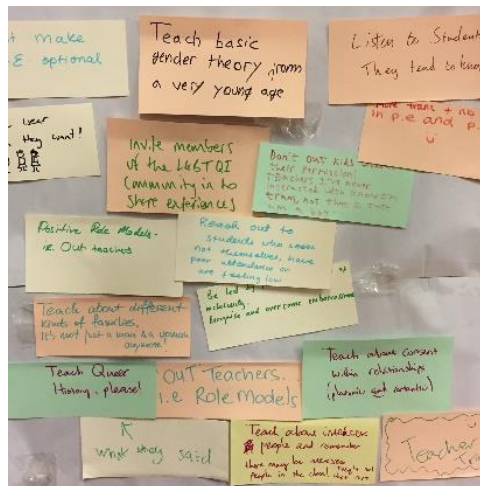


Community Discussion: *Another Brick in the Wall*



LGBTQI people's experience of education,
past and present



This report was written by Greig Willis Kennedy and Jules Stapleton Barnes from LGBT Health and Wellbeing (LGBT Health), to capture key discussions from the event. It was hosted by LGBT Health and trans youth group (Beyond Gender) and with support from LGBT Youth Scotland (LGBT Youth). This partnership led to a balanced proportion of young and older individuals who identify as LGBTQI to attend, offering varied perspectives to the discussion and further enhancing the potential for intergenerational discussion.

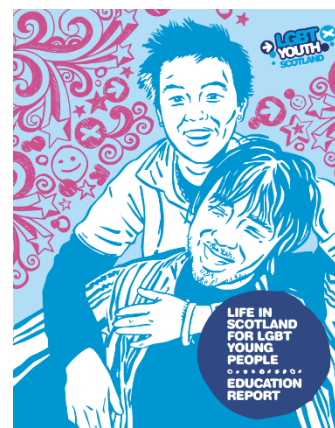
Background

A report created by LGBT Youth Scotland named *Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People: Education* (2012) found that educational institutes are where LGBT young people face most discrimination. With this in mind, the community discussion sought to gain a greater understanding of the experiences, **both past and present** of LGBTQI people whilst learning within educational environments.

Schools in Scotland, under the Education Act 2000 (Scottish Government, 2000), have a legal obligation to prioritise the inclusion and equality of all pupils. This notion is echoed within Scottish Educational Policy, including that of the Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2010) which stipulates that it is the responsibility of practitioners to promote the health and wellbeing of their pupils and to afford equal opportunities to all. Indeed, one of the four capacities which this curriculum aims to develop within pupils is that of 'confident individuals', a statement which can be directly related to the promotion of one's own identity.

About the Event

Hosted on 16th May, 2017, this event was attended by 40 people from LGBTQI communities in Edinburgh. It formed part of the on-going series of community discussions hosted by LGBT Health. The purpose is provide a safe space where LGBTQI people can feel empowered and supported to have a say on topics and matters that affect their lives. At this discussion, participants had an



“I want to give and receive hope”

opportunity to share their experiences of being in educational settings, with stories shared from the 1950's to present day. We aimed to reach a diverse age range of participants in order to provide a platform for intergenerational discussion, engaging with youth groups but

also LGBT Age, to create a united sense of community. Having a wide age range also allowed for an opportunity to examine differences and commonalities, taking stock of what has changed in educational settings, what issues still remain and what we can learn from one another's experiences. Importantly, the event brought to light issues that have recently affected young people, providing feedback and information to share more widely and a means of direction for moving forward.

Prior to the event we asked people what it was they were hoping to gain from attending. The majority of responses referred to a desire to share experiences, with one response capturing this notion poignantly,

“I want to share my experiences. I want to give and receive hope”.

A visual icebreaker helped to welcome people into the space initially and help reflect the age range of those present. Participants were asked to place a peg on the timeline beside the decade in which they most associate with being in education (for most this was during their formal education; during primary, and high school). From the display, those present were aware that there were people considering experiences from the 1950's well into the new millennium; involving people aged 60+ and young people as young as 15.



A speed chat activity allowed participants to talk to one another about a variety of aspects concerning school life, helping to set the scene for more personal discussion later in the event. Guest speaker Andrew Christensen, Principle Teacher Guidance at Earlston High School in the Borders then provided insight into how his school currently supports LGBTQI students and teachers.

More in-depth group discussions followed, which involved topics more directly related to people's experience of exploring sexual and gender identities during education. The questions posed for discussion, generated some interesting themes and issues which were faced by individuals, from different decades, and are explored in greater detail below.

Finally, participants were asked to write down suggestions of what would have been useful for them or what could be changed in relation to supporting their identity whilst in educational settings and then to place these suggestions on a wall in a brick like formation.

A snapshot of a Scottish Borders School by Guest Speaker, Andrew Christensen

“There have been a number of developments in Scottish education over the last 15 years, which are helping to change the landscape to that of a less hostile one for our LGBT community and striving for a more inclusive and diverse outlook:

*One major development is that of Scottish Education Policy. For instance, **Getting it Right For Every Child** (GIRFEC), which hones in on several indicators to ensure our young people's health and wellbeing is promoted - the indicators that students are Included, Nurtured and Respected are particularly relevant here. The Standards for Registration and Standards for Career Long Professional Learning stipulate the duty of care that our teachers have in ensuring young people feel included and respected. HGIOS version 4 (How Good is Our School)- a bench marking document that outlines ways in which schools can excel cites standards for Health and Wellbeing, including ensuring equality and diversity. The 2010 Equality Act which requires public bodies, including schools, to take active steps to eliminate discrimination and to do positive things to promote equality, also ensures that our children's needs are fundamentally respected.*

Another aspect which is helping to change the landscape is the subsequent approach to teaching and learning and ensuring that the four capacities (developing Success, Confidence, Responsibility and Effectiveness). Curriculum for Excellence demands that all are embedded in to the curriculum. Here, the Confident Individuals' capacity is of particular interest as it encourages the promotion of self-respect, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, and secure values and beliefs. Lastly, Health and Wellbeing Experiences and Outcomes (referred to as Es and Os) explicitly demand from the early years right through to the end of S3 that young people are taught to appreciate that there are different shapes of families, relationships and identities.

Organisations such as Stonewall and LGBT Youth Scotland are engaging with the government, local authorities and schools to help shift the landscape of education for our young people. Scottish Borders Council, amongst others, has committed that all of its high schools will begin to engage with LGBT Youth Scotland's charter mark, a bench mark to ensure equality for LGBT+ young people.

However it is not only at a policy level that changes to attitudes in our schools is brought about. There is undeniably an increased presence of LGBT+ themes in the media and current affairs. The combination of evolving safe spaces and open mindedness is fostering a generation of proud LGBT+ young people who claim their identity in the school setting and speak out on LGBT+ themes. These young people are beginning to take the lead on peer and staff education, on topics such as pronouns and identity, and hold their head high in the school community. Teachers feel supported to be out LGBT+ educators and, with the continued support of

partnerships they develop within their community, feel confident to address LGBT+ issues and become role models for new generations to come.”

Earlston High School provide a good example of the positive work schools and educational professionals *can* do to reduce the inequalities and barriers experienced by LGBTQI students.

There were many positive responses around the room, showing surprise, support and a sense of envy for Earlston’s approach in supporting LGBTQI students. Many present indicated that school life would have been drastically different and less difficult, if their school had implemented these steps.

What is your school doing to include and support LGBTQI students?

The Discussions

What were you taught about relationships?

The general response was that very little education on relationships had taken place, with this being truer for the older respondents. One respondent who was in high school education more recently claimed to have been taught ‘nothing at all’ about relationships. Those who did receive education on relationships said that it was only heterosexual relationships they were taught about.

Following, are some of the direct responses to this question with dates placed beside some them to indicate when the respondent was in school and to help gauge how these issues have changed over time:



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- Students working on the school newspaper were expelled for writing about a same sex kiss (1993/4)
- Being openly LGBT was a disciplinary offence (teacher, 1996)
- My School boycotted a play with same-sex romance
- Only taught about how babies were made (Recent)
- [the teaching] it was all about straight couples (Recent)
- School did teach me about sex and relationships; condoms, sex toys, sex between cis men and cis women (2014)

”

How have gendered spaces affected your experience of school/education?

The focus of discussion was around respondent's recollections of spaces such as changing rooms and toilets, as being problematic for transgender people within a school setting:

- Five open-planned/gender neutral toilets were introduced at one person's school, but then the most frequently used toilets, in the busiest parts of the school became gendered again
- One trans young person was told *“We're not going to do swimming because we don't know what to do with you”*
- Another was told *“Don't look at me!”* by other students when in a school changing room, indicative of the discrimination they faced by fellow students
- A parent of a trans child explained how the primary school which their child is attending is failing to fully recognise them as they the gender they identify with. When there was a confusion over which toilet the child should use the child explained *“I go to the toilet to pee or poo, not to be a boy or girl”*

“We're not going to do swimming because we don't know what to do with you”

- Another respondent who identifies as trans was told to use the staff toilets which were a considerable distance away from class rooms as they were not granted the permission to use the student toilet of the gender they identify with



- Parental backlash was cited as an issue which affected schools ability in supporting trans students and their choices
- One individual had a positive response to this question explaining that *“My P.E. teacher didn’t gender activities or pigeon hole”*

What did you know about LGBTQIA people at school?

All responses given were negative and showed a total lack of education and support on this matter. Many of those present agreed that is was through media such as books, TV and music as well as through friends and attending LGBT youth that they learned about LGBTQIA identities. Below is a snapshot of responses with some dates to indicate which years these responses relate to:

“What we knew about LGBTQI people was derogatory. Unkind. Taboo”

“

- What we knew about LGBTQI people was derogatory. Unkind. Taboo (1990s)
- Threatened with detention if I talked about it (1990)
- When LGBT Youth began supporting me, the teachers were unsupportive (2004/5)
- I was homophobic because I was conditioned that way, I didn't get the support I needed to stop and address my own issues (2007/8)

”

What has changed about your feelings about your identity after you left?

When discussing this particular question the room as a whole were asked if they felt leaving high (secondary) school was an escape; the vast majority agreed.

Here are some of the other responses to this question:

“When I left school I felt more free, could be myself... which I hadn’t learned to do in that environment”

“

- I’ve met people who aren’t cis gender! Knowing more trans people lets you know you can do it
- I was able to escape that whole life, it trapped me
- Felt I couldn’t be my identity until I changed my name, I couldn’t do this at school
- I am myself, true self, at work, they didn’t know me before so it is easier
- I can ask ‘who am I?’, ‘What am I?’

”

Closing Reflections

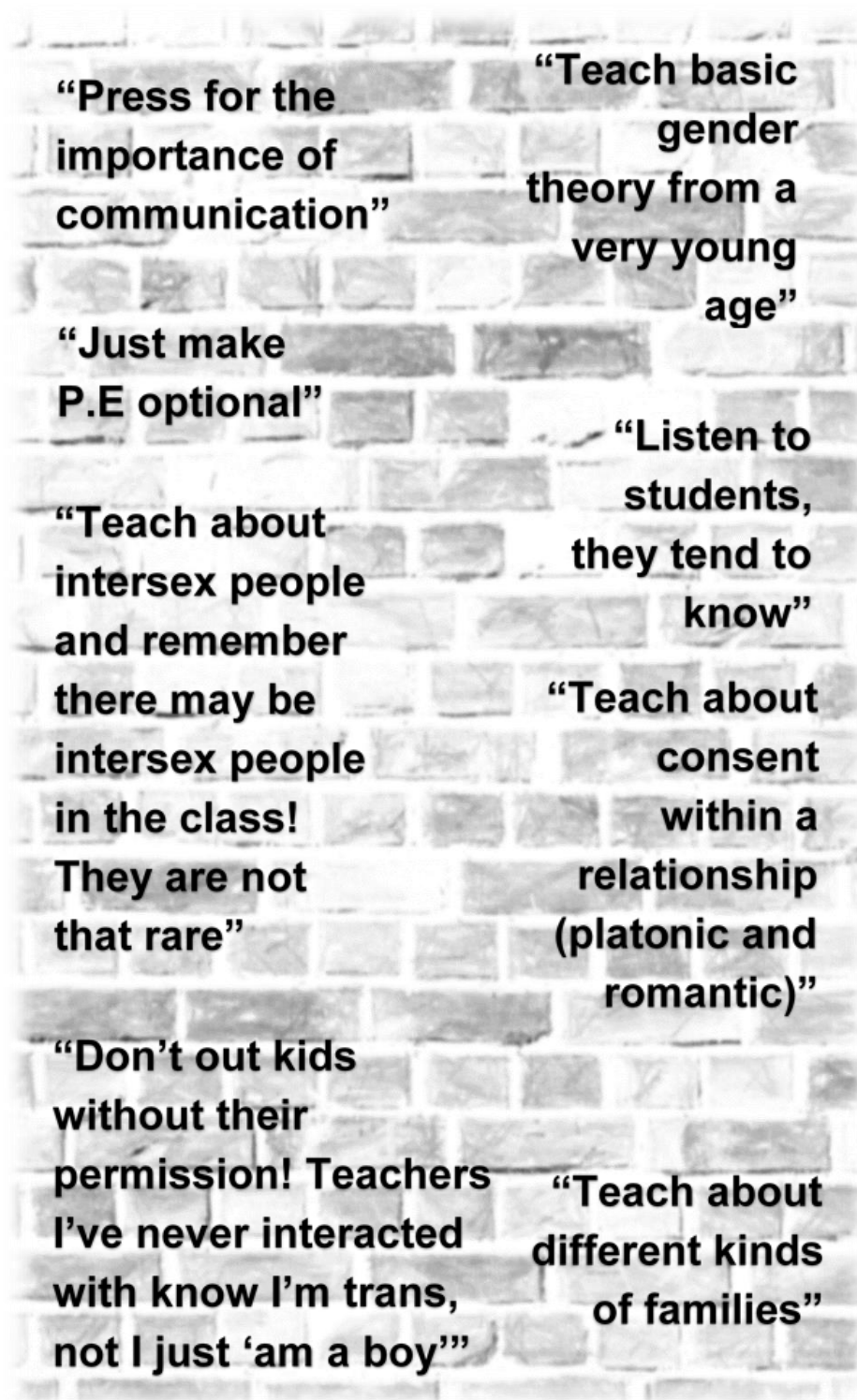
In times where education is at the forefront of the fight for LGBTQI rights and equality it was encouraging to hear everyone’s view and experiences regarding this topic. Through the variety of responses it is clear that there is still a lot of progress to be made; many present at the discussion had similar experiences in spite of the age range of participants.

Hearing about the approach taken at Earlston High School in supporting their LGBTQIA students is truly inspiring and can serve as a good example of progressive practice which meets the social and legal obligations of schools in Scotland.

The combination of evolving safe spaces and open mindedness like this, is fostering a generation of proud LGBT+ young people who claim their identity in the school setting and speak out on LGBT+ themes. This young person describes the affirming experience of a teacher’s response to their coming out,

"I was like, '*I'm bisexual*' and they just smiled and said, '*good for you, so am I.*'"

Below is a representation of the wall created at the event with suggestions given by participants for moving forward from this point.



Useful Links and Contacts

LGBT Health and Wellbeing

LGBT Health delivers a varied programme of services, projects, groups, courses and events in Edinburgh and Glasgow for people aged 16+. We welcome people with a diverse range of identities. W: www.lgbthealth.org.uk T: 0131 523 1100

Lothian Transgender Support Programme

LGBT Health and Wellbeing's holistic programme of support for trans people, including newsletter, information and 1:1 support, managing transition courses, confidence building workshops and regular social events. Contact Jules Stapleton Barnes (Edinburgh) or Katrina Mitchell (Glasgow)

E: jules@lgbthealth.org.uk T: 0131 523 1104 (Edinburgh)
E: katrina@lgbthealth.org.uk T: 0141 271 2330 (Glasgow)

LGBT Youth Scotland

LGBT Youth Scotland offer a wide range of groups, activities, volunteer opportunities, and events for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender young people and their friends. They run groups and drop ins in: Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Galashiels, Glasgow, Perth, Stirling and Stranraer. LGBTYS also have information about what other LGBT youth and community groups that are running across Scotland.

E: info@lgbtyouth.org.uk W: <https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/> T: 0131 555 3940

LGBT Youth - Resources

Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People: Education (2012) provides an interesting account of the experiences of LGBT young people in education. Direct link: https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/files/documents/Life_in_Scotland_for_LGBT_Young_People_-_Education_Report_NEW.pdf

Non-Binary Scotland

Meeting every second Friday from 6pm-9pm Support and social opportunities for people who either self-identify as out with the gender binary of men and women or are questioning whether they might.

E: nonbinaryscotland@gmail.com
F: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/nonbinaryscotland/>

Beyond Gender

Group for transgender [and intersex] people and their friends aged 13–25. Tuesday evenings from 7–9pm, LGBT Youth Scotland, 40 Commercial Street, EH6 6JD

E: beyondgender@lgbtyouth.org.uk W: www.beyondgenderyouth.org

General Teaching Council for Scotland

GTCS carries out a wide range of statutory functions and initiatives to promote, support and develop the professional learning of teachers. Address: Clerwood House, 96 Clermiston Road, EH12 6UT T: 0131 314 6000

E: gtcs@gtcs.org.uk W: <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/>

Education Scotland

Education Scotland is the Scottish Government's executive agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education. The Curriculum for Excellence is detailed on their website.

W: <https://education.gov.scot>

The Scottish Government

Information regarding equality legislation can be found on their website, the following web address will direct you to their pages concerning the government's work towards equality for LGBTI people

W: <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/equality/lgbti/>