff). Critical policies cannot in and of themselves change social contexts – leadership support for their implementation is required.

Circumstances were clearly tougher for teachers in religious schools – both at the state and sometimes school policy levels, where they were not only offered less protection but sometimes even persecuted through exclusionary policies. Several teachers had found these school types so difficult to work in that they had left them, or even the education sector, altogether. Exclusionary work practices were leading to some teachers reporting taking sick leave or feeling discomfort at work, and were impacting teachers' ability to enact their GLBTIQ identities even in their private lives. However, the data did show that regardless of school restrictions or a lack of support, GLBTIQ teachers were still finding work in schools that did not welcome them and sometimes choosing to stay, coming out even when it was discouraged (and sometimes for disruptive purposes) to individuals and groups, and engaging in educational activism to improve school environments for themselves and others.

Conclusions

It is difficult to clarify the value of the education policy protections in Victoria without comparison to other types of state protections in practice through survey data and interviews in other state contexts, so gathering such data must be a priority. However, some preliminary conclusions can be reached about policies affecting GLBTIQ teachers in Australia.

First, education policies relevant to GLBTIQ teachers are not always known by the teachers themselves, and may not be acted upon in their schooling contexts. Knowledge about these policies needs to be promoted through multiple means (union newsletters, websites, networking groups), so that teachers can understand the protections or vulnerabilities they may face in different school types. This information should also be included in teacher education programmes; professional updates can also be useful dissemination strategies.

Second, some of the issues identified in this preliminary investigation (such as support or disclosure of identity) may be too complex for simple exploration. Teachers may choose to come out in unwelcoming environments to make a point, or choose not to

disclose their identity in supportive environments for personal or professional reasons, or may not have a choice about whether or not their identities are 'known'. Teachers may be out to some and not other staff or students, and the specific details of to whom and why can vary. Questions of outness can also be ideological. Rasmussen (2003), for example, has argued against simplistic identification claims and Robinson (2002) has written about the value of strategically playing up or playing down identification in different contexts.

Finally, teachers are agentic professionals who engage to some extent in activism within their profession, and while it is clear that this is best enabled through policy support, other complicated impacts of policies which are not directly related (as with indigenous community education policies) need also to be examined. This line of inquiry should be explored further in future research, especially in light of the new national law which offers protection for GLBTIQ teachers in government schools at a 'higher level' than many state-level policies and frameworks, and its potential impacts on current and future generations of teachers.

Notes

1. The term transgender describes a broad range of non-conforming gender identities and can include people who identify as a different sex to the one assigned at birth, who may choose to undergo sex affirmation/reassignment surgery (transsexuals). Gender queer people are not transsexual, and disrupt or reject traditional gender models.
2. The term pansexual describes people whose sexual and romantic feelings are for all genders; this rejects the gender binary of male/female and asserts more than two genders.
3. Interview participants chose their own pseudonyms.

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