Supporting Indigenous Queer-2S Students in Culturally Safer School Spaces

Portfolio

Submitted as partial requirement for the fulfillment of a Master of Education by:

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Description of Project

In their report, *The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools*, Taylor and Peter (2011) noted that "students hear 'that's gay' and 'faggot' and 'lezbo' every day at school" (p.10). Some students are able to disregard these harmful comments, while others are not. Other youth face even more discrimination as they are doubly marginalized in schools, identifying membership in both the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit community (LGBTQ2S and referred to as Q-2S in this study) and their ethnic or racialized community, or, as in the case of this study's student group, their First Nation, Métis or Inuit community (FNMI and referred to as Indigenous in this study). Derogatory names, hurtful comments, micro-aggressions as well as acts of racism can all cause significant harms in educational contexts, such as schools and classrooms, making education unsafe or schools quite terrifying, leading to high drop-out rates, increased risks for mental health problems, including suicide, and compounding long-term oppressions in children's lives, such as chronic unemployment and poverty (Craig, McInroy & Austin, 2018; van Wormer & McKinney, 2003; Walters, Horwath & Simoni, 2001). For these reasons, it is essential that queer teachers, such as myself, become role models and work to create culturally safer spaces for Indigenous Q-2S students and their families, who often experience multiple exclusions, oppressions and harms while trying to obtain their right to equal or equitable education.

As an experienced Gender and Sexual Alliance (GSA) teacher-mentor and an experienced teacher in northern/remote First Nation communities, I demonstrate to other settler-teachers how to engage Q-2S Indigenous youth through an autoethnography of my own GSA teaching with multiple queer and 2S youth groups. This autoethnography aims to explore and develop an indigenized trauma-informed pedagogy that aims to recognize the intersection of

ongoing historical oppressions, human rights' struggles, and injustices against Indigenous and Q-

2S communities (Morgensen, 2012). I demonstrate this Q-2S trauma-informed safer space

pedagogy through three tasks: (1) a review of the relevant literature on the socio-cultural-

historical roles of Indigenous Q-2S people, the effects of colonization which continue as harmful

realities in schools, and examples of safer, more inclusive spaces such as GSA programs that can

help support Indigenous Q-2S students and ensure greater cultural safety (Barker, Goodman, &

DeBeck, 2017) in schools; (2) autoethnographic reflections and stories to compare my lived

experiences as a gay White settler teacher in two very different school districts (one large

southern Ontario board with ethnically diverse, newcomer and racialized students and a remote

northern Ontario district of reserve schools and only Indigenous youth/families); and lastly, (3) a

workshop for staff and colleagues to share my research on how to support gender/sexuality

diverse students and foster more inclusive spaces of belonging and cultural safety for Indigenous

Queer-2S youth in urban schools.

Background and Rationale

Background - Situating Myself

Situating or locating oneself is an important practice in most Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. Hindle, Hyndes, Phillips and Rameka (2015) highlight the practice of locating oneself from a Maori perspective during introductory speeches called *Mihimihi*. The *Mihimihi* allow people to situate themselves "across physical, cultural and social landscapes to establish connections to all those who are present" (p. 85). I locate myself as a white settler, as one whose ancestors do not originate where I currently reside or on these lands called Canada. I do this to highlight my own limited cultural understandings of history and connections to Indigenous community while attempting to braid my life into greater ethical relationality with Indigenous Peoples. I aim to not speak from or reproduce the easy or dominant settler stance of a "perfect stranger" (Higgins, Madden & Korteweg, 2015) where settlers feel entitled to declare no connection to Indigenous peoples or guilt for settler-colonialism. As an educator who wants to reduce the harms and ongoing impacts of colonization in schools, I need to first recognize and respect the traditional territory or homelands of the Fort William First Nation, and to be in better relations to my treaty partners, the Anishinaabeg of the 1850 Robinson-Superior treaty, along with the many First Peoples of Northwestern Ontario such as the Grand Council of Treaty #3 (the Anishinaabe), the Métis, and the people of Treaty #9 (the Nishnawbe Aski), who all make Thunder Bay their home and send their children to the city's schools. I am a White man of Northern European, Finnish and Russian heritage whose parents and grand-parents came to this land for a better life and settled on stolen Indigenous lands, without contending with this original and ongoing crime of settler-colonialism. I have arrived in a place where I can acknowledge both my unearned settler privilege as well as my role and responsibilities to develop respectful

relationships with Indigenous students/families to make Thunder Bay schools culturally safe

(Gerlach, Browne & Greenwood, 2017).

I grew up in Northern Ontario, specifically in Thunder Bay, with very close connections

to family and the Finnish community. I also identify with a minority community that has been

and continues to be ostracized, ridiculed, and violently attacked, physically and mentally across

Canada because I am a gay man and teacher. But I only speak from *one* minority perspective as

gay or queer, rather than from an intersectional identity of race and sexuality. For many years, I

have been a teacher-mentor to queer racialized youth and their allies in GSA programs in a

predominantly South-Asian suburb in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). I have also lived and

worked in Indigenous communities, but recognize that I cannot speak directly for, or generalize

about Indigenous issues, practices, or cultural ways of knowing as a non-Indigenous person or

Canadian settler. I consciously document this portfolio research journey as a critically reflexive

settler educator to not disengage from "settler moves to innocence" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.

10)—those moves that excuse or redeem settlers from their complicit ongoing racism in

perpetuating cultural genocide through teaching, while believing we are distanced from these

systemic forces or somehow enlightened beyond reproducing settler colonialism. Instead, the

goal of my teaching and portfolio work is to focus on and best serve Indigenous Q-2S youth,

families, and communities by working to transform school spaces, away from institutionalized

colonial harms and towards a foundation of Indigenous cultural safety.

Through the relationships I have developed personally and professionally with

Indigenous youth in communities of the Far North and with queer racialized youth in the GTA of

Southern Ontario, I am now in a better place of understanding relationality with Q-2S students.

Through this portfolio, I offer humble insights as a white teacher-researcher to help shift my

settler colleagues' perspectives and pedagogies to ensure more efforts at reconciliation through

settler teacher de/colonizing (Madden, 2019). I believe sharing my stories of teacher change,

with mistakes, discomfort, and growth, can provide new understandings of queer and Two-Spirit

Indigenous students. By describing my own settler de/colonizing journey, I can support other

settler teachers to enact greater reconciliation and respectful relations with Indigenous

students/families through culturally safer and sustaining spaces in schools and classrooms.

Portfolio Tasks

Introduction to Tasks

The primary purpose of this portfolio is to help educators understand the importance of culturally safer spaces for Indigenous Queer-2 Spirit (Q-2S) youth in schools. Safer spaces for Indigenous Q-2S youth that are culturally relevant and trauma-informed will not only provide an inclusive space where youth can express their diverse gender-sexual selves, but it may also create open spaces within schools where Indigenous students can reclaim their cultural identities (Barker, Goodman & DeBeck, 2017). When Indigenous Q-2S youth find a place of belonging in a school-based community (e.g., a GSA), then the potential is increased to help reduce rates of self-harm or suicide among these youth while increasing graduation rates or academic success as well as overall student wellbeing.

Task #1 - Literature Review

The first task is a review of pertinent literature that addresses the following research topics and issues: the historical role of Indigenous Q-2S people in their communities; the effects of colonization which have led to present day harms and ongoing colonial realities for Indigenous Q-2S communities; how schools can become spaces attuned to decolonization and actions for reconciliation; and, how queer safe spaces such as GSA programs in schools can model approaches that support Indigenous Q-2S students to self-determine and reclaim their own education. The literature review's purpose is to build the research framework for tasks #2 and #3.

Task #2 – Autoethnographic Narrative

Ellis (2004) and Holman Jones (2005) define autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (as cited in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010, n.p.). As a

white settler male teacher, I am unable to speak directly for Indigenous youth or cultures but

hope to help other educators on a path towards "education-as-reconciliation" (Korteweg &

Fiddler, 2018, p. 256), an engaged praxis for repairing settler-colonial harms and improving

ethical relationality, through reflecting on my own lived experiences as documented in a learning

journal or autoethnography. Autoethnographies resist colonial research methods whereby the

colonizer exploits a culture for their own gain (Conquergood, 1991; Ellis, 2007; Riedmann,

1993, as cited in Ellis et al., 2010; Ellis, 2008). Gilley (2006) notes that it can be difficult to

conduct fieldwork in a community to which a researcher does not belong, thus, I write task #2

from the positionality of a gay/queer educator and my involvement with intersectional

communities of racialized and gender/sexuality diverse students. This autoethnographic study

not only allows me to directly relate to and participate in decolonial queer pedagogy (Driskill,

2010; Ellasante, 2021; Nichols, 2018) but it also highlights culturally inclusive experiences with

queer youth and families that can help other educators approach Indigenous Queer-2S students

with greater understanding and empathy (Ellis, 2008; Ellis et al., 2010).

Task #3 – Workshop for Educators: Supporting Indigenous gender/sexuality diverse students

The final portfolio task is a culminating representation of my research that is mobilized

into a workshop for educator colleagues to improve the school environment for Indigenous

gender/sexuality diverse students or Q-2S youth through decolonial GSA programs. The

workshop will engage teacher colleagues in a decolonial queer pedagogy, highlighted and

illustrated by my own lived experiences of unlearning and unsettling my colonial approach. I

will also demonstrate this approach with relevant research and resources to guide staff towards

thinking through more culturally safe, sustaining, and sensitive learning environments for their

own schools. I intend to deliver this workshop through professional development sessions within my school and across the board.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms and definitions will help to highlight some of the key ideas within the portfolio tasks including the literature review. Many of these definitions are paraphrased or direct quotes from researchers in the field.

Queer-2S: Mayo (2013) and McCready (2004) use queer as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and all others who claim a nonnormative, non-heterosexual identity. For the purposes of this portfolio the 2S, or Two-Spirit, is added to represent some Indigenous Peoples who identify within the Queer or LGBTQ categories, as well as others who do not identify within those categories but instead have a deeper spiritual and cultural connection (Garrett & Barret, 2003; Gilley, 2006; Lang, 2016)

GSA: Gay-Straight Alliances (or more recently for greater inclusivity called Gender and Sexuality Alliances) are "meant to be a safe and supportive social space for students from the LGBTQ community and allies" (Tompkins, Kearns & Mitton-Kükner, 2017, p. 694).

Indigenous Cultural Safety: According to Papps and Ramsden (1996) in reference to nursing and midwifery services, "cultural safety places an obligation on the nurse or midwife to provide care within the framework of recognizing and respecting the difference of any individual… [it] addresses power relationships between the service provider and the people who use the service" (pp. 493-494). It also empowers the users of the service to determine if the user felt safe. For the purposes of this portfolio, the same definition of cultural safety will also be applied to education contexts.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: Paris (2012) states that "culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). Paris (2012) highlights that in process of being culturally sustaining we should not generalize, simplify, or connect only to past cultural identities, instead "we must be open to sustaining them in both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used to contemporary young people" (p. 95).

Safe Spaces: Polletta (1999) defines safe spaces as "small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization" (p. 1). Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, and Drechsler (2012) argue that safe spaces encompass three dimensions, including "context (safe from what?), membership (safe for whom?), and activity (safe to do what?)" (p. 204); however, whether a space is safe or not is dependent on the participants feelings of safety.

Settler Colonialism: Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasise the role of land and ownership, when they define settler colonialism:

> … different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain….Within settler colonialism, the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth….Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation. (p. 5)

Decolonization: Tuck and Yang (2012) note that "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land, simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted" (p. 7). Given the definition of decolonization by Tuck and Yang (2012), the portfolio itself cannot be used as a tool to decolonize schools through rematriation of land. Instead, I will ensure that the portfolio will not employ the term, decolonization, as a metaphor or method for "settler moves to innocence" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10) that aim to absolve settlers from the harms of ongoing land dispossession against Indigenous peoples.

Reconciliation: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a) highlights that,

> reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country... there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour. (pp. 6-7)

Reconciliation by settler educators is the main purpose of this portfolio as it is meant to displace settler-colonialism in schools while opening space in education for Indigenous LGBTQ-2S peoples to reclaim their cultural identities and community sovereignty.

Chapter 2: Methods/Methodology

As a white settler educator, I approach this Indigenous education study with great critical humility, acknowledging that I am not an expert in Indigenous Knowledge (IK) or cultures, nor do I have any of the lived experiences of racism against racialized peoples (Black, Indigenous and People of colour, BIPOC) in Canada. However, through this project, I do hope to take responsibility for settler colonial harms in schools by researching how to develop culturally safe space spaces in schools to support and improve the school environment for Indigenous Q-2S students.

In task 1, I review pertinent literature on topics relevant to this portfolio, including current and historical research focused on Indigenous Q-2S peoples and their communities/cultures, first centering Indigenous scholars who are in relation, and then those non-Indigenous scholars who work directly with Indigenous communities.

For task 2, my autoethnography uses my own stories from my time as the co-lead teacher of a GSA/GSD club in a Greater Toronto Area (GTA) secondary school. I describe, reflect, and analyze my experiences in trying to relate with newcomer/immigrant families and other BIPOC communities to draw patterns of commonalities or differences relevant for supporting northern Ontario Indigenous Q-2S youth. It should be noted that Ellis (2004) and Holman Jones (2005) define autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (as cited in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010, n.p.). Through this task, I document how I came to understand the intersectionality of queer youth issues with race, ethnicity, and culture by reliving experiences and remembering stories of my teacher attempts to relate to the distinct cultures of these GSA/GSD students and their families. I further expand on this task to (re)generate or

reconfigure these key patterns or concepts to bring into relation with Indigenous Q-2S youth in

Northern Ontario. My purpose is to de/colonize settler-colonial patriarchal heteronormativity to

"centre Indigenous thought, disrupt colonial relations, and eliminate the potential for pan-

Indian philosophical approaches to pedagogies" (Styres, 2017, p. 17).

For task 3, I combine the research from task 1 with the narratives from task 2 to develop

a research-based power point presentation and workshop for teacher-colleagues to better engage

and improve the school environment for Indigenous Q-2S students in northern Ontario. The

presentation is designed to help educators conceptualize and develop safer spaces for Indigenous

Q-2S students in their own school programs and to focus on inclusivity, cultural sustainability

and decolonial pedagogies for all Indigenous students and their communities.

Ethics Review

As my portfolio does not involve the examination of human participants as data, I did not

seek approval from the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University. However, this portfolio is

intentional in its stance to follow the four Rs of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) which are

consistent with a decolonial pedagogy inclusive of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and

responsibility. First, I value respect for Indigenous cultural integrity by acknowledging and

incorporating "cultural knowledge, traditions and core values" (p. 6) whenever indicated in the

Indigenous scholarship. Second, I sought to produce knowledge that was relevant for Indigenous

Q-2S peoples as well as examine my own biased views and practices against the twelve

"standards" identified by Hampton (1988) to steer away from unknowingly continuing settler-

colonialism in education. Third, reciprocity is demonstrated in this portfolio by placing an

emphasis "on making teaching and learning two-way processes, in which the give-and-take

between [teachers] and students opens up new levels of understanding for everyone" (p. 10).

Lastly, I demonstrate "responsibility through participation" (p. 11) by ensuring that the tasks within the portfolio, including developing school programs such as GSA/GSDs, are accessible and allow Indigenous Q-2S students and their families the "opportunity to exercise control" (p. 11).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

"White teachers [often] deliver a curriculum that is reflective of and shaped by eurocentrism and whiteness" (Higgins, Madden & Korteweg, 2015, p. 251), demonstrating how even well-intentioned educators can still lead Indigenous LGBTQ and Two-Spirit youth (further referred to as Q-2S) to become invisible or victims of racism and homophobia (Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008). Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) or Gender and Sexual Diversity (GSD) clubs that are culturally safe and sustaining, however, can become safer and braver spaces for Indigenous Q-2S and other racialized queer youth. This literature review examines the historical struggles of Indigenous Q-2S people and the role that education can play in the recognition of homophobic oppressions and the advocacy for these marginalized children's rights. This literature review will demonstrate with established literature how schools and teachers could help shift curriculum and programming towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and social justice for queer communities. Teachers can play a key role in addressing the ongoing settler-colonial dominance (Higgins, Madden & Korteweg, 2015; Loutzenheiser, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012) and multiple oppressions against Indigenous queer students and families (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018) on the path towards reconciliation-in-education (Calls #62 and #63, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015b) through the establishment of safer spaces in schools.

Historical Context of Indigenous Q-2S People

Historically, Indigenous Q-2S community members were accepted within some Indigenous communities before colonization (Garrett & Barret, 2003; Gilley, 2006; Mayo & Sheppard, 2012). It must be stated that Indigenous communities are all different or unique, rather

than risk categorizing them all as pan-Indigenous which is a colonial strategy of erasure. Each

tribe or Indigenous community has practices, values and beliefs which may or may not be similar

to other communities (Kirmayer, Tait, & Simpson, 2009). Many Indigenous communities,

however, viewed gender and sexuality as fluid and non-binary (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Mayo

& Sheppard, 2012; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Sheppard & Mayo, 2013; Walters et al.,

2001). Some men identified with female roles, some females identified with male roles, and

some took mates of the same or opposite sex, depending on their sexual orientation (Adams &

Phillips, 2009; Goulet, 1996; Mayo & Sheppard, 2012; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004).

Blackwood (1997) and Cromwell (1997) also lend evidence to research regarding fluid

gender roles in Indigenous communities, when they reference Two-Spirit men who helped make

pottery and baskets and Two-Spirit women who hunted and engaged in war. Bittner (2014),

Mayo and Sheppard (2012), and Robinson (2014) refer to Dakota words such as *Winkte* and Dine

(Navajo) words such as *Nadleehe* or *Nadleehi* to suggest that through language, Indigenous

communities accepted LGBTQ and Two-Spirit people. However, colonization brought European

settler beliefs of gender and sexuality, where binaries, male or female, heterosexual or

homosexual, were the dominant norms (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Bittner, 2014; Gilley, 2006;

Morgensen, 2012; Robinson, 2014). Within these binary beliefs, homosexuality and gender

fluidity were not openly accepted (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Bittner, 2014; Meyer-Cook &

Labelle, 2004). Instead, the imposition of these beliefs on Indigenous Peoples and communities

caused Indigenous LBGTQ and Two-Spirit people to go into hiding, and many were forced out

of their esteemed roles and valued positions in the community. (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Bittner,

2014; Gilley, 2006; Mayo & Sheppard, 2012).

Since many Q-2S people were not the bearers of children, they often held leadership roles within the community (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Garrett & Barret, 2003). Two-Spirit people were spiritual leaders and respected because they were able to see aspects of life through female and male spirits (Garrett & Barret, 2003). Others within the Indigenous Q-2S community were often educators, healers, and community leaders (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Garrett & Barret, 2003), whose "qualities were seen to add value and contribute to life within the communities" (Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004, p. 30). Many historical accounts depict Two-Spirit people in these esteemed positions within the community. Oral and documented accounts, as well as artifacts such as carvings, paintings, and sculptures, were passed down and show the inclusion of Q-2S people (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Mayo & Sheppard, 2012). With the arrival of European settlers, many of the artifacts were destroyed, oral history tainted by non-inclusive beliefs, and projects to eliminate Indigenous Q-2S people were enacted (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Morgensen, 2012).

Present Day Realities for Remote and Urban Indigenous Q-2S People

With the erasure of historical truths and mass oppression through systems such as the Indian Residential School (IRS), education was employed to colonize and assimilate Indigenous Peoples into the dominant settler population and colonization continues to impact Indigenous Q-2S communities, with the erasure of traditional Indigenous gender roles and protocols (Garrett & Barret, 2003; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Morgensen, 2012; Robinson, 2014, 2017). Where they once prospered, Indigenous Q-2S people now face many psychosocial, socioeconomic and physical abuses (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Erney & Weber, 2018; Robinson, 2017; Walters et al., 2001). Many families and communities reject Q-2S people because of the influences of Euro-western religions that see them as sinful (Bittner, 2014; Robinson, 2014; van Wormer &

McKinney, 2003). Lang (2016) notes that "homophobia was rampant both on the reservations

and in urban Native contexts when I did my fieldwork" (p. 300) and through further research, she

suggests that not much has changed. Gilley (2006) noted that,

> Although Two-Spirit men share the general view that Indian people are victims of
>
> colonialism and pressures to acculturate, they are also critical of tribal leaders for not
>
> holding on to traditions of gender diversity as they did other cultural practices. In this
>
> way, Two-Spirit men see the respect once given gender diversity as a part of the historic
>
> traditional values that Indian people now venerate. In contrast, many non-gay Indians see
>
> same-sex relationships and gender difference as something that did not exist historically
>
> and should not be recognized as associated with contemporary Native peoples. (p. 61)

The present view in many communities can make it difficult for Q-2S people to be accepted or

even tolerated (Gilley, 2006; Mayo, 2007). In many remote or isolated communities, especially

in Northern Ontario, the influence of the Catholic Church is still quite strong (Chacaby &

Plummer, 2016). According to Kosciw, Diaz, and Greytak (2008) Q-2S youth in remote and

rural communities have very limited access to LGBT+ related resources and supports. For this

reason, many Indigenous community members who identify as Q-2S turn to urban centres as a

way out of the community in order to situate themselves in a place of inclusion (Gilley, 2006);

however, their Indigenous identity is often another barrier they face (Adams & Phillips, 2009;

Garrett & Barret, 2003; Gilley, 2006; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Robinson, 2017). They are

more likely to experience verbal, physical and sexual assaults than other white LGBTQ+ people

in urban centres (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Garrett & Barret, 2003; Loutzenheiser, 2015;

Robinson, 2017; Taylor & Peter, 2011), leading to additional trauma. The trauma experienced by

Indigenous Peoples due to continued colonization is multigenerational, Indigenous Q-2S people,

in particular, are more susceptible to mental health, substance abuse, and instances of self-harm (Balsam, Huang, Fieland, Simoni, & Walters, 2004; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Robinson, 2017; Walters et al., 2001). "According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, First Nations youth suffer suicide rates five to seven times that of their non-Indigenous peer group, while Inuit youth suffer suicide rates 11 times the Canadian average – among the highest suicide rates in the world" (Government of Canada, 2006, as cited in Baker, Goodman & DeBeck, 2017, p. 208). Many Indigenous Q-2S people also live in poverty, struggling to regain their rightful place as a respected leader in the community (Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Robinson, 2017). However, with societal changes, including policies of inclusion, Indigenous Q-2S people are beginning to assert themselves as leaders within some of their communities (Robinson, 2014). One of the policies of inclusion for Q-2S peoples in the area of education are Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) which provide a safe space for Q-2S youth.

Gay-Straight Alliance or Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSAs) Programs

Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) programs can have multiple roles. From a club that meets regularly to support Q-2S students and their allies, to a program that seeks to make a societal change (Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, & Drechsler, 2012; Poteat, Yoshikawa, Calzo, Russell, & Horn, 2017). Stonefish and Lafreniere (2015) note that Gay-Straight Alliances

> direct their efforts to educating as wide a circle as possible based on the ideology of inclusion. GSAs [Gay-Straight Alliances] draw on multiple resources to empower through knowledge and create genuine opportunities for change. GSAs provide a space for LGBTQ+ youth to intellectually explore their subculture(s) and to safely deal with the challenges of sexual and gender diversity. (p. 19)

However, the reach and success of GSAs are dependent on the commitment and beliefs that

students, teachers, administrators and the community have (Mayo, 2013). When the community

does not believe in, or support, Q-2S peoples, Gay-Straight Alliance programs and clubs can be

difficult to organize (Mayberry et al., 2013). Thus, the development of inclusive policies to allow

students to request the development of Gay-Straight Alliance programs and clubs has made a

difference for many Q-2S students (Mayo, 2013; Robinson, 2014).

GSA Programs as Safer Spaces

A safe space can be defined as a supportive space for vulnerable, socially isolated and

marginalized individuals, however, "it is not altogether clear what counts as a safe space" (Fetner

et al., 2012, p. 189). Gay-Straight Alliance or more recently referred to as Gender and Sexuality

Alliance (GSA) programs are often perceived as safe spaces for LGBTQ youth (Fetner et al.,

2012; Mayberry et al., 2013; Mayo, 2013; Morrison, 2012; Stonefish & Lafreniere, 2015;

Toomey et al., 2011). As a safe space, GSA programs and clubs allow students that identify as

queer and allies to come together in a space to support one another (Morrison, 2012). In this

space, usually with an adult advisor, students can openly discuss their concerns, their experiences

in the school and community, or plan events aimed at social change (Fetner et al., 2012). It is a

space where all in attendance should feel welcomed and accepted (Morrison, 2012). Fetner et al.

(2012) note that in some instances, students and property involved in GSA programs face

hostility and can be subject to threats, menace or vandalism by other members of the school

community. Although conceptualized as a safe space, students have been targeted due to their

affiliation with the GSA (Fetner et al., 2012).

Morrison (2012) indicates that the title itself can be seen as limiting in the sense that it is

binary or where members are either gay or straight. Fetner et al. (2012) outline how some groups

were not able to call themselves a GSA but instead had to use a more general equity-focused title

such as social justice clubs. Fetner et al. (2012) and McCready (2004a) also highlight the need

for more inclusion of racialized students and different gender identities because GSA programs

can cause students of colour to feel invisible due to dual marginalizations of race and gender

identity/sexuality, or the programs themselves may be racist by design (Betro, 2014; Fetner et al.,

2012). Conversely, Mayo (2013) argues that although these issues do arise, GSA programs

improve the atmosphere of most schools by showing greater acceptance towards queer people.

GSA programs can also be cooperative places of activism where queer and ally students work

together to change the perception or beliefs of others in their school or the wider community

(Fetner et al., 2012; Mayberry et al., 2013; Mayo, 2013; Morrison, 2012)

GSA Programs as Safer Spaces for Racialized Students

Taylor and Peter (2011) note that "very few statistically significant findings surfaced

about the experiences of LGBTQ[2S] [Indigenous] youth in Canadian schools in [their] report"

(p. 21). It is important to recognize the intersection of queer identity and race as "separately and

together, [because] these identities are often subjected to bias, discrimination and current and

historical oppression by communities and public systems" (Erney & Weber, 2018, p. 151). For

this compelling reason of intersectional marginalizations as well as the very limited research on

the question of GSA programs as safe spaces for Indigenous students, my study focuses on

research that centres racialized queer students. However, it should be noted that not all racialized

queer people have the same lived experience of culture, community, language or history (Fox &

Ore, 2010).

Stonefish and Lafreniere (2015) suggest that GSAs have been a key component of the

recognition and inclusion of queer issues, however, Blackburn and McCready (2009) suggest

that GSA programs are often inadequate for racialized youth and further normalize whiteness.

Fetner et al. (2012) and Mayo (2013) emphasize this argument noting that white power and

privilege in school GSAs can marginalize queer youth of colour through exclusionary practices

based on race. Research conducted by Fetner et al. (2012) found that "students of colour… were

most likely to be marginalized in these groups, while straight [white] students were welcomed"

(p. 201). McCready (2004b) also posits that racialized youth do not feel safe in schools and

extracurricular programs because schools and programs do not provide the safety they need from

other students of colour; "David believed his [lighter] skin colour combined with his gender non-

conformity, seemed to position him outside the boundaries of Blackness in the eyes of his Black

peers" (p. 139). While Cruz (2008) highlights that racialized students may feel fear of

persecution or isolation from their families or communities, Mayo (2013) notes that the lack of

faculty of colour at GSA meetings leads to fewer students of colour "coming out" to meetings,

instead choosing other clubs or supports which reflect their racial, ethnic or cultural

backgrounds. From an even bigger perspective than GSA programs, Loutzenheiser (2015) notes

that school boards often overlook or minimize the importance of race in queer policies,

> neglect[ing] to recognize the racialized and Indigenous communities that may have a
>
> different relationship to sexual orientation and/or gender identity, or may experience
>
> homophobic/heteronormative/transphobic harassment and violence differently than those
>
> not bearing the weight of White privilege and colonization. (p. 111)

Although much research suggests that GSAs and queer policies can lead to BIPOC (Black,

Indigenous and People of Colour) queer students remaining invisible, there are some who believe

that GSAs can be a supportive and safe space for racialized students.

Mayo (2013) does suggest that the presence of a GSA can lead to positive experiences and safe spaces for any student who may be an ally or member of the queer community. Fox and Ore (2010) recommend reconsidering the idea of a safe space and instead adopting the notion of a "safe(r) space" (p. 631) which can be more inclusive of racialized students by questioning what the definition of safety means to each individual. The use of bibliotherapy in GSAs, especially sources that directly relate to the cultural identity of students of colour through literature such as books, poems, or other media can increase the motivation and self-confidence of these students, as well as address common misconceptions (Majied, 2010). A final key component to ensure that queer racialized youth are supported in GSAs is to ensure that they feel safe by having the multiple dimensions of their identity affirmed, so as not to promote colour-blind approaches, but instead recognize and authentically engage diversity (Craig, McInroy & Austin, 2018; Erney & Weber, 2018).

Certainly, more research is needed to better understand and account for the specific needs of queer racialized people (Balsam et al., 2004; Craig et al., 2018; Mayberry et al., 2013; Poteat et al., 2017; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Fox and Ore (2010) argue that

> LGBT[Q2S+] safe spaces created as sites to feel *comfortabl*e, *affirmed*, and *addressed* are similarly inflected by the impulse to reconstruct a self with accesses to privilege rather than addressing the systemic and interconnecting violence and inequities that bring about the kind of illegitimacy and impropriety many different kinds of queer people experience. (p. 639)

Thus, it is important for GSAs to not only act as safer spaces but to support and benefit all queer youth and allies and be a space of social change (Fox & Ore, 2010).

GSA Programs to mentor Students as Agents of Change

The role of GSA programs and clubs is not only to provide a safe space for queer

students and their allies, but to provide a space where they can meet to discuss how they can

change the status quo (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Fetner et al., 2012; Mayberry et al., 2013;

Mayo, 2013; Morrison, 2012).

> While established initially to provide safe spaces and counselling supports within the
>
> academic setting, GSAs [Gay-Straight Alliances] transcend institutional boundaries by
>
> challenging prejudice and discrimination on a much larger scale. Built on a partnership
>
> between LGBTQ+ youth and their heterosexual allies, GSAs are grounded within the
>
> educational setting but are extending their reach beyond the confines of the institution.
>
> (Stonefish & Lafreniere, 2015, p. 11)

Although Stonefish and Lafreniere (2015) outline the community reach GSA programs are

attempting to make, Mayberry et al. (2013) suggest that some of the programs are simply social

groups where students meet to hang out. In this case, GSA programs are not working towards

making a change on a large scale, but are instead places of comfort, though, to some students, a

place of comfort may be all they are seeking (Mayberry et al., 2013). Fetner et al. (2012) note

that sometimes limited activism is not due to a lack of desired change or work on the part of

students or staff in GSA programs, but instead due to restrictive policies beyond the control of

the program. In these instances, GSA members have been unable to "create much policy change

in their schools and communities" (Fetner et al., 2012, p. 201). However, many GSA programs,

have made differences in communities where they can exist (Mayo, 2013; Morrison, 2012).

Specific activism activities, aimed at societal change, organized by school GSA programs

include the "day of silence," where students bring attention to queer issues by drawing attention

to "cultural silence," and "pride prom" where students can bring a same-sex date to prom (Fetner et al., 2012, p. 202). Morrison (2012) also outlines her work with a rural GSA program where members organized an "Acceptance Week" which included marches in the school and speeches. Morrison (2012) does note that although the activity was intended to bring about acceptance of queer youth, it felt rather like tolerance instead, where the school community simply did not argue against the existence of a GSA Alliance program. In the end, the activism of GSA programs is only as strong and beneficial as those students and staff who are leading the program (Fetner et al., 2012). To further the call of activism in GSA programs, it is essential to also include the voices of other marginalized groups within the queer community (Mayo & Sheppard, 2012). McCready (2004b) notes that as more students of colour come to openly identify as LGBTQ2S+ GSA/GSD staff advisors need to examine the dominant representation of BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ youth in mass media to

> recognize students who experiences differ from these representations… to [make] a conscious effort to use speakers bureaus and workshop facilitators that are racially diverse… [to decorate] the meeting rooms with queer historical figures from multiple racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds; having books, magazines, and other reading materials on hand that reflect a range of racial and ethnic experiences about queer identity; and [build] coalitions with other students and teachers who are broadly concerned with the ways multiple forms of oppression compromise the safety and effectiveness of urban schools. (p. 142)

Decolonization and Reconciliation to Improve Indigenous Cultural Safety for Youth in Schools

According to Tuck and Yang (2012), the critical issue of any decolonization or reconciliation attempt is the repatriation/rematriation of Indigenous lands. In regards to a decolonizing approach to education, Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) suggest that "education has to begin with Land because the primary act of colonization is stealing Indigenous land while instilling a neo-colonial ideology that legitimizes the occupation of Land by settlers, away from the rightful Indigenous homeland caretakers" (p. 265). In order to decolonize GSA programs, discussion and teachings of land will occur as the foundation of any Indigenous education but will not be the main or sole focus. Reconciliation in this study of culturally safer GSAs will be approached as "… establishing and maintaining respectful and healthy [Indigenous]–non-[Indigenous] relationships in Canada" (Madden, 2019, p. 291). Decolonization and any attempts at indigenization must be grounded in historical truths and authentic community-determined practices (Gerlach et al., 2017; Madden, 2019) in order for settler educators to start a social imaginary that can open spaces of cultural safety where students and teachers build "capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 7) as action-oriented, accountability-focused reconciliation.

School safe spaces, such as GSAs, can become culturally safer for Indigenous Q-2S students when teacher-advisors acknowledge their settler privileges (Gerlach et al., 2017) and start decolonizing their biases, even unintentional, that maintain systemically colonial spaces of education. GSA teacher-advisors need to promote Indigenous cultural safety (ICS) that intersects with sexual orientation and gender identity issues in education (Lenette, 2014). ICS very much depends on consulting with local Indigenous community and Elders in order to learn how best to

respect their IK, customs, protocols and traditions (Aseron, Greymorning, Miller & Wilde, 2013;

Fulcher, 2012). Similar to education services, nursing and midwifery researchers, Papps and

Ramsden (1996) posit that "cultural safety places an obligation on the [professional] nurse or

midwife to provide care within the framework of recognizing and respecting the difference of

any individual… [it] addresses power relationships between the service provider and the people

who use the service" (pp. 493-494). For many Indigenous students in urban schools, a culturally

safer space "actively counteracts the impacts of systemic racism and other forms of

discrimination" (Gerlach et al., 2017, p. 1764) through story and talking circles (Aseron et al.,

2013). It is critically important for the cultural safety of Indigenous Q-2S students that teacher-

advisors of GSA programs build genuine relationships, based on trust, to support these students

and their whole families (Gerlach et al., 2017).

Improving the Experience for Indigenous Q-2S Students and Families in Culturally and

Queer Safe School Programs

Prior to colonization and the missionization period, Indigenous Q-2S peoples were

openly accepted in their communities when gender identity and sexuality were fluid social

constructs in many Indigenous cultures (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Mayo & Sheppard, 2012;

Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Sheppard & Mayo, 2013). There was no need to conform to a

binary of male or female, heterosexual or homosexual dichotomy, until colonization and the

dominance of Eurocentric beliefs (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). In order to include Indigenous Q-2S

views in GSAs and other equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) programs, teachers must, "queer

White settler colonialism and the colonial gender and sexual categories it relies on" (Hunt &

Holmes, 2015, p. 156). By critiquing programs through "queer of colour" theory, Hunt &

Holmes (2015) suggest that the inclusion of racialized Q-2S people can be better achieved. On

the contrary, Driskill (2010) views "queer of colour critiques" as exclusionary towards

Indigenous Peoples and their own history of colonization. Driskill (2010) argues that instead of

using a queer of colour theory to critique programs, "Two-Spirit critiques locate Two-Spirit and

queer native identities as integrated into larger Indigenous worldviews and practices." (p. 86)

They claim that an indigenized queer theory is the way to reinforce the foundational belief that

Two-Spirit people have always been an integral part of Indigenous communities. Incorporating

Two-Spirit histories in programs can help those students who are also marginalized by their

Indigenous status gain a greater sense of self-acceptance, worth in their communities and pride

for their identity (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Mayo & Sheppard, 2012).

The Two-Spirit Indigenous worldview encourages people to believe that everyone and

everything is important and thus is held in high regard (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

Wilson (2008), referencing the worldview of her community, notes:

> The Swampy Cree dialect of our community has no word for homosexual and no gender-
>
> specific pronouns. Rather than dividing the world into female and male, or making
>
> linguistic distinctions based on sexual characteristics or anatomy, we distinguish between
>
> what is animate and what is inanimate. Living creatures, animate objects, and actions are
>
> understood to have a spiritual purpose (Ahenakew). Our language and culture are rooted
>
> in this fundamental truth: that every living creature and everything that acts in and on this
>
> world is spiritually meaningful. (p. 193)

This belief is echoed through much Indigenous scholarship or research involving Indigenous

communities, where Indigenous LGBTQ and Two-Spirit people are valued as a normal and vital

part of the community (Driskill, 2010). As such, incorporating a history of Two-Spirit

Indigenous Peoples into educational or school programs will make them more inclusive spaces

(Mayo & Sheppard, 2012).

Many holistic Indigenous perspectives on gender and sexuality can also be incorporated

into school programs to improve the environment for Indigenous Q-2S youth (Driskill, 2010;

Mayo & Sheppard, 2012; Robinson, 2014). According to Driskill (2010), a lesson regarding

Two-Spirit Indigenous worldview can be reinforced through GSA programs by teaching the

belief that Two-Spirit people "carry very particular medicine – which is not to be misunderstood

as more (or less) important than man's or woman's particular medicines" (p. 85). Robinson

(2014) suggests the use of the Seven Grandfather Teachings of "wisdom, love, respect, courage

honesty, humility, and truth… such values could form the foundation for a whole-school

program that emphasizes community belonging, character development, and personal

responsibility in ways that include two-spirited people" (Robinson, 2014, p. 25). However,

Robinson (2014) also argues that care must be taken when teaching about Two-Spirit peoples

because each Indigenous community may recognize Two-Spirit people differently, especially

through language. Sheppard and Mayo (2013) support community differences by suggesting

teachings that are community-specific. For example, teaching about the Diné view of Two-Spirit

people and its relation to overall American beliefs showcases "the multiple layers of oppression,

the extreme violence that defines the interactions of the Diné and the Americans, and the

ongoing lived oppression that many who identify with this history [face]" (Sheppard & Mayo,

2013, p. 262). Bittner (2014) highlights the need for more resources which include Two-Spirit

peoples because it can be difficult to include teachings about unfamiliar identities. Overall,

incorporating a Two-Spirit worldview in GSAs can improve student well-being and ensure that

all students and staff are included regardless of race, spiritual or religious beliefs, gender or

sexual identity (Robinson, 2014).

Conclusion

It is evident from this literature review that there is a great need for further research

focused on Indigenous Q-2S and racialized youth in school GSA/GSD programs. This need is

echoed by many education scholars, including Fetner et al. (2012), Mayberry et al. (2013), and

Poteat et al. (2017). GSA programs, as culturally safe spaces and school-based places of activism

can provide an authentic opening and collaborative space for greater reconciliation between

settler-ally educators and Indigenous Q-2S students and families. Robinson (2014) and Bittner

(2014) have noted that teachers need to be aware and mindful when discussing Indigenous Q-2S

identity as the histories and situations of Indigenous Q-2S people can differ greatly, depending

on the particular Indigenous culture, community, language and land. Tompkins et al. (2017)

highlight the importance of additional training to support teachers and teacher candidates as

LGBTQ advocates, further illustrating the need of education and teachers in ensuring greater

equity for Q-2S students (Tompkins et al., 2017; van Wormer & McKinney, 2003).

Through my autoethnographic study, I will reflect upon stories of unsettling my teacher-

ally/advocate identity through understandings of Indigenous Q-2S student experience and

developing more inclusive cultural approaches to decolonize and create safer, more indigenized

spaces in mainstream schools and classrooms. This autoethnography may support and model for

other educators, particularly non-Indigenous queer teachers, a path towards more decolonial,

equitable and inclusive pedagogies for education-as-reconciliation (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018).

White teachers must focus on bringing their own professional positionality and pedagogical

practice to "challenge racism and its intersections with other axes of oppression, notably

colonialism" (Madden, 2019, p. 297). As Mayo (2007) notes, "work[ing] with young people of

color… can [be] a way into a queer friendship network organized… not only in response to the

racism experienced from young White queer people but also with the support… of non-queer

youth of color" (p. 69). Baker et al. (2017) recommend a decolonial approach, where culture is

used as treatment to prevent youth suicide and work toward healing and the revitalization of

traditional values. GSA and queer educators working together to create safer, decolonial spaces

in schools may not only foster cultural spaces where Indigenous youth can reclaim their

identities, but also help save lives of these Indigenous Q-2S students.

Chapter 4: Task 2 – Creating Safer Brave Spaces from an Autoethnographic Narrative

For many years, I have been a teacher-advocate for students whose voices have been silenced. I, like many of my students, struggled to find my voice and become my authentic self throughout my K-12 years. However, unlike many of the students and families I have worked with, I now understand and recognize that I was not doubly silenced or marginalized by the intersectionality of my queerness with my culture (northern European) or race (white). Many of my students have faced multiple oppressions at the intersection of their culture, race and their sexual/gender identity inside schools and classrooms. I also recognize that there are many caring educators who bravely and quietly continue to respond to these students and do their best to create safer, culturally sustaining, spaces for racialized Q-2S youth.

Stories are an important foundation to Indigenous research and have become the basis of my research as an autoethnography. All of my stories are my own but are greatly influenced by others with whom I have had reciprocal relationships and lived experiences. Although the following stories are all interconnected and several themes can be derived from individual accounts, each story I wrote has a clear, recurring theme of queer pedagogy. By focusing on my lived experiences working with queer racialized students in the GTA, I was then able to connect and extend these many experiences to my current position of teaching and working with Indigenous Q-2S students in Northern Ontario. Much of my previous experience working with racialized youth in GSAs now supports my current task of ensuring that Indigenous students who identify as Q-2S have culturally safer, culturally sustaining, inclusive, and supportive spaces to be themselves and affirmed in their identities.

Themes

The following graphic organizer is a tool which outlines the themes that have been

identified through the analysis of my stories. Each theme is then connected to a specific story

which are all titled in the chart below. This table of themes will be revisited at the end of the

chapter to further extend to action items for settler-teachers in order to support a decolonial queer

pedagogy in their schools and GSA/GSD programs.

Table 1

Thematic Chart of Stories

	Analytic Theme	**Theme Short Title**	**Story**
1	Different cultural and ethnic communities have different views regarding women, gender roles and LGBTQ2S+ peoples.	Differing Views	Respect for Women
2	Queer-Two-Spirit (Q-2S) youth can face a lot of family pressure, from their cultural communities and extended families.	Pressures	"Nina" the Lesbian Student
3	Family's religion or spiritual beliefs can play a very significant role in how they view, behave or treat their Q-2S children.	Religious and Spiritual Beliefs	The Unimpressed Parent
4	Heteronormativity is still dominant and often homophobic in both Indigenous/ethnic communities and society at large.	Homophobia	Day of Pink
5	There is an ongoing need for adult Q-2S presence in schools, especially Q-2S role models from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) communities, including Elders.	Q2-S Role Models	The School GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) Club
6	Q-2S BIPOC and newcomer youth are in need of safer and 'braver' spaces in their schools to freely investigate and express their Q-2S identities while also developing a Q-2S community.	Safer and Braver Spaces	Rainbow Wall

Autoethnographic Stories Connected to Analytic Themes

Story 1: Respect for Women

This first story takes place in a secondary school in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and more specifically within the school's GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) program. As one of the lead teachers for the school GSA, I had many "aha!" moments where I was surprised out of my comfort zone and learned a great deal from the diverse cultural backgrounds of these queer students. Many of these students self-identified as People of Colour (POC), cisgender, heterosexual and female, however, there were some students who identified as gender queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual and fluid. Within the larger school community, a great deal of the students' families were newcomer Canadians, having recently arrived from countries such as India, Syria, Jamaica, and Pakistan as well as students who were first and second generation Canadian.

As March 8th approached, International Women's Day, the GSA students noted a gap within the school and community culture that they wanted and needed to fill; there were not enough women in leadership and those that were leaders were often not respected. I remember one student telling the group about their family dynamics, highlighting the fact that women were not respected in their family, often viewed and treated as subservient or second-class status to men. Another student discussed the love they had for their mother and sisters, but that it was the first-born son who had the respect from the family, treated as a king, and being able to do whatever they wanted because they were male. Another student spoke up, identified as a gay male in the GSA but that he was not "out" to his family because he was not able to express his true sexual identity as it was forbidden in his culture (the same ethnic background as the 'king' male student). The GSA students then decided that it was their mission to improve awareness of

the degrading mistreatment of women within the school, such as the disrespect shown toward female teachers by male students, and in the community. They wanted to change the narrative in order to show the rest of the school that we must place a greater value on women's lives and their lived experiences. As one of the lead teachers of the GSA I was so impressed by the advocacy occurring in the group and even more so when the gay male student was the first to step up and say that something needed to be done. He was determined, regardless of family opinion, to lead a showcase and march within the school while wearing high heels, because he "needed to walk in her shoes." And so, to the anthem of Lady Gaga, this young man stepped up on stage in front of the whole school walking in high heel shoes. Most of the students in the school rose to their feet in applause, many students who I thought would have laughed and turned away, rose in support, not only for the gay male student in high heels, but in support of women and their importance. This was a pivotal moment for my changing perceptions as a GSA lead teacher because around the globe, western colonization has turned many matriarchal societies into patriarchs, where highly respected women and those who identified as women who were leaders and decision makers, were stripped of any power or authority.

The story highlights the first theme of respect for women and sensitized my teaching to the reality that different cultural and ethnic communities have different views regarding women, gender roles and LGBTQ2S+ peoples. Having a greater understanding of this theme is critical for understanding the fuller back story of racialized LGBTQ2S+ students. These youth may come from families where women and men are the only gender identities represented and where each gender has specific or traditional roles within the family and as defined by the cultural community. Racialized LGBTQ2S+ students who identify differently in terms of their gender may not feel as though they socially fit or have a safe space to express themselves.

Bridging Theme-1: Addressing Differing Views of Gender/Sexuality to Support Indigenous Q-2S Youth. Views of gender roles and Q-2S peoples differ by Indigenous community but have also been, and still are, greatly affected by colonization (Kirmayer, Tait, & Simpson, 2009). Where Q-2S peoples were once the leaders of many communities (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Garrett & Barret, 2003), colonization and the euro-western belief in the divine right of the patriarch have greatly disadvantaged Q-2S individuals (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Bittner, 2014; Gilley, 2006; Morgensen, 2012; Robinson, 2014). Consider the trauma experienced by families at the hands of men throughout the continued process of colonization leading to many missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2S, as well as many psychosocial, socioeconomic and other physical abuses (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Erney & Weber, 2018; Robinson, 2017; Walters et al., 2001). In order to support Indigenous Q-2S youth in northern Ontario schools, teachers must first understand the impact of colonization on Q-2S histories and identity so that wrongs can be corrected, and students can have a better understanding of gender identity, fluidity and the changing and reclaiming roles and spaces for Indigenous Q-2S peoples.

Story 2: "Nina" the Lesbian Student

Nina (pseudonym for anonymity) was known to me more through my role as a guidance counsellor rather than through the GSA program, but she would sometimes participate in GSA events. Nina identified as a lesbian and person of colour, more specially she identified as a queer South Asian young woman. In her final year of high school, Nina decided that it was time to come out to her teachers and peers. However, she was concerned that coming out would mean

that her family would find out as well. Nina decided to meet with me as her guidance counsellor to see if I could provide her with any advice or supports.

Unfortunately, I did not have any great advice or words of wisdom for Nina, as I told her that everyone's story is different and the experience of coming out must be an individual choice. I wanted to make sure that Nina was not putting too much pressure on herself but thanked her for sharing her truth with me. She also wanted me to know how scary it has been for her trying to let people know her sexual orientation. Nina had been made aware that a suitable husband was available for her when she was done school and that her future husband would move to Canada so they could start a life together. This was not a future that Nina wanted, as she wanted to pursue a career for herself and she did not want to marry a man.

This impending marriage situation is what fuelled Nina's desire to come out to her teachers and peers because she needed a support system to cope. However, Nina was unable to fulfill her decision to come out because she was afraid that if her family discovered her identity as a lesbian then they would ship her back to her home country, a country that she had not visited for many years. She also told me that if she were to go back and her family were aware that she was a lesbian that she would fear for her life, she thought someone in her family would either "kill me themselves or hire someone to do it." This statement sent chills down my spine as I knew that I needed to not only support Nina's identity but also help to ensure her physical safety.

I brought Nina's concerns forward to school administration to make sure they knew, and could advise me, on what next steps to take. Nina decided that she was going to take her time letting people know that she was a lesbian, particularly for her own safety, but also because she had been accepted to a post-secondary program that would take her a great distance away from home and family. She let me know that when the time was right in her new post-secondary life

that she would begin to come out to peers and professors and hoped that she would one day have

a girlfriend who would hopefully become her wife. She stated that waiting was the best option at

the time and in the end if her family could not accept her for who she was then she would find a

family that would. I have not been in direct contact with Nina since she graduated, but I have

heard from others that she is doing well and living as her true self.

       This story focuses on the second theme for working with LGBTQ2S+ youth as white

settler-educators: how queer BIPOC youth have to contend with the dual pressures from

heteronormative family and cultural community while exploring or seeking their gender/sexual

identities. BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ youth who feel safe expressing their identities within school

safe spaces may start to express or test their identities within their extended family and in the

broader cultural community. However, the feeling of safety within the school GSA context may

come at a cost as families who do not accept the youth's identity may force them to pull back or

withdraw from that safe GSA space at school. The pressure that youth feel to do well for their

families can have long-lasting effects on their ability to express their true identities, including

possible lifelong suppression.

       Bridging Theme-2: Addressing Pressures to Support Indigenous Q-2S Youth. Many

Indigenous youth face the impact of intergenerational trauma, their parents or grandparents who

attended residential school may have developed a set of beliefs which differ from the past beliefs

of the community (Garrett & Barret, 2003; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Morgensen, 2012;

Robinson, 2014, 2017). Students may have seen, or directly been a part of, the rejection of Q-2S

people in their own communities as colonization through western religions viewed Q-2S people

as sinful (Bittner, 2014; Robinson, 2014; van Wormer & McKinney, 2003). Thus, students may

feel that they must follow the same beliefs and practices of their families and communities or

face similar rejection. Access to safe, culturally sustaining spaces in northern Ontario schools

can provide students with the acceptance they require and help them develop lifelong

relationships in order to support them through future unknowns.

Story 3: The Unimpressed Parent

From my experience, many parents are involved in all aspects of their children's lives. As

children grow into young adults, they often feel pressured to live up to their parents'

expectations. My own parents wanted better for me than what they had, and this has been my

understanding when working with many new, first- and second-generation Canadian families.

The pressure placed on youth academically can feel quite overwhelming, but when you add on

top of that parent pressures of identity and conformity it can be debilitating. This was very much

the case for one student in our GTA Secondary School GSA.

The GSA had been up and running in the high school for a few years before a student,

let's call them JJ, joined. JJ had never been involved with the GSA but had heard about it since

the GSA ran many events such as the Day of Pink, International Women's Day, the Day of

Silence, among others. JJ was known by teachers as a quiet student who had previously

experienced some troubles with their mental health. One day JJ approached me and the other

GSA lead teacher to inquire about being involved with the GSA in the hopes of developing some

peer relationships and a support system. As lead teachers we were always happy to accept new

students into the program to spread acceptance and awareness throughout the school. We also

knew that the program was a good way for students to support one another through difficult

times; many students had similar experiences, especially with family.

As lead GSA teachers we typically told students that they should inform parents that they

wanted to be involved in an after-school program. A program focused on acceptance and that

sometimes topics of gender, sexuality, human rights, racism and other intersectional issues would be discussed in order to help address them at the school level. However, in this instance JJ was 17, soon to be 18, and had informed us that they did not want their parent to know for fear that they would no longer be allowed to participate in any extra-curricular activities. We spoke to school administration and counselling and it was decided that we would in fact take JJ's lead on this issue. JJ quickly became one of the outspoken members of the GSA and they found friends and supports where and when they needed them most. A few months later, this situation changed.

A staff member who was not a supporter or believer in the school GSA had informed JJ's parent that they had been attending an after-school club, a club that focused on "gay issues". JJ had stopped attending the GSA and was no longer speaking to other students involved in the GSA, those who we thought were JJ's friends. After a few weeks that JJ had not been at the GSA meetings, I decided to phone home to touch base and inquire about JJ. JJ's mom answered the phone, we had a very lengthy and difficult conversation. JJ's mom started the conversation by indicating that they were currently not impressed by the school and staff, that we had taught their child that it was okay to think, be and feel different, that, for some people, gender identity did not always align with sex at birth. I had learned that after being confronted by their mother, JJ had "come out" as trans to their parent. The mom then continued, while escalating her voice, that she had to spend numerous hours taking her child to learn how to act proper from the family's religious leader, and that she was putting an end to all of this nonsense. As one of the GSA lead teachers, I felt attacked, but knew that this was not an argument that I was going to continue, I politely ended the conversation with the hope of reconnecting at a future date. I brought my concerns forward to administration, who's advice was to "stay out of the family affair" and "not

speak to [JJ] if I saw them in the school". This advice provided little comfort as I was quite

concerned about JJ. I ended up reaching out to the school social worker who said she would

follow up with the family to ensure the wellbeing of JJ and connect them with additional

community resources. I have since heard that JJ is doing quite well and openly identifies as a

trans person; however, I never crossed paths with JJ again; they changed schools to complete

high school and I returned to Northern Ontario.

This story highlights the third analytic theme that a family's religion or spiritual beliefs

have a significant impact in how they view, behave, or treat their queer BIPOC children. This

theme is important to understand as queer BIPOC youth likely have multiple identities and ways

of expression. Youth may appear and act differently depending on who they are around, as such,

teachers who are supporting LGBTQ2S+ youth in safe school spaces must be aware of these

differences to avoid commenting on, and possibly "outing", the student.

Bridging Theme-3: Addressing Religious and Spiritual Beliefs to Support

Indigenous Q-2S Youth. Parents, extended family and communities can play a significant role

in the lives of Indigenous Q-2S youth. When Indigenous Q-2S are shamed, verbally or physically

abused, or not able to express their identities, they are much more susceptible to mental health

and substance use issues (Balsam, Huang, Fieland, Simoni, & Walters, 2004; Meyer-Cook &

Labelle, 2004; Robinson, 2017; Walters et al., 2001). In many situations Indigenous Q-2S turn to

urban centres away from their communities to try and find spaces of acceptance and inclusion

(Gilley, 2006). However, many then continue to face abuses and lives of poverty, hoping to one

day regain a respected place within their community (Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Robinson,

2017). Teachers must understand and acknowledge that all communities are different (Kirmayer,

Tait, & Simpson, 2009), some may be more accepting of the fluidity of gender and sexuality

(Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Mayo & Sheppard, 2012; Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004; Sheppard & Mayo, 2013; Walters et al., 2001). Students from communities more accepting of Q-2S people, including those not as influenced by Eurocentric beliefs, could be excellent allies and supports for those students from less accepting families and communities.

Story 4: Day of Pink

This story also takes place with a GTA Secondary School GSA Club. Since the inception of the club at the school it had always been a desire of the club to organize the day of pink. The students and I experienced some confusion since there are two dates for the "Day of Pink", one is a Canadian day of pink that occurs at the end of February and the other is an international "Day of Pink" which is held in April. Thus, I gave the students some options, we could do both dates, or, they could decide if they only wanted to focus on one of the dates. In the end, the students decided that they did not want to do both dates as they stated that by celebrating both dates it may lessen the impact they could have by just focusing on one date. So, they suggested that the GSA Club focus on the international "day of pink" since many of the students and their families were either new to Canada or had only been in Canada for one or two generations. In doing so, they wanted to demonstrate that LGBTQ2S+ people existed everywhere around the globe; however, some countries were more accepting than others. Bridging the gap between tolerance, acceptance, and inclusion was another area that the GSA Club wanted to focus on.

The first activity the group wanted to run was to create a map which showed tolerance, acceptance and inclusion around the globe, they also wanted to highlight specific countries where it was illegal to identify as a member of the LGBTQ2S+ community. As a GSA lead teacher, I was shocked by the effort, amount of research and passion the students demonstrated toward the project. Not only did they want to share this information with other students in the

school, they also wanted to share it with the larger school community, to show that LGBTQ2S+

people exist, they are here to stay, and that they deserve many of the rights and opportunities

provided to heterosexual, cisgender people. I will admit, this was not an easy task for the

students, nor was it easy to see as a member of the LGBTQ2S+ community myself. The students

of the GSA faced some criticism from members of the community who do not agree with

LGBTQ2S+ lifestyles, however, the students demonstrated such skill and compassion when

tackling these tough situations. Their responses included answers such as "there are examples of

homosexual activity in artifacts found around the globe" and "religious texts can be interpreted

in so many ways, maybe we are just reading it the way we think we should". There are still so

many places around the world where people are prosecuted on suspicions of being LGBTQ2S+

and the students of the GSA Club wanted to make sure that anyone in the school who identifies

with the LGBTQ2S+ community felt accepted and loved.

This story highlights the fourth theme that heteronormativity is still dominant and often

homophobic in both Indigenous/ethnic communities and society at large. This theme is important

to understand because LGBTQ2S+ youth still struggle to see a place for themselves in society.

Although there is more public/prominent LGBTQ2S+ representation, if families and

communities are not accepting and criticize or ridicule the representation, LGBTQ2S+ youth

might be afraid to express their identities. Thus perpetuating the struggle for LGBTQ2S+ youth

to find acceptance.

Bridging Theme-4: Addressing Homophobia to Support Indigenous Q-2S Youth.

The process of colonization brought with it an influence of Eurocentric western beliefs regarding

gender and sexual identity. In many northern Ontario communities, the influence of these beliefs

is still quite engrained and impacts the roles of community members, from dress to attitude. As

previously mentioned, in some Indigenous communities, members who identified as Q-2S held

esteemed positions as spiritual leaders who were respected because they were able to see aspects

of life through female and male spirits (Garrett & Barret, 2003) others were educators, healers

and community leaders (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Garrett & Barret, 2003). Having knowledge of

pre-colonization life and the acceptance of Q-2S peoples may help students (re)generate or

(re)story a place for themselves and others like them.

Story 5: The School GSA Club

At its inception the GSA was a very small group of students, some weeks only 2 or 3

students showed up. But, as the weeks went on the group continued to get larger and larger. It

certainly wasn't anything I or the other GSA lead teacher had done, instead, it was through the

voice of the students in the club that others began to see its importance. By putting on whole

school events the first students to join the GSA were able to spread the ideas of inclusion,

acceptance and love for one another, regardless of race, culture, religion, gender, sexuality and

other areas of individual identity. For me as a teacher it was very heartwarming to witness.

This was my first experience helping to co-lead and develop a school GSA. I had

experience running other clubs such as technology clubs, culture day clubs and sports teams, but

never a school GSA. When we were approached by a small group of students to organize a

school GSA we were somewhat hesitant as we weren't sure if there would be push back or

student interest. There definitely ended up being some push back from a few students and

families who thought the idea of a school GSA would mean that we would teach other students

how to be gay and a teacher whose own beliefs were similar, but I'll discuss some of these

stories in more detail later. We decided to go ahead, knowing that if we could even help one

student, the setbacks and any ridicule would be worth it.

The club evolved, continuing to run whole school, large scale events, but also into a place where students could gather and support one another. From the initial 2, sometimes 3 students, when I left for northern Ontario, the club had grown to a regular student attendance of approximately 25 to 30 students. With such a large group of students participating in the GSA club, I noticed that the students wanted to start doing more and more within the group and not as many whole school events. Instead, the students wanted to provide space to other clubs and committees which weren't having as much success getting their messages across. So, from a small group running large events, the GSA started to change its identity to a large group running small events.

These small events took place on a weekly basis when the GSA club met. I saw students supporting one another through arts such as creating spoken word and paintings to discussing the most recent episode of some show they watched on TV. I could tell that the students felt the GSA was a safe space for them to be who they are and express themselves through different identities, they did not have to try to fit into a mould. Regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, race, religious affiliation, familial and cultural backgrounds, they were free to be who they wanted to be. However, I did notice that a few particular groups of students were missing. We tasked ourselves with finding out which groups we belonged to and thus which groups of students may not be represented.

During one of our GSA group meetings we decided to survey our identities to determine who may not be represented in our group. The list of identities consisted of:

- Male, female, gender non-conforming, trans

- Heterosexual, homosexual, queer, bisexual, asexual

- South Asian (all gender identities)

- Caucasian (all gender identities)

- Black (female only)

- Asian (all gender identities)

To me and the rest of the group no one indicated that they identified as either, Indigenous inclusive of LGBTQ2S, Hispanic inclusive of LGBTQ or as male and black. This allowed us to open up the discussion of creating a space for those whose identities were missing. However, even after trying to find representation the group could not for a variety of reasons, from reluctance of individuals to be involved to lack of representation within the school as a whole. I am hopeful that even after my departure as a lead GSA teacher that the group continues to seek out representation from all communities.

This story highlights the fifth theme that there is an ongoing need for adult LGBTQ2S+ presence in schools, especially LGBTQ2S+ role models from BIPOC communities, including Elders. Racialized LGBTQ2S+ youth need to find acceptance and normalization to their identities. As some white LGBTQ peoples are finding acceptance in families and other places in society, racialized youth do not see the same representation by others who look and sound like them and who also identify as LGBTQ2S+. It is important that teachers who help to establish safe spaces for LGBTQ2S+ youth ensure representation from all racialized groups.

Bridging Theme-5: Q2-S Role Models to Support Indigenous Q-2S. Adult advisors or teacher representatives in school clubs can often be the determining factor in who participates in the club, a lack of cultural similarity can lead to fewer students of colour attending, instead selecting clubs that reflect their ethnic or cultural background (Mayo, 2013). Students need to feel that they can openly express their concerns and be who they are most comfortable being (Fetner et al., 2012). Racialized Q-2S youth need to see others that look like them, talk like them

and express cultural identities like them so that they do not feel invisible due to their dual

marginalization (Betro, 2014; Fetner et al., 2012). Thus, there is a need for GSA advisors, guests,

and mentors to be inclusive and represent the students involved in the space.

Story 6: Rainbow Wall

        Throughout the first semester, the students in the GSA club wanted to hang out and get to

know one another and discuss issues they saw around the school. One day as they were talking,

the students began to notice a trend in the way that some of them were being treated by their

peers. They came to realize that students who appeared, through dress or actions, to be gender

queer, gay or lesbian were being treated differently in their classes, they were sometimes teased,

sometimes mimicked, sometimes ridiculed, and sometimes, felt as though they were being

bullied. As one of the GSA lead teachers, I made sure that all of these issues were taken

seriously, incident reports filed, situations investigated and depending on administration students

faced consequences. This was a fine line for me to negotiate between my GSA role and as a staff

member with the administration: students in the GSA club needed to believe that it was a safe

space to discuss issues and concerns without fearing reprimands or retaliation should the

tormentor or bully have to face consequences for inappropriate behaviours or actions; however, I

needed to be certain that I did not overstep my teacher professional capacity or interfere in

administration's purview. So, as a club we came up with some criteria for when incidents had to

be reported to administration and left to their discretion or due process on how to handle.

        When I think back to my own secondary school experiences in a northern Ontario town

in the late 1990s, I have to admit that my own queer identity development and interactions with

peers/teachers was overall a poor experience. There were no GSA clubs or programs for me to

join. There were no LGBTQ2S+ role models to look up to. And, I definitely do not recall a

discussion about LGBTQ2S+ people in any of my classes. I wasn't a popular kid and I didn't

really find a "group" that I fit into or felt the sense of belonging or included. Unfortunately, there

were many times when peers would make stereotypical comments and assume that I must be gay

even though there was no chance of my "coming out" in such an unsafe space. I am sure that

teachers and other peers overheard the comments or jokes, but no one stepped in to do anything

about this exclusion and oppression. For this primary reason, I found it necessary to be part of a

GSA in any school where I taught in order to ensure that LGBTQ2S students knew that I was

listening and willing to take an active role in ensuring their safety and wellbeing.

A few of the GSA students had seen online the idea of a rainbow wall where different

coloured paper is used, students write messages on the pieces of paper and then the pieces are put

together to look like a rainbow. The GSA group decided that this was a way they could make

positive change within the school and community to show their support for LGBTQ2S people

who were experiencing hardships due to hazing, bullying, or other abuses at school or at home.

The rainbow wall would become the method to encourage all students in the school from

different backgrounds and family situations to write a message or positive affirmation on a bright

coloured piece of paper. Over the course of a few days it was amazing to see all of the positive

messages from the whole school community that included messages of love and support such as

the following: "you're loved", "I care about you", "you brighten my day", "I stand with you and

support you no matter who you are." After all of the pieces of coloured paper were collected, the

students arranged them by colour and attached them to a very visible atrium wall in the shape of

a rainbow. As the GSA students read through and posted the messages on the wall, it was

stunning to see all the emotion building and to know—they and me--that we were not alone or

excluded from the school community.

This story highlights the final theme that LGBTQ2S+ BIPOC and newcomer youth are in need of safe and 'brave' spaces in their schools to freely investigate and express their LGBTQ2S+ identities while also developing an LGBTQ2S+ community. This theme is critical to understand because without a safe space for racialized/BIPOC LGBTQ2S+ youth to express their identities they may have no other space for self-exploration. Without self-exploration and expression of their identities they may not develop a support system with others in their community. Without a support system they may turn to other ways of coping with their unexpressed identities. These coping mechanisms can include numbing their pain through drugs or suicide as they may feel it is the only option since they are not accepted in their own families or communities.

Bridging Theme-6: Safer and Braver Spaces to Support Indigenous Q-2S Youth. For Indigenous Q-2S youth, finding a safe space where they can express both their Q-2S identity as well as their cultural identity in a place like school is key for their wellbeing. If the cultural foundation of these youths' lives are avoided or made invisible, the GSA may continue to normalize whiteness and thus further marginalize queer youth of colour (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Fetner et al., 2012; Mayo, 2013). Majjid (2010) suggests that the use of bibliotherapy, a method that incorporates the use of culturally relevant books, poems and other media, can build BIPOC youth self-confidence and address cultural misconceptions during GSA gatherings. As previously noted, a representative Indigenous adult or Elder or role-model who reflects the cultural identity of the students in the GSA can then help encourage them to find acceptance not only in the school LGBTQ2S community but also with members of their FNMI cultural communities.

Summary of Thematic Analysis of GSA Stories with Action Items

In this chart, I summarize the main lessons learned or action items that emerged from the

thematic analysis of my 6 pivotal lived experiences as a GSA lead-teacher. I have indicated in

this chart the following elements: the story title, the main theme that emerged from the retelling

of the story, and the calls to action for all educators, particularly white settler GSA lead-teachers.

As a result of each critical reflection in retelling the story as praxis, action items which support a

decolonial queer pedagogy are recommended to be applied to school GSA/GSD programs so that

Indigenous Q-2S youth are made more visible and the GSA/GSD becomes a safer, braver, and

culturally sustaining space.

Table 2

Action Steps for Praxis

	Story	**Theme**	**Action Steps for Praxis**
1	Respect for Women	Different cultural and ethnic communities have different views regarding women, gender roles and LGBTQ2S+ peoples.	• Keep impact of trauma in mind for each GSA/LGBTQ2S student • Understand history and impact of colonialism on Q-2S peoples in particular • Connect with families and communities to learn more about changing roles of Q-2S members.
2	"Nina" the Lesbian Student	Queer-2S youth can face a lot of family pressure, from their cultural communities and extended families.	• Listen closely to youth, their hopes, wants, dreams and worries • Provide access to safe, supportive, and culturally sustaining spaces
3	The Unimpressed Parent	Family's religion or spiritual beliefs can play a very significant role in how they view, behave or treat their Q-2S children.	• Acknowledge that each community will have their own views of Q-2S people • Consider students from more accepting communities as allies or supports as the student navigates their support system
4	Day of Pink	Heteronormativity is still dominant and often homophobic in both	• Acknowledge the influence of western beliefs around gender identity and expression that are widespread

		Indigenous/ethnic communities and society at large.	• Learn about community practices and the influence of colonization on current and past ways of knowing and being
5	The School GSA Club	There is an ongoing need for adult Q-2S presence in schools, especially Q-2S role models from BIPOC communities, including Elders.	• Access and develop relationships with Q-2S Elders or mentors from communities to bridge the gaps of representation • Ensure the environment is safe and culturally supportive. GSA advisors, guests, and mentors should be inclusive and represent the students.
6	Rainbow Wall	Q-2S BIPOC and newcomer youth are in need of safer and 'braver' spaces in their schools to freely investigate and express their Q-2S identities while also developing a Q-2S community.	• Ensure the GSA/safe space is created with culturally relevant material • Connect with Q-2S role models and Elders to support Q-2S youth • A culturally safe and sustaining GSA needs to embody relationality for all, it must be ethical, respectful, relevant, and reciprocal

Final Words

As noted, all of my stories have been connected to overarching themes, but within each story, other themes can also be found. Each school interaction, each peer relationship, can become a part of our identity story. But it is only by sharing our stories that others can learn and grow alongside us. Our stories can help add to the experiences of others in positive and meaningful ways. My journey has taken me to a place where I am now comfortable to share my experiences with others, recognizing that my privilege allows me the opportunity to do so. My White cis-male privilege can easily take up space, instead, I intend to use this privilege to be brave and give back to BIPOC communities by educating racialized Q-2S youth in safer school spaces. This type of school environment is not only for BIPOC Q-2S identity formation, but also for improving learning as culturally safe and sustaining. I follow Paris' lead that all educators, especially GSA educators, need to enact a social justice praxis:

> … be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of
>
> young people—it requires that [educators] support young people in sustaining the cultural
>
> and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to
>
> dominant cultural competence… culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and
>
> foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic
>
> project of schooling. (Paris, 2012, p. 95)

After engaging in this autoethnography portfolio, I now understand that teachers attempting to

provide safe spaces in schools to racialized Q-2S youth need to be open, accepting and willing to

analyze the systemic conditions of White supremacy and settler-colonialism in all school

programs including GSAs, along with teachers examining their own positionalities and

unconscious individual complicities in White settler systems.

Chapter 5: Task 3 - Workshop Presentation: Supporting Indigenous Queer-2S and

Gender/Sexuality Diverse Students

The following slides were developed using information from task one, the literature review, and the analysis of task two, the autoethnographic narrative, to take the next step in developing a plan of action for positive decolonial approaches in GSA/GSD school clubs. The slides are a representation of my research to be communicated in a workshop format for teachers and educators to better support Indigenous gender/sexuality diverse students in Northern Ontario schools by establishing safer spaces in programs such as GSAs. The workshop intends to engage my teaching colleagues in an approach of decolonial queer pedagogy for culturally safer GSA programs by demonstrating my own lived experiences of unlearning my settler stance. In this task/chapter, I include each slide along with the speaker notes that I hope to present in the near future, at this critical moment of settler reckoning with our reconciliation responsibilities and improving settler educators' relationships with Indigenous students, families and communities.

Welcome to today's workshop focused on supporting Indigenous Queer and Two-Spirit students in culturally safer school spaces.

Situating Myself

I locate myself as a settler, as one whose ancestors do not originate where I currently reside or on these lands called Canada. I do this to highlight my own cultural understandings in relation to Indigenous Peoples, so that I do not speak from the perspective of a "perfect stranger" (Higgins, Madden & Korteweg, 2015)
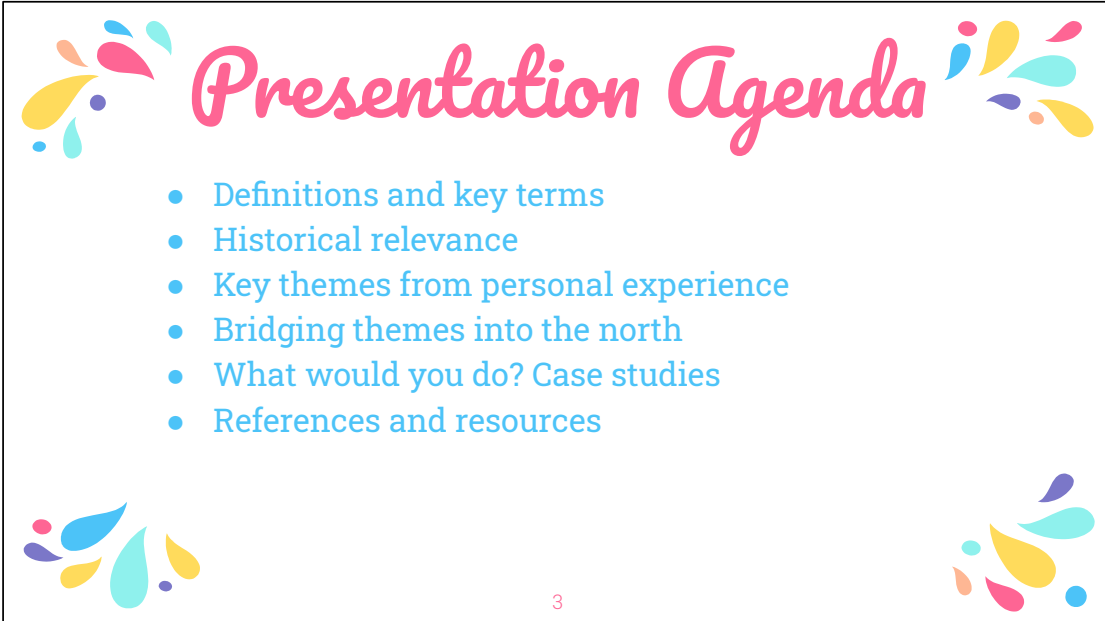
I am a gay White man of Northern European, Finnish and Russian heritage whose parents and grand-parents came to this land for a better life, and I acknowledge both my unearned settler privilege as well as my role and responsibilities to make Thunder Bay schools more culturally safe (Gerlach, Browne & Greenwood, 2017).

2

Explanation of "Perfect Stranger" (Higgins, Madden, Korteweg, 2015)
We often deliver a curriculum that is reflective of and is shaped by Eurocentrism and whiteness. It is further characterized by denial of the role that whiteness plays in shaping our lives as well as claims of knowing little to nothing about Indigenous peoples and cultures. Thus, allowing us to be shielded from difficult knowledges associated with decolonization, integration of Indigenous perspectives, colonialism and racism. We become "perfect strangers" instead of taking on the more difficult task of educating ourselves so that we can educate others.

Today's agenda is as follows:

First we will review and discuss some of the key terms and definitions as related to culturally safer spaces, gender and sexual identity.

We will then look at some of the historical relevance as it relates to colonization and euro-western beliefs

Next we will look at some themes that have been derived from personal experiences working with BIPOC youth in southern Ontario and how those themes can be bridged to work with Indigenous students and other students of colour in northern Ontario

Finally, we will take a look at a couple of case studies as a group and discuss different approaches to each scenario we may take.

Definitions and Key Terms

4

The following slides will highlight and explain some of the terminology that I encountered.

Queer

Mayo (2013) and McCready (2004) use queer as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and all others who claim a nonnormative, non-heterosexual identity.

5
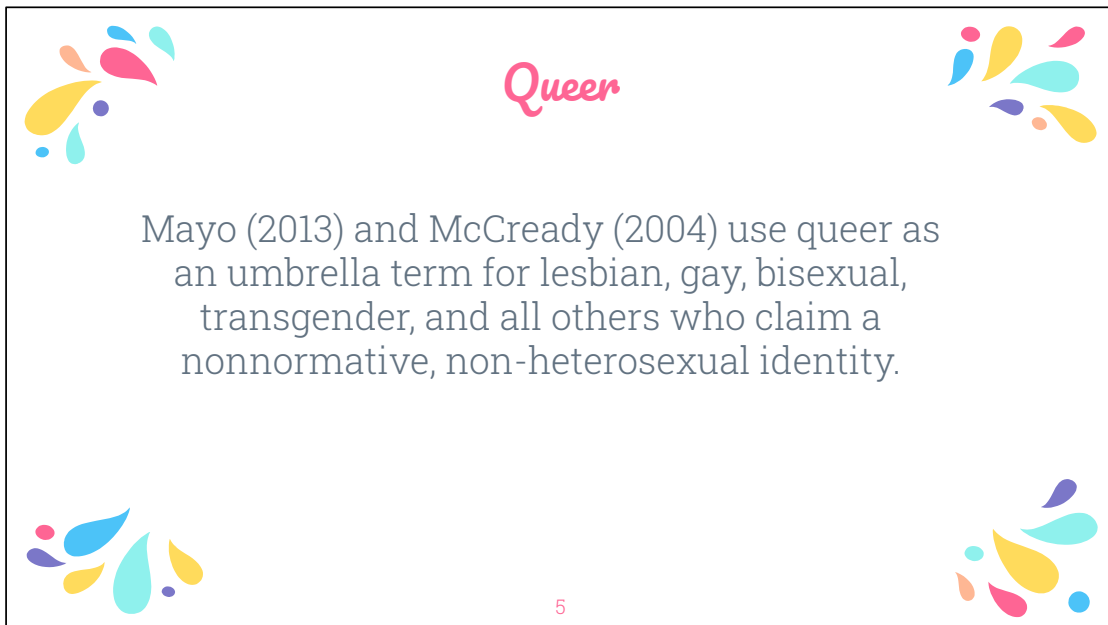
Allow participants to read. Note that for the purposes of this presentation and portfolio I also use the term queer as an umbrella term for non-heterosexual identity.

Two-Spirit

For the purpose of this portfolio the term, Two-Spirit (2S), is added to represent some Indigenous Peoples who identify within Queer or LGBTQ categories, as well as others who do not identify within those categories but instead have a deeper spiritual and cultural connection (Garrett & Barret, 2003; Gilley, 2006; Lang, 2016)

6

It should be noted that not all Indigenous LGBTQ+ people refer to themselves as Two-Spirit. The video on the following slide will provide more detail about the term Two-Spirit.

Two-Spirit

InQueery is a series that takes a deeper look at the meaning, context, and history of LGBTQ+ vocabulary and culture. This video in particular explores the history of the term "Two-Spirit" and who it pertains to. Does it mean two genders? Can anyone use it to describe themselves?
Play video https://youtu.be/A4lBibGzUnE
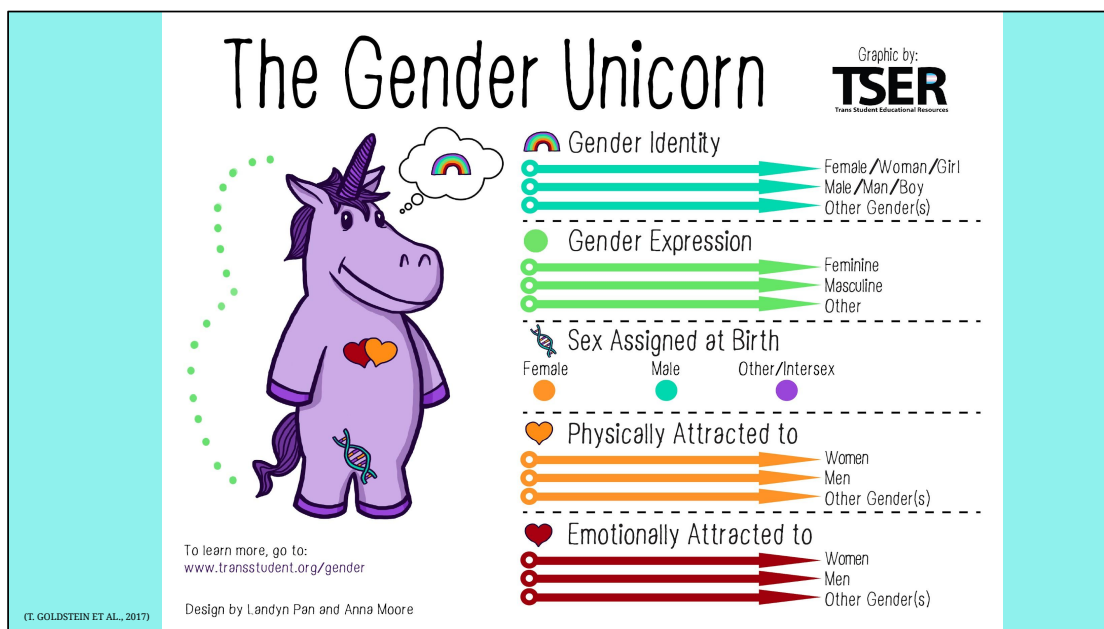
The gender unicorn is from TSER which stands for Trans Student Educational Resources. The guide can be found at https://transstudent.org/gender/ Within each area, the arrows are a sliding scale, not a checkbox, representing the continuum of gender and sexuality.

The following definitions have been provided by TSER:
Gender Identity: One's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or another gender(s). Everyone has a gender identity, including you. For transgender people, their sex assigned at birth and their own internal sense of gender identity are not the same. Female, woman, and girl and male, man, and boy are also not necessarily linked to each other but are just six common gender identities.

Gender Expression/Presentation: The physical manifestation of one's gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. Many transgender people seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth.

Sex Assigned at Birth: The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, chromosomes. It is important we don't simply use "sex" because of the vagueness of the definition of sex and its place in transphobia. Chromosomes are frequently used to determine sex from prenatal karyotyping (although not as often as genitalia). Chromosomes do not always determine genitalia, sex, or gender.

Physically Attracted To: Sexual orientation. It is important to note that sexual and romantic/emotional attraction can be from a variety of factors including but not limited to gender identity, gender expression/presentation, and sex assigned at birth.

Emotionally Attracted To: Romantic/emotional orientation. It is important to note that sexual and romantic/emotional attraction can be from a variety of factors including but not limited to gender identity, gender expression/presentation, and sex assigned at birth. There are other types of attraction related to gender such as aesthetical or platonic. These are simply two common forms of attraction.

Some of you may be aware of the Gingerbread person which is also a great resource with many different lessons we can use, it can be found at www.thesafezoneproject.com
The Gender Unicorn has some changes from The Gingerbread/Genderbread Person The Gender Unicorn was created with significant changes to more accurately portray the distinction between gender, sex assigned at birth, and sexuality. Ultimately, TSER wanted to recognize genders outside of the western gender binary, which the Genderbread Person does not. Not all trans people exist on a scale of womanhood and manhood. There are several other issues with this graphic such as the use of the inaccurate term "biological sex," the use of "asex" (which fails to recognize that everyone has sex characteristics prescribed to them), and several other issues with terminology and presentation.

GSA

Gay-Straight Alliances, or more recently for greater inclusivity, renamed as Gender and Sexuality Alliances, are "meant to be a safe and supportive social space for students from the LGBTQ community and allies" (Tompkins, Kearns & Mitton-Kükner, 2017, p. 694).

9
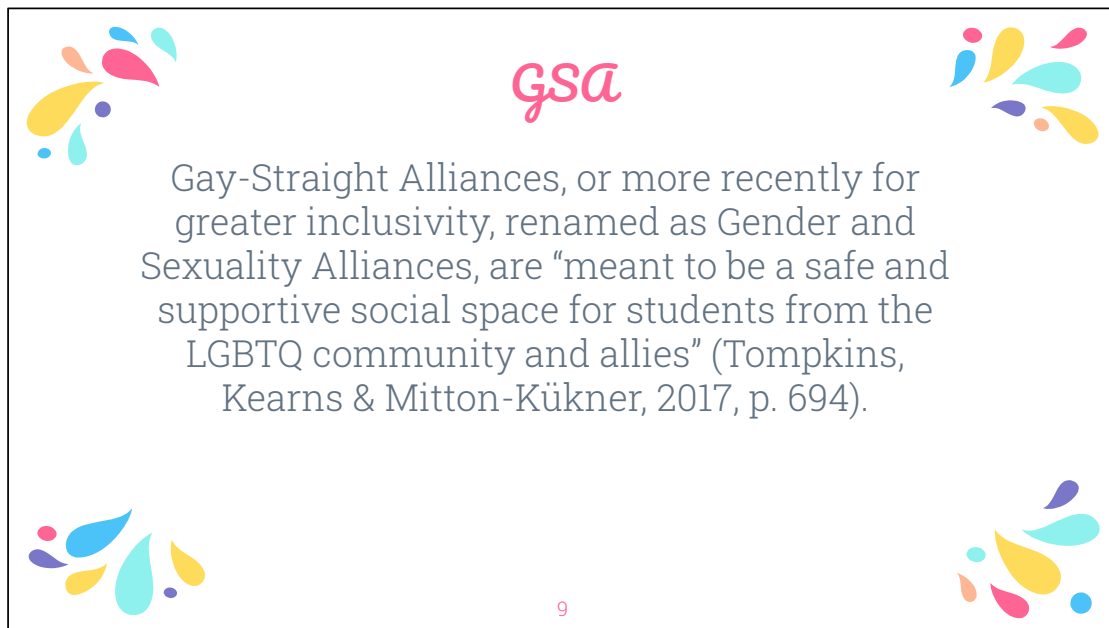
Allow participants to read.
I have been involved with school GSAs for many years, allowing students to name the GSA themselves gives them the opportunity to own their space, in my most recent club, students named it the GSD, Gender and Sexual Diversity Club as a way to be more inclusive.

Indigenous Cultural Safety

According to Papps and Ramsden (1996) in reference to nursing and midwifery services, "cultural safety places an obligation on the nurse or midwife to provide care within the framework of recognizing and respecting the difference of any individual… [it] addresses power relationships between the service provider and the people who use the service" (pp. 493-494).

10

Allow participants to read. It also empowers the users of the service to determine if the user felt safe.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
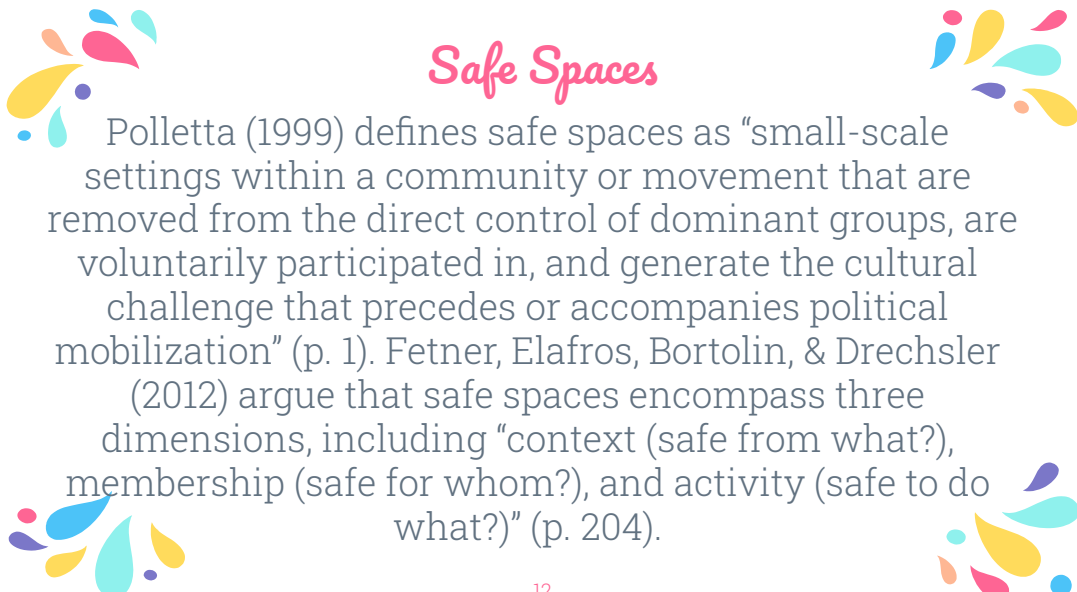
Paris (2012) states that "culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). Paris (2012) highlights that in process of being culturally sustaining we should not generalize, simplify or connect only to past cultural identities, instead "we must be open to sustaining them in both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used to contemporary young people" (p. 95).

11

Allow participants to read. In order to provide students with a space that is culturally sustaining, teachers and schools should connect with the communities in which students are from in order to learn about traditions and evolving ways of being.

Safe Spaces

Polletta (1999) defines safe spaces as "small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization" (p. 1). Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, & Drechsler (2012) argue that safe spaces encompass three dimensions, including "context (safe from what?), membership (safe for whom?), and activity (safe to do what?)" (p. 204).

12

Allow participants to read. GSAs or GSDs are meant to be safe spaces. However, to support BIPOC LGBTQ2S+ students teacher leads must go further and provide students with safer and braver spaces that are culturally safe and sustaining.

Historical Relevance

13

The next section we will look a bit deeper into is the historical relevance as it relates to colonization and euro-western beliefs in relation to Indigenous peoples.

Pre-Colonization

* Indigenous Q-2S community members were accepted within some Indigenous communities before colonization.
  * NOTE: Each community has practices, values and beliefs which may or may not be similar to other communities.
* Many Indigenous communities viewed gender and sexuality as fluid and non-binary.
* Dakota words such as "Winkte" and Dine (Navajo) words such as "Nadleehe" or "Nadleehi" suggest acceptance through language.
* Q-2S people were often not the bearers of children, instead they held leadership roles within the community.
* Some Q-2S people were spiritual leaders and respected because they were able to see aspects of life through female and male spirits.
* Others Q-2S people within the community were often educators, healers, and community leaders, whose "qualities were seen to add value and contribute to life within the communities" (Meyer-Cook & Labelle, 2004, p. 30).

14

This slide shows some of the pre-colonization views toward Q-2S peoples in some Indigenous communities. It should be noted that each community has practices, values and beliefs which may or may not be similar to other communities. Thus we must recognize that not all communities may have been open and accepting of Q-2S peoples. However, we can see that from much of the research that there were many who looked up to and respected Q-2S community members.
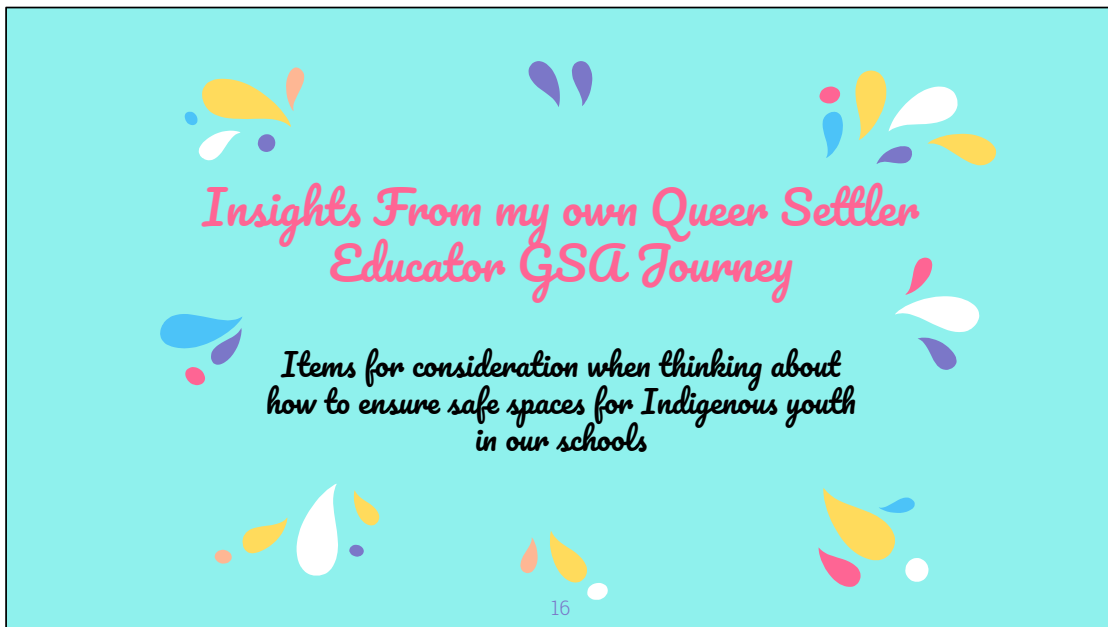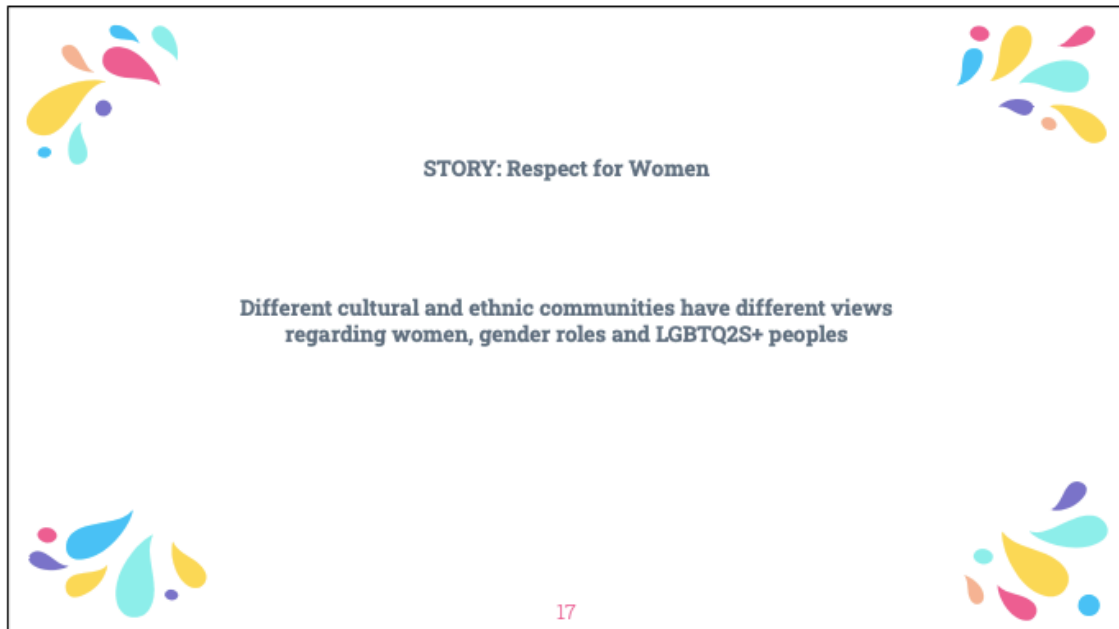
Post-Colonization to Present

* Colonization brought European settler beliefs of gender and sexuality, where binaries, male or female, heterosexual or homosexual, were the dominant norms.
* Many Indigenous LBGTQ and Two-Spirit people went into hiding and were forced out of their esteemed roles and positions in the community.
* Artifacts were destroyed, oral history tainted by non-inclusive beliefs, and projects to eliminate Indigenous Q-2S people were enacted
* Indigenous Q-2S people now face many psychosocial, socioeconomic and physical abuses
* Many families and communities reject Q-2S people because of the influences of Euro-western religions that see them as sinful
* In many remote or isolated communities the influence of the Catholic Church is still quite strong
* Q-2S youth in remote and rural communities have very limited access to LGBT+ related resources and supports.

15

As more and more Europeans came to North America and other continents around the world they brought with them a set of beliefs which were very different than the Indigenous people living in each area. The Europeans viewed their beliefs as far superior and began to force the euro-western way of knowing and being onto the Indigenous population. One of these beliefs included the binary of gender, where there are only two genders male and female with the aim of procreation requiring heterosexual norms. These eurocentric worldviews and beliefs are still very prevalent in many Indigenous communities today. However, many Indigenous peoples are trying to restore and reclaim their past identity.

Insights From my own Queer Settler Educator GSA Journey

Items for consideration when thinking about how to ensure safe spaces for Indigenous youth in our schools
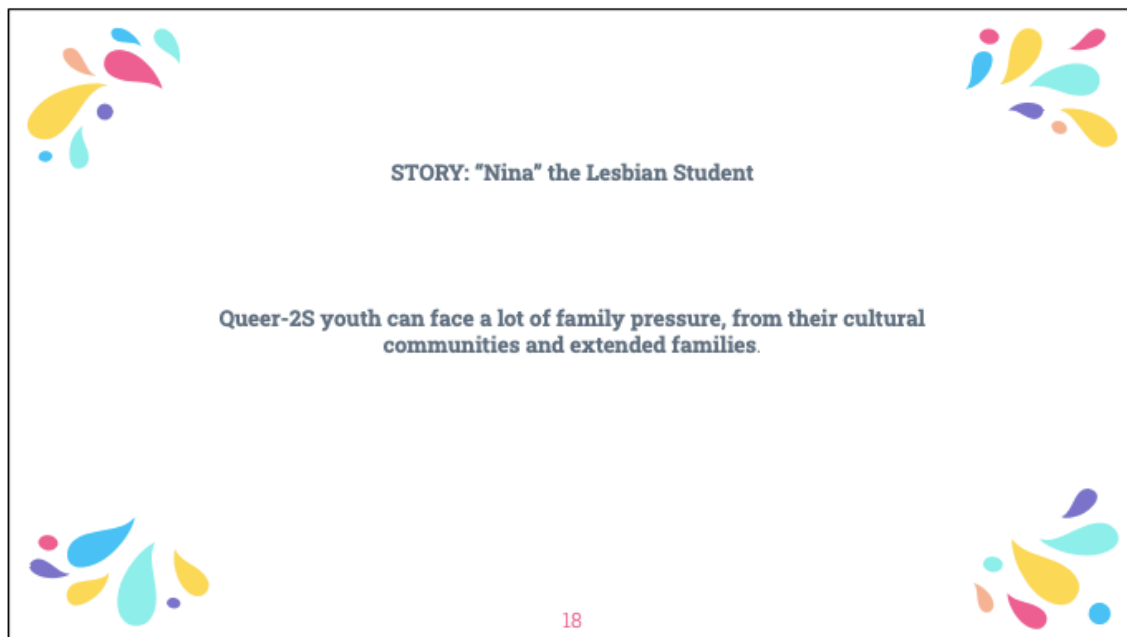
16

I have been teaching for over 15 years and about 10 years ago I started to work with other teachers to help support students who were either questioning their gender and sexual identity or wanted to be an ally to support those who were. As part of my portfolio, I reflected on my time spent working with BIPOC students in southern Ontario who were involved in our school GSA. I wrote stories as I reflected on my experiences. I used these stories as data and analyzed them to find common themes and discovered 6 key themes or issues. My stories are all interconnected and several themes can be derived from each account, but each story has one dominant theme of queer pedagogy which I will highlight in the next few slides.

STORY: Respect for Women

Different cultural and ethnic communities have different views regarding women, gender roles and LGBTQ2S+ peoples

17

GSA teachers need to consider - discuss examples from story - Respect for Women

- Role of Indigenous women as leaders in the community
- Role of two-spirit men and women who were seen as important to many Indigenous communities
- The trauma experienced by Indigenous women at the hands of men throughout the continued process of colonization, consider missing and murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2S.
- An understanding of gender fluidity and how to work with students in grade 6, 7 and 8 who may be questioning gender identity.
- The changing role of women in Indigenous communities, i.e. female chiefs elected under a westernized electoral system.
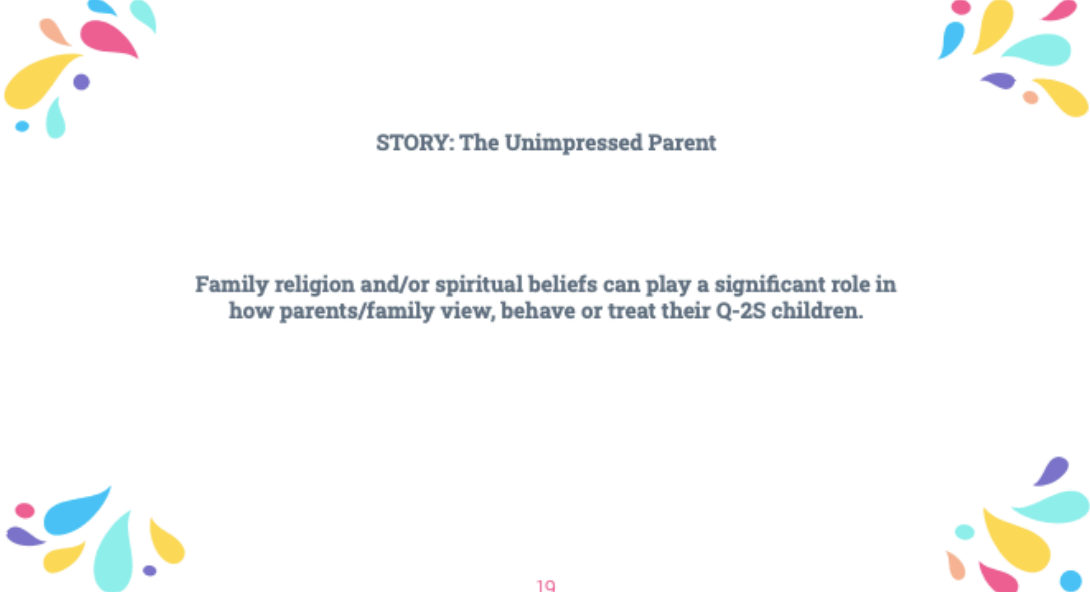
STORY: "Nina" the Lesbian Student

Queer-2S youth can face a lot of family pressure, from their cultural communities and extended families.

18

GSA teachers need to consider - discuss examples from story - "Nina" the Lesbian Student

- Many Indigenous youth face the impact of intergenerational trauma, their parents or grandparents who attended residential school may have developed a set of beliefs which differ from the past beliefs of the community.
- Western beliefs of gender expression and identity may have been passed down throughout the community through the process of colonization.
- Students may feel that they must follow the same beliefs and practices of their families and community or else they may not be able to return to or see family again.
- Communities may be culturally divided, some members may accept Q-2S peoples while other members may not. Youth in small, remote or isolated communities may find this very confusing.
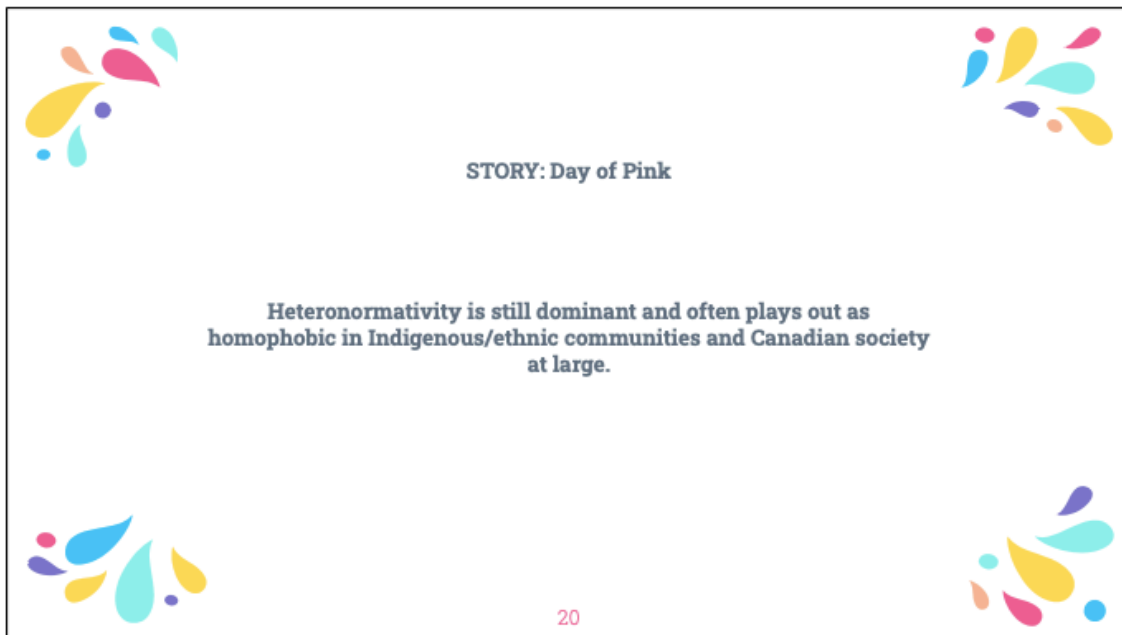
STORY: The Unimpressed Parent

Family religion and/or spiritual beliefs can play a significant role in
how parents/family view, behave or treat their Q-2S children.

19

GSA teachers need to consider - discuss examples from story - The Unimpressed Parent

- Many northern communities are influenced by western religions which sought to colonize, eliminate and educate the Indigenous population
- Students who identify as Q-2S and whose families are from remote communities may feel isolated and alone
- We must acknowledge that each community will have their own views of Q-2S people and that traditional some were accepting while others were not, even without the influence of western cultures and ideologies.
- Students who identify as Q-2S and whose families practice a more traditional Indigenous way of knowing, may be more apt to self identify and to openly support their less supported peers
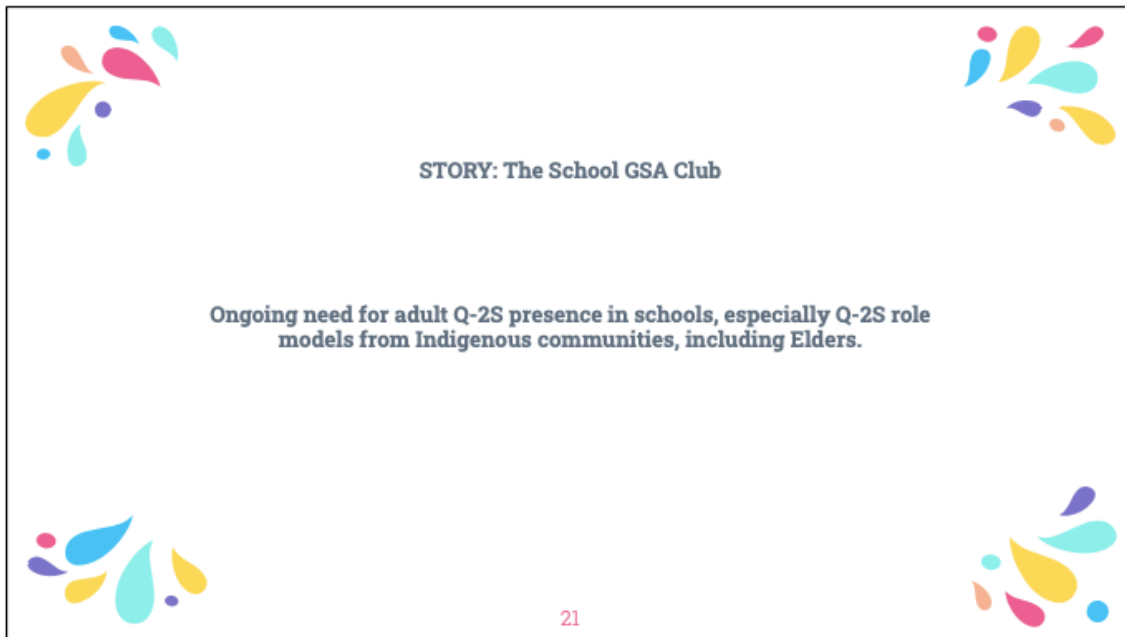
STORY: Day of Pink

Heteronormativity is still dominant and often plays out as homophobic in Indigenous/ethnic communities and Canadian society at large.

20

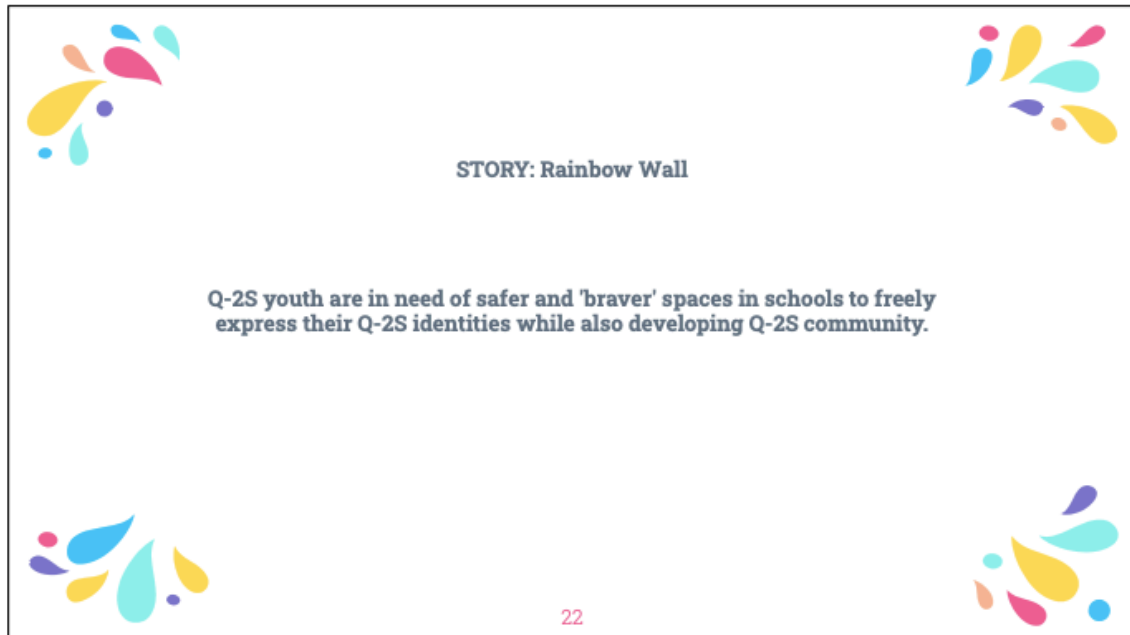**GSA teachers need to consider - discuss examples from story - Day of Pink**

- The influence of western beliefs around gender identity and expression are wide spread throughout northern communities. From the roles of community members to dress and attitude.
- Communities which have been matriarchal in the past, may now follow patriarchal and heteronormative social norms.
- Communities that once had hereditary or ancestral leaders, now follow the Indian Act imposed western practice of elected officials, some of whom may be elected or hold positions of power due to their gender identity.
- Children may have been raised by the community without specific gender roles. However, colonization and western influence may now gender children from birth through capitalistic practices.

STORY: The School GSA Club

Ongoing need for adult Q-2S presence in schools, especially Q-2S role
models from Indigenous communities, including Elders.

21

**GSA teachers need to consider - discuss examples from story - The School
GSA Club**

- Due to the ongoing impacts of colonization, there may be no Q-2S Elders to
  represent the many FNMI communities. Schools may need to access and
  develop relationships with Q-2S Elders from other communities to bridge the
  gaps of representation.
- Some communities are now only beginning to regain traditional practices/
  ancestral identities while others remain very connected to western colonial
  views.
- Ensuring that culturally safe and supportive environments are the norm in
  schools as well as accessing Q2S role models, including Elders, is essential if
  we are to support today's youth.

STORY: Rainbow Wall

Q-2S youth are in need of safer and 'braver' spaces in schools to freely express their Q-2S identities while also developing Q-2S community.

22

GSA teachers need to consider - discuss examples from story - Rainbow Wall

- Ensure the GSA/safe space is created with culturally relevant material available for all Q-2S youth, including BIPOC and newcomer youth.
- As much as possible, connect with Q-2S role models and Elders to support Q-2S youth.
- Don't wait for students to request a safe space, have one ready and waiting so that students will come.
- Host school wide events to show students that there are safe spaces available to Q-2S+ youth.
- Do not out or identify student members to the broader community and parents. In younger grades, consider having a broader view of an inclusivity/activist club.
- Always consider your audience, research their lived experience/context and remember their history is important.
- A culturally safe and sustaining GSA needs to embody relationality for all - ethical, respectful, relevant, reciprocal.
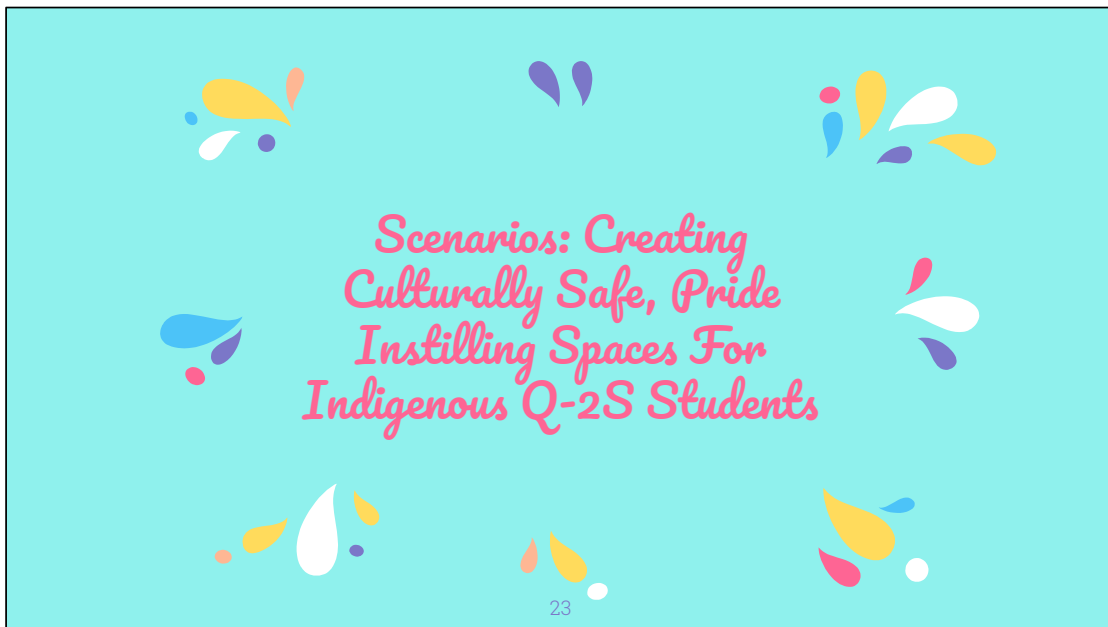
For the following, we are going to examine 2 scenarios with a tool called Forum Theatre. David Farmer, an award-winning writer, theatre director and drama consultant notes on his website https://dramaresource.com/forum-theatre/ that Forum theatre is:

"A technique pioneered by Brazilian radical Augusto Boal. A play or scene, usually indicating some kind of oppression, is shown twice. During the replay, any member of the audience ('spect-actor') is allowed to shout 'Stop!', step forward and take the place of one of the oppressed characters, showing how they could change the situation to enable a different outcome. Several alternatives may be explored by different spect-actors. The other actors remain in character, improvising their responses. A facilitator (Joker) is necessary to enable communication between the players and the audience.

The strategy breaks through the barrier between performers and audience, putting them on an equal footing. It enables participants to try out courses of action which could be applicable to their everyday lives. Originally the technique was developed by Boal as a political tool for change (part of the Theatre of the Oppressed), but has been widely adapted for use in educational contexts."

Farmer, D. (2019, April 16). Forum Theatre. Drama Resource. https://dramaresource.com/forum-theatre/.

Scenario #1

- Student is from a remote community and has recently moved to an urban centre in Northern Ontario
- Previous community is isolated and heavily influenced by the Catholic church
- Student has never "met" another member of the LGBTQ2S community but has seen "out" and proud representatives on TV and internet/media.
- Homophobic comments are regularly made by extended family when encountering gay representation on media.
- Student identifies as gay and male but not "out" to family due to fear of rejection and repraisals.
- Women are not overtly respected and intergenerational trauma is prevalent.
- All grandparents attended residential schools.

Question for Consideration:

How do we ensure a safe space is created in school and distinct cultural identity respected?

24

Using the information posted on this slide, you will be acting as the GSA lead teacher trying to determine how to best support the student. With a colleague(s), think of conditions/characteristics of a GSA that would develop a more inclusive, culturally sustaining, safer space for Q-2S students like this.

Scenario #2

- Indigenous students who appear, through dress or actions, to be gender queer, gay or lesbian are being oppressed differently than their LGBTQ peers who identify as white. The Indigenous Q-2S students are being teased, mimicked, ridiculed and bullied more in the school environment.
- The GSA/GSD is considered a safe space for all in attendance, and students often want to openly discuss concerns-such as bullying- without an escalation or discussion with administration.
- Often, queer students who also identify as BIPOC do not feel comfortable sharing their oppressions within the GSA.

Question for Consideration:

As a GSA Lead, how do you ensure a safe space for all students to openly share their lived experiences, including oppressions?

25

Using the information posted on this slide, you will be acting as the GSA lead teacher trying to determine how to best support these Q-2S students. With a colleague(s), develop a more inclusive, culturally sustaining, safer space for students like these.
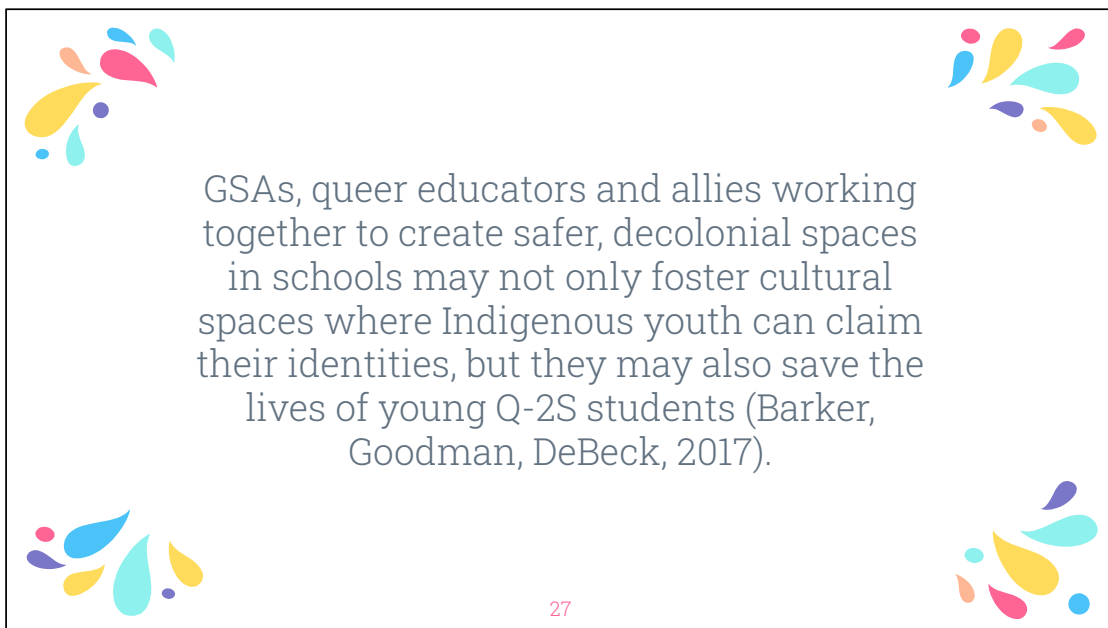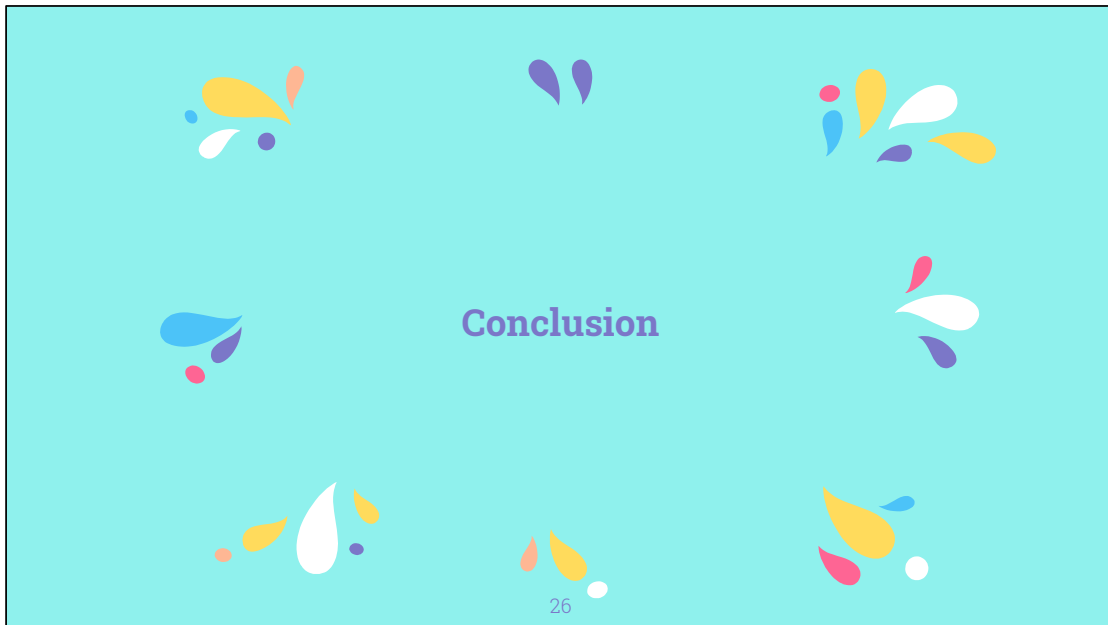
Conclusion

26

GSAs, queer educators and allies working together to create safer, decolonial spaces in schools may not only foster cultural spaces where Indigenous youth can claim their identities, but they may also save the lives of young Q-2S students (Barker, Goodman, DeBeck, 2017).

27

GSAs, queer educators and allies working together to create safer, decolonial spaces in schools may not only foster cultural spaces where Indigenous youth can claim their identities, but they may also save the lives of young Q-2S students. Too many students have not had the opportunity to explore their own gender and sexual identity within the public school system. This is our opportunity to work together with communities to learn, develop and grow in order to support Q-2S youth and their families. Thank you for taking the time to participate, learn and engage in meaningful dialogue. Should you have any further questions please reach out.

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28

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Credits

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

* Presentation template by SlidesCarnival
* Photographs by Unsplash

30

Chapter 6: Conclusion – Self Reflection

It has been almost three years since my Master of Education journey began. I have finally made it to the conclusion and it has been an incredible journey of unlearning, relearning and determining my role in reconciliation. The process of self-reflection and story writing can be quite daunting, but to move forward, I had to re-consider my past, how I worked through difficult situations, and honestly and critically examine what I can do differently to better support the Indigenous students and families that I work with. Thinking about and digging deeper into my privilege as a White settler teacher has been a very humbling process as I consider the space and life opportunities I have had in comparison to BIPOC-LGBTQ2S+ youth and families and how these experiences have influenced the way I operate in the world and teach in schools today.

In reading this portfolio, it is my hope that other settler teachers become better decolonial allies to Q-2S Indigenous students by working in partnership with Indigenous families and communities to create culturally safer, sustaining and braver spaces in schools. It is also my hope that settler teachers who use information from this portfolio will aim to follow the four Rs of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), including respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility when working with Q-2S youth. To do so, settler teachers must be reflexive practitioners and become more than allies by challenging the status quo and digging deeper into the colonial influences on privilege and power (Potvin, 2020). Settler educators should also check in to ensure that racialized Q-2S youth feel safe in classrooms and schools by having the multiple dimensions of their identity affirmed, while also recognizing and authentically engaging their sexual/gender diversity (Craig, McInroy & Austin, 2018; Erney & Weber, 2018). Using the themes and action items from task two and task three of this portfolio, settler teachers should be better prepared to explore decolonial queer pedagogy to disrupt the heteronormative practices that continue to

influence schools and make education programs and practices culturally safe and sustaining

spaces for wellbeing and thriving for all LGBTQ2S-BIPOC youth. I am honoured to be in a

position where I can make positive changes for LGBTQ2S+ youth in schools. Had a teacher been

brave enough to do the same for me when I was in school, it certainly would have changed my

life because I would have found earlier acceptance and comfort with who I always knew I was.

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