

English 135

Marco Tancon V00939001

The Canadian ticking time bomb: A research paper on the stigma that surround
Transgender Youth in Canadian schools

Writing this research paper was probably one of the most eye opening experiences for me as a writer and member of society. It was as if I was just a young fish swimming through water and not knowing what the hell is water (David Foster Wallace). I say this because my prior knowledge of the challenges that the transgender community faces was minimal. There were a couple of challenges along the way, most being from actually sitting down and reading articles that could be their own book. Another challenge I faced was trying to comprehend the staggering facts about transgender students across Canada. As a writer, I found it very challenging to do proper text citation, I went to the academic commons in the library for both trying to start my project as well as at the end to make sure I was citing this correctly but we weren't able to get through the entire paper. I learned multiple lessons from this research most importantly, I feel that I am much more confident in my ability to talk to others about social injustices like the stigma that surrounds the transgender community. The information I used was mostly from (Taylor et al., 2016) article that went over many of the results from the every teacher project. I would like feedback to be more centered on persuasiveness and structure of my essay, but would also like to know what you thought my grammar and clarity.

Mat Asano, a transgender girl from Quebec, describes her experience of being bullied for her gender identity and expression. The bullying started when she was only in the third grade and did not stop throughout all of elementary school. The bullying was so bad, once she was forced to pull down her skirt and underwear. Mat and her mother found that the greatest obstacle of integrating into school was with the adult teachers' judgment and prejudice, as well as the school environment which reflected, or amplified, this discrimination. Although Mat had thought about killing herself multiple times, she is still living in Quebec (Asano, 2015). Mat is one of many transgendered youth who face similar discrimination, prejudice and mental health repercussions. Studies show that 64% of transgender youth in Canadian schools do not feel safe at school (*Every class in every school* 2011). An assessment of 55 Canadian transgender youth, aged 15 to 21, found that 25 youth, or 44%, had seriously thought about taking their own lives. Of those 25 youth, that had seriously thought about taking their own lives, 10 of them had tried within the last year (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2010). In this paper I will be examining how the education system is responding to this life and death issue of stigma, prejudice and bullying of transgender youth in Canadian schools through policy, teacher training, and student initiatives.

The Canadian education system falls under the jurisdiction of each provincial and territorial governments, not the federal government. Which means each province has a similar but different curriculum, as well as various laws and legislation in place which are aimed at making the entire LGBTQ+ community feel safer in school. In 2012, Ontario was one of the first provinces that pushed for change. Taylor talks about how the "Ontario *Education Act* [that] requires all schools to develop and implement a policy that promotes a safe and inclusive school

climate that is accepting of students of any sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression” (Taylor et al., 2016). This started a movement across Canada with provinces such as Alberta, Quebec, Manitoba, British Columbia and New Brunswick all implementing similar policies surrounding safe school policies. A study called *The Every Teacher Project* was the largest study ever conducted in this field in which over 3400 teachers from across all provinces and territories were interviewed and surveyed. Teachers from schools with and without “safe schools” policies that address transphobic bullying, gender identity and expression issues, were asked about the safety of transgender students at their schools. 22.3% of teachers from “safe schools” reported their schools were “very safe” for transgender students compared with 13.5% of teachers from schools without such policies (Taylor et al., 2016). Taylor goes on to say, “The role of anti-LGBTQ harassment policies are achieving safety for LGBTQ+ students” (2016). I agree with Taylor that these policies are proven to be successful and a great step forward, however, effective implementation in every school across the country is necessary and would literally save lives. Although education is not controlled by the federal government, I think they should be creating bills that mandate provinces to have anti-transphobic, safe school policies and train teachers and administrators to both feel comfortable and confident in enforcing policies effectively to protect all transgender students.

Teachers have one of the most important roles in the Canadian education system: educating the youth. However, results from Every Teacher Project showed that even though most of the teachers approved of a LGBTQ+ inclusive education, only 43.5% strongly agreed when asked if they were comfortable discussing LGBTQ+ topics with students (Taylor et al., 2016). To

me, this shows that the education system failed itself by failing to educate the educator. Provincial governments across Canada started implementing curriculum resources and professional development on how to teach with a LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum. (Taylor et al., 2016) says that the “Newfoundland and Labrador's Department of Education requires mandatory training on LGBT education for every administrator and teacher in the province.” Similarly, in 2016, British Columbia brought forth a program of curriculum resources called SOGI 123 (sexual orientation and gender identity) which today has been implemented in 60/60 school districts in British Columbia and some in Alberta. SOGI 123 is now part of the curriculum that aims to train teachers on how to teach with a sexual orientation and gender identity inclusive curriculum. This is much needed as shown by results from The Every Teacher Project 2016 in which 70% of teachers had confidence that curriculum resources like SOGI would be a good source to find help. The research from the Every Teacher Project that proves there is strong interest among teachers to implement sexual orientation and gender identity inclusive curricula. With one of the major barriers being need for resources, this need is met by SOGI district leads/coordinators. I believe that teachers have a lot of influence on students. If teachers start making evidence based steps forward; making schools safe for transgender students, student bodies can follow in their footsteps or be inspired to find their own ways of including LGBTQ+ peers.

Students have more power to promote social justice than they believe. I know that sticking up for someone in the hallways or telling someone “you can’t joke about that” for saying “grow a pair” or “don't be so masculine” are very scary things to do and can have consequences.

One of the most effective students led initiatives for change are gay straight alliance/gender sexuality alliance clubs (GSA's). When students participate in GSA's or events at schools it fosters a more inclusive community and a safer school for transgender students and other sexual/gender minorities. My highschool had a very strong GSA which I believed led to many of my LGBTQ+ peers feeling safe about being themselves at school. In addition, 73% of transgender students who were surveyed from schools with GSA's acknowledge a safe school for themselves versus 58% of transgender students from high schools with no GSA's (Antony, W., & Antony, J., 2017). Surprisingly, a study found that "Fifty-eight percent of cis-gendered, straight students... found it upsetting to hear transphobic remarks"(2017). This shows that there is a drive for change from the general student population. However, (Antony, W., & Antony, J) say, that the reason they believes that there is still a stigma around transgender students is not because there is not support for transgender peers, but because students are afraid to act in support (2017). Although there is a fear of standing up to an entrenched stigma. I believe that it has to be broken, not by one person but as an entire community.

I believe school is a paradox it can be the best years of someone's life, as well as the worst. As shown through multiple studies and tragedies, members of the transgender community often face some of their worst years in school and not all survive them. I believe the Canadian education system in one of the best in the world; however, it continues to fail transgender students. Although the Canadian education system has responded to the stigma that surrounds transgender youth in Canada through implementing policies, training teachers to teach with an inclusive curriculum and supported students starting clubs and taking initiative, the prejudiced

view on transgender youth in Canadian schools is still an issue. Even with the changes being implemented: social justice takes time, and the longer it takes the more transgender youth will have unsafe school experiences like Mat's - not all will survive them.

References

- Antony, W., & Antony, J. (2017). *Power and residence* (6th ed.). Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood publishing.
- Asano, M. (Victim). (2015). *Firsthand: Transforming gender* [Television series episode]. (Producer), *CBC television*.
- Every class in every school* [Web page] (2011). Retrieved from <https://egale.ca/everyclass/>
- The every teacher project* [Web page] (2016). Retrieved from <https://egale.ca/every-teacherproject/>
- Grossman, A. H., & D'Augelli, A. R. (2010). Transgender youth and life-threatening behaviors. *Suicide and life-threatening behavior*, 37, 527-537.
<https://doi:10.1521/suli.2007.37.5.527>
- Taylor, C. G., Meyer, E. J., Peter, T., Ristock, J., Short, D., & Campbell, C. (2016). *Gaps between beliefs, perceptions, and practices: The every teacher project on LGBTQ-inclusive education in canadian schools. Journal of LGBT youth*, 13(1-2), 112-140. <https://doi:10.1080/19361653.2015.1087929>

