Manuscript Title:

What can Teachers do to Challenge Heteronormativity? A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Research indicates there is a gap between teachers' positive beliefs about LGBTQ+ inclusive education and how they demonstrate this in practice. Teachers often feel limited in their capacity to implement inclusive practices, constrained by dominant heteronormative narratives in schools. Through a three-stage thematic synthesis approach, a review was conducted to explore: what can teachers do to challenge heteronormativity? The developed themes indicate that teachers can work strategically within their community context, integrate non-normative representations throughout the curriculum, role model inclusivity and acts of social justice, and facilitate a co-constructive learning environment. These themes are discussed in the context of facilitators and barriers around LGBTQ+ inclusive education, leading to a discussion of implications relevant to educators across a range of settings.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, schools, teachers, pupils, heteronormativity, inclusivity.

What can teachers do to challenge heteronormativity? A systematic literature review

Heteronormativity is a dominant discourse that positions heterosexual orientation and binary models of gender as the norm (McBride & Schubotz, 2017). People are often assumed to be cisgender, identifying with their gender assigned at birth (either female or male) and to be attracted to a gender other than their own, as this characterizes the majority of people (van der Toorn et al., 2020). It has been argued that within heteronormative societies, this binary heterosexual gender order underpins knowledge systems and social relations, which can lead to the privileging of those who adhere to sexual and gender norms (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012; McBride & Schubotz, 2017). Consequently, non-normative gender and sexual behaviours can often be met with discriminatory reactions from others (van der Toorn et al., 2020). This has ramifications for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other sexual and gender-diverse identified (LGBTQ+) persons. The term 'queer' is used here as a collective term for those who have sexual and gender identities other than heterosexual and cisgender. 'Transgender' refers to those whose gender identities do not align with their assigned gender at birth. Although the term encompasses both trans-binary identities (female, male) and trans-non-binary identities (genders that do not fall into either of these categories such as agender, bigender, genderfluid etc.), research often uses 'transgender' exclusively for trans-binary individuals. For clarity within the current article, the term 'trans-spectrum' will be used as a collective term to indicate all transgender identities.

It has been argued that the structure and ethos within educational settings often perpetuates a binary gender and heteronormative order (Bragg et al., 2018). Adherence to uniform policies that reinforce gender norms (Mitchell & Natcen, 2009), curricula that negate the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity (McBride & Schubotz, 2017), and the implementation of inclusion and anti-bullying policies (Kurian, 2019) culminate to reinforce heteronormative values. Linville (2011) argues that such practices may inadvertently marginalise LGBTQ+ young people and legitimise homophobic and transphobic bullying. Indeed, LGBTQ+ pupils are more likely to experience peer rejection and isolation, sexuality-based discrimination and physical victimisation than their cisgender

and heterosexual peers (Kosciw et al., 2014; Murphy, 2012), and report feelings of isolation, helplessness and fears around their safety (Murphy, 2012; Steck & Perry, 2018). Reduced feelings of safety have been found to have a negative impact on academic outcomes and absenteeism for LGBTQ+ young people (Johns et al., 2019), while victimisation has been associated with suicidality and reduced feelings of school belonging (Hatchel et al., 2018). Amongst LGBTQ+ populations, victimisation is typically more pronounced towards those with non-normative gender expressions (Gordon et al., 2018), with trans-spectrum youth reporting greater homophobic abuse and cissexism (bias against trans-spectrum identities) than their queer, cisgender peers (Day et al., 2018; Jones & Hillier, 2013; Ullman, 2017).

Teachers play an integral role in young people's school experiences, in particular shaping pupils' sense of school belonging through the promotion of interpersonal classroom environments (Anderman, 2003). LGBTQ+ young people with supportive school staff report increased feelings of school connectedness (Kosciw et al., 2010), improved feelings of safety and lower levels of victimisation (De Pedro et al., 2018). The presence of supportive educators has also been found to positively impact LGBTQ+ pupils' academic achievements and reduce absenteeism (Kosciw et al., 2010). Educators can enact inclusive practice in a number of ways, such as intervening in bullying, being an advocate for LGBTQ+ issues in schools and incorporating LGBTQ+ topics into their teaching (Greytak et al., 2013). However, research indicates that teachers do not regularly intervene in LGBTQ+ based bullying and miss opportunities to teach about LGBTQ+ identities or issues (Snapp et al., 2015). It has been argued that there is a tension between educators' roles as protectors of young people's rights and their capacity to put this into practice, underscored by their own beliefs, unawareness or reluctance to intervene (Kurian, 2019). For instance, in a Stonewall survey of English teachers, 42% of primary school teachers and 55% of secondary school teachers reported that they did not always intervene when pupils used 'gay' as an insult, while over 30% of both primary and secondary teachers reported not always intervening to pupils calling one another 'poof', 'dyke' or 'faggot' (Stonewall, 2014). In a large-scale USA-based survey exploring the school experiences of

LGBTQ+ young people, over 50% of participants reported having heard homophobic comments and negative remarks about gender expression from their own teachers and other school staff (Kosciw et al., 2014). Such research indicates that teachers might both directly and indirectly legitimise prejudice by not recognising the presence or significance of LGBTQ+ phobic behaviours, sometimes engaging in prejudiced behaviours themselves.

Lack of intervention might also be underpinned by teachers' confidence in their capacity to respond, with teachers who have stronger beliefs that intervening will bring a positive outcome being more likely to respond (Collier et al., 2015). Confidence also appears to play a role in teachers' engagement in affirmative, proactive approaches to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. In a study with over 3,400 teachers in Canada, Taylor et al. (2016) found that 96% of teachers believed LGBTQ+ rights are human rights and 84.5% approved of LGBTQ+ inclusive education. However, fewer than half of teachers had included LGBTQ+ identities in discussions of human rights or in topics of sexual health. Fewer than 20% of teachers had included LGBTQ+ themed stories or information about LGBTQ+ historical figures in their lessons. Only half reported challenging homophobia, with fewer still challenging transphobia.

The gap between teachers' beliefs and their practice indicates the presence of additional barriers that infringe on their work. Such barriers are often systemic in nature, including a lack of administrative or colleague support (Taylor et al., 2016), fears of parental resistance (Steck & Perry, 2018; Warwick et al., 2001), concerns of disciplinary action (Taylor et al., 2016) and limitations in school policy (Warwick et al., 2001). There is an ever-growing research base providing insights into the systemic and cultural shifts that can be made to create an LGBTQ+ inclusive environment, with suggestions for whole-school training programmes, development of explicit policy and guidance, creation of safe spaces for LGBTQ+ pupils and whole-school implementation of an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum (Luecke, 2018; Steck & Perry, 2018). However, such practices entail coordinated efforts at the whole-school level which are not easily applicable to the individual teacher working within the boundaries of restrictive school systems. Overhauling entire school systems and effecting social

change within them is an aspiration not to be disregarded, yet it is an aspiration over which many teachers will have little autonomy. As the importance of teachers in young people's school experiences has been firmly established, the focus of this research is to understand what actions individual teachers can make to challenge heteronormativity that transcend the barriers of the contexts in which they work. While an individual teacher's actions alone may not lead to systemic advances, the impact on the pupils they work with is well evidenced and might act as the first stepping stone towards greater LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

A systematic literature review was conducted in response to the question: what can teachers do to challenge heteronormativity? A process of thematic synthesis was applied to develop analytical themes that answered this question, in turn providing implications for teachers' practice.

Methodology

This review was conducted by a doctoral student, referred to henceforth as the researcher, under the supervision of two tutors from the same University.

Selection and Search Strategy

A systematic search strategy was conducted using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Moher et al., 2009) as depicted in Figure 1. Five electronic databases (PsycInfo, ERIC, SCOPUS, CINAHL and Web of Science) were chosen based on their relevance to Psychology and education. An initial search was conducted on PsycInfo using the terms: teacher* OR "school staff*" OR educator* OR "school community" AND lgb* OR lesbian OR gay OR homosexual OR bisexual OR queer OR "sexual minority" OR "gender non-conforming" OR "gender nonconforming" OR "gender-nonconforming" OR transgender OR trans OR non-binary OR "non binary" OR "gender fluid" OR genderfluid OR "gender minority" AND attitudes OR perceptions OR beliefs OR knowledge OR "professional development" OR practice OR action or actions OR "school climate" OR "school environment" OR cisnormativ* OR heteronormativ* AND

accepting OR non-discriminatory OR inclusive OR affirming OR supportive OR responsive* OR advocat* OR "anti-oppressive" OR interrupting OR challenging.

All database searches were conducted between May and July of 2020. Search terms and Boolean operators were adapted as necessary to each database used. Searches were conducted to exclude books. No limits were applied for date of publication. Overall, the search yielded 1,414 papers of which 533 duplicates were removed. A further 831 articles were removed following title and abstract screening using the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1). The remaining 50 articles were further assessed for eligibility through full text review. Thirty-six articles were removed, leaving 14 qualitative articles for synthesis.

Quality Assurance

All 14 articles were quality assessed using the Manchester Framework for qualitative studies (Bond et al., 2013), detailed in Appendix A. Studies could score a maximum of 14 and were broadly categorised as low (0-4), medium (5-9) or high (10-14) in their rating, as detailed alongside the characteristics of the included studies (Table 2). The primary purpose of this process was not to exclude articles based on a set score but rather to gain insight into their relative methodological rigour. Had the quality assurance process brought to light clear methodological problems or issues of interpretative quality within an article, exclusion would have been considered and the reasons for this made explicit. The score alone was not utilised as a reason for exclusion and did not affect the weight given to each article during the synthesis. Indeed, the weight given to articles was organically shaped by the process of thematic synthesis in which data that helped to answer the research question was naturally prioritised in the development of analytic themes.

Figure 1

Systematic search strategy using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Moher et al., 2009)

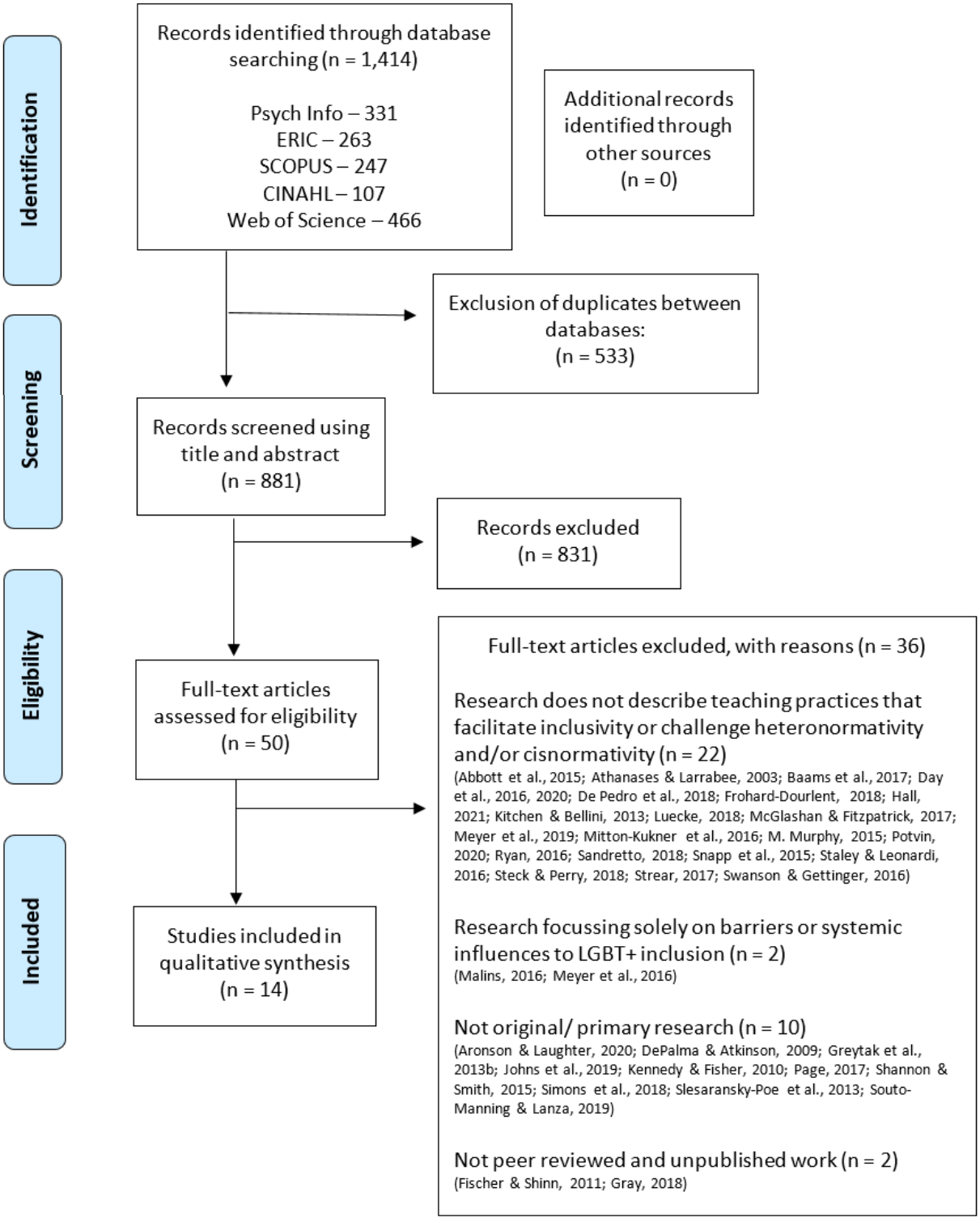


Table 1

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
• Primary research • Published in a peer-reviewed journal • Published at any time • Text available in English • Research related to teaching practices that facilitate inclusivity or challenge heteronormativity • Research relevant to teaching practices in school settings, e.g., primary and secondary schools	• Non-primary research, e.g., review articles, conference presentations, reflective commentaries • Book publications • Non-peer-reviewed and unpublished work e.g., dissertations • Text not available in English • Research that does not describe teaching practices that facilitate inclusivity or challenge heteronormativity and/or cisnormativity • Research focusing solely on barriers or systemic influences to LGBTQ+ inclusion • Research exclusively related to teaching practice in further and higher education settings, e.g., universities

Table 2

Characteristics of the reviewed studies

Study number	Author and date	Country	Site setting for data collection	Sampling approach	Participant details	Data collection methods	Analysis approach[1]	Quality Assurance rating
1	Bentley & Souto-Manning (2016)	USA	Pre-school classroom	Collaborative research study between a teacher-researcher and researcher	Teacher-researcher working in a pre-school class	Observational data (written reflections)	Unspecified	Low (3)
2	Carlile (2019)	England	Various	Convenience sampling (via	Six school staff members (teachers, senior leaders and support staff) working	Two interviews per participant	Inductive coding	Medium (9)

[1] As reported by study authors.

				established contacts)	across four primary schools serving faith communities	First interview: post training of 'Educate & Celebrate' teaching programme Second interview: post implementation of 'Educate and Celebrate' programme in class		
3	Cullen & Sandy (2009)	England	Various	Convenience sampling (via wider research project)	26 teacher-researchers, nine university researchers and one diversity trainer	Teacher-researchers' written reflections, web-postings, focused discussions and classroom observations	Unspecified	Medium (8)
4	Evans & Rawlings (2019)	Australia	Various	Convenience sampling (via established contacts)	Three transgender young people aged 17-25	Recorded semi-structured interviews with each participant	Thematic analysis	High (10)

5	Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman (2015)	USA	Various	Snowball sampling	16 Midwest educators working in middle and/or high schools	Semi-standardised interviews. Nine conducted via telephone and seven conducted face-to-face	Thematic analysis	High (12)
6	Helmer (2016)	USA	Public regional high school in Western New England	Unspecified	One teacher and 24 pupils aged 17-18 enrolled on a Gay and Lesbian Literature course	Observational data; interviews with teacher and pupils; two questionnaires completed by pupils; and course materials	Analysis of empirical materials following a grounded theory approach	Medium (5)
7	Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan (2019)	USA	Two school sites in fourth and fifth grade classrooms	Unspecified	Two fourth and fifth grade teachers	Observational data of participants in class; interview transcripts with teachers; and written reflections from teachers	Unspecified	Medium (6)

8	Kelly (2012)	New Zealand	Kindergarten classroom with 21 children	Unspecified	Four teacher-researchers	Teacher-researchers' written logs detailing observations and reflections; semi-structured interviews with the teacher-researchers	Interpretative analysis	High (10)
9	Martino & Cumming-Potvin (2016)	Canada	Elementary school (Kindergarten to grade 5)	Snowball sampling	One teacher (part of a wider research project)	Teacher's written reflections on using the storybooks provided with her class and a semi-structured interview	Case study analysis	Medium (9)
10	Meyer & Leonardi (2018)	Canada	Various	Convenience sampling (via established contacts)	26 educators (Elementary and secondary teachers, and diversity mentors) from different schools	Semi-structured interviews conducted in person or remotely	Ongoing exploratory analysis	High (10)
11	Pearce & Cumming-	Australia	Various	Snowball sampling	Nine English teachers working in government and independent high schools	Semi-structured interviews	Inductive approach	Medium (9)

	Potvin (2017)							
12	Ryan, Patraw, & Bednar (2013)	USA	Kindergarten to grade eight school	Purposive sampling	One elementary school teacher	Observation, informal interviews, and document analysis	Topical / thematic analysis	Medium (9)
13	Tompkins, Kearns, & Mitton-Kükner (2018)	Canada	Various	Unspecified	Nine teachers who had completed the 'Positive Space' training programme	Focus groups	Thematic analysis	Medium (9)
14	Ullman (2018)	USA	Various	Purposive sampling	31 educators (teachers, headteachers and assistant headteachers) from nine different schools teaching	Focus group or individual interviews	Thematic coding	Medium (9)

					from kindergarten to grade 12			

Data Synthesis and Extraction

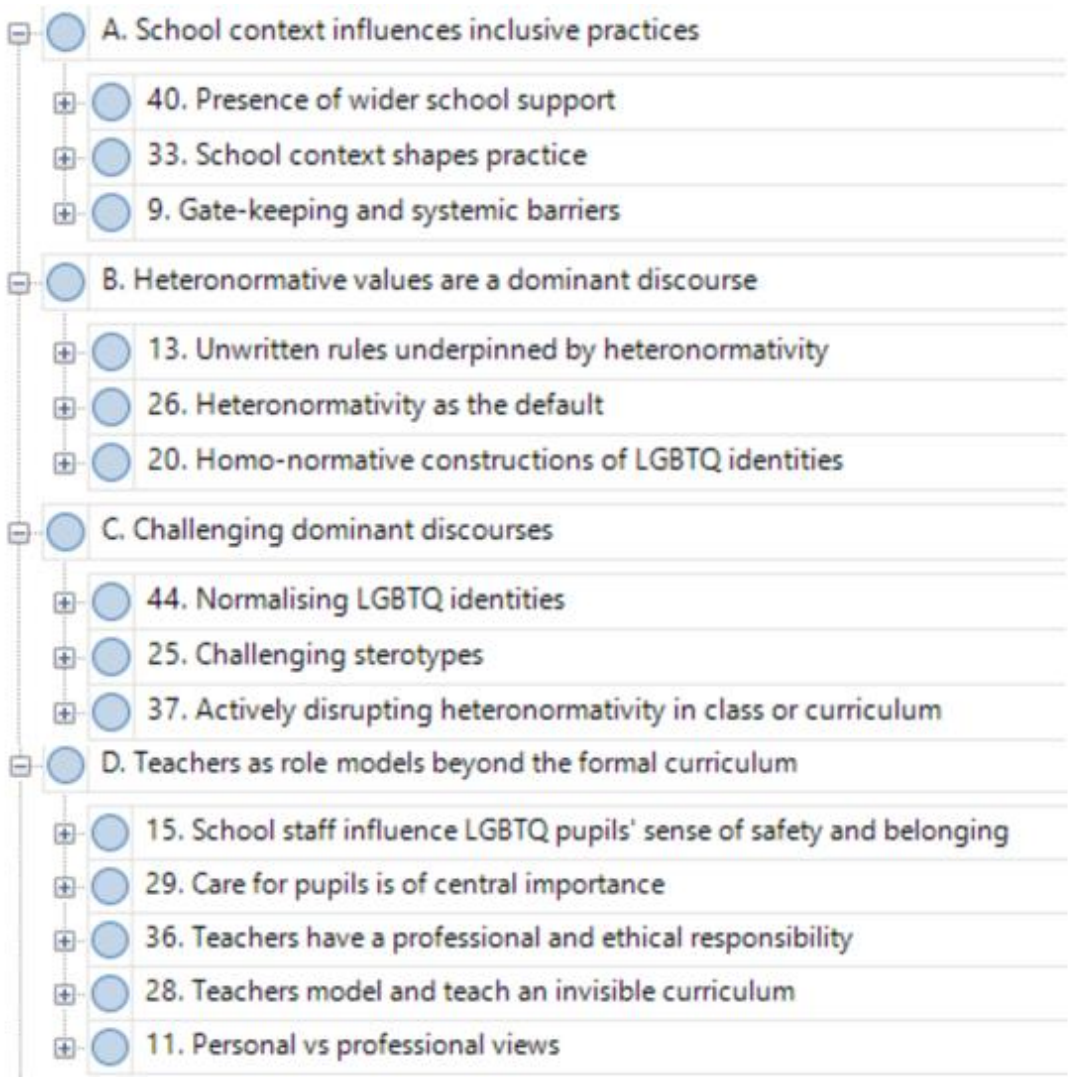
The 14 studies were analysed using thematic synthesis, chosen due to its suitability for inductive and interpretative analysis (Bolandet al., 2017). The current study's research question was such that there were not clearly defined concepts or themes from existing literature to draw upon for analysis, making an inductive approach most suitable. Additionally, the research aims and designs of the included studies were disparate, warranting an interpretative lens in order to link together concepts relevant to this study's research question. Thematic synthesis entails interpretation and thus resonates with the constructivist epistemological position held by the researcher. Constructivism is a form of perspectivism in which knowledge is constructed through the interactions a person has with the world around them and their interpretations of this (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Schwandt, 2003). Within this review, the researcher had a key role in interpreting and synthesising data, constructing new knowledge by interacting with the data and the interpretations of study authors.

All text within each articles' results or findings sections was included in analysis, including participant quotations and author interpretations. This data was stored and coded using NVivo 12. A three-stage thematic synthesis approach was conducted, drawing on Thomas and Harden's (2008) work. Stage one involved line-by-line coding of the data. Each sentence was given at least one code to capture its meaning and content although most sentences were given multiple codes. This was an iterative process; codes were re-visited and re-named in order to translate concepts between studies, an integral aspect of synthesising qualitative research (Britten et al., 2002; Thomas & Harden, 2008). This process resulted in 47 initial codes. Stage two involved identifying similarities and differences between the initial codes and grouping them accordingly, resulting in 11 descriptive themes. The process of moving between stage one and stage two of the thematic synthesis is exampled in Figure 2 and detailed in full in Appendix B. An overview of the studies from which descriptive themes were most evident is shown in Table 3. Thomas and Harden (2008) describe

stage three as 'going beyond' the content of the original studies by using the descriptive themes developed from inductive analysis to answer the review question. Within the current research, this entailed inferring from the descriptive themes what teachers could do to challenge heteronormativity.

Figure 2

Thematic synthesis stage 1 to stage 2: Example of descriptive themes developed from initial codes



Note. Numbered items indicate initial codes developed during stage 1 of the thematic synthesis. Lettered items indicate descriptive themes developed from the initial codes during stage 2 of the thematic synthesis.

Table 3

Descriptive themes identified in each reviewed study

Descriptive Theme:	Bentley and Souto-Manning (2016)	Carlile (2019)	Cullen and Sandy (2009)	Evans and Rawlings (2019)	Fredman et al. (2015)	Helmer (2016)	Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan (2019)	Kelly (2012)	Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2016)	Meyer and Leonardi (2018)	Pearce and Cumming-Potvin (2017)	Ryan et al. (2013)	Tompkins et al. (2018)	Ullman (2018)
School context influences inclusive practices	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Heteronormative values are a dominant discourse	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Educators challenging dominant discourses	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Teachers as role models: working beyond the formal curriculum	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Weighing up professional risks	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
Teacher confidence engaging with LGBTQ+ content	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Learning from and with pupils	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Young people are capable of understanding and respecting LGBTQ+ experiences	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Strategic implementation of LGBTQ+ content	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N
Working with the community	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y

Note. Y indicates that the descriptive theme was evident in the study. N indicates that the theme was not evident in the study.

Synthesis

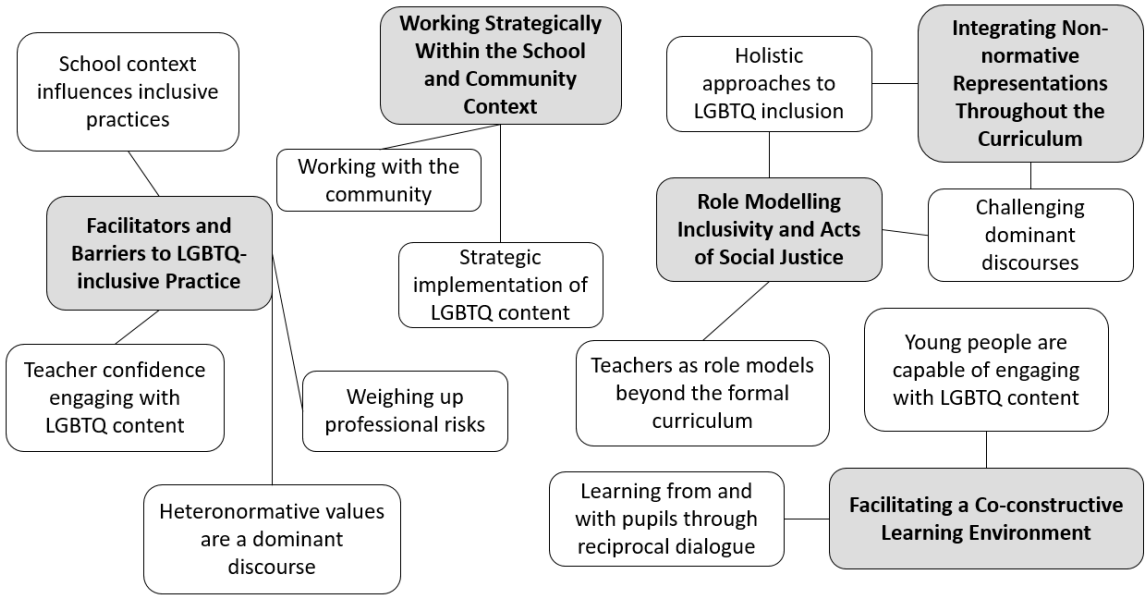
Synthesis Overview

A total of 14 qualitative papers were included in this synthesis, published between 2009 and 2019. Six studies were based in the USA, three in Canada, two in England, two in Australia and two in New Zealand.

Five analytical themes were developed from the descriptive themes, depicted in Figure 3. Four of these were developed in response to the research question: 'what can teachers do to challenge heteronormativity?' and included: working strategically within the school and community context; integrating non-normative representations throughout the curriculum; role modelling inclusivity and acts of social justice; and facilitating a co-constructive learning environment. The inductive nature of analysis during the descriptive coding phase provided insight into the contexts in which teachers in the reviewed research worked and how this shaped their LGBTQ+ inclusive practices. Although not directly answering the research question, these insights provide a contextual backdrop within which the themes are situated and were therefore further synthesised to form a fifth theme: facilitators and barriers to LGBTQ+ inclusive practice. It is from this theme that this section will begin. The papers from which the themes were generated are referenced throughout the synthesis, along with illustrative quotes from the included studies.

Figure 3

Graphic representation of how descriptive themes contributed to the development of analytical themes.



Note. Analytical themes are represented in bold on a shaded background to distinguish them from the descriptive themes.

Analytical Themes

Facilitators and Barriers to LGBTQ+ Inclusive Practice

Within the reviewed research, teachers' capacity and willingness to challenge heteronormativity was shaped by the context of the schools in which they worked. Embedding LGBTQ+ inclusive pedagogy was perceived as easier when celebrating diversity was inherent to the school culture and the surrounding community (Kelly, 2012; Meyer & Leonardi, 2018). Conversely, educators working within conservative school contexts felt pressured to scaffold pedagogical practices to minimise potential issues of parental disapproval and community resistance (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017). For some teachers, their fears of community backlash had not been actualised (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019). However, there were many examples given of resistance towards mentions of LGBTQ+ identities in lessons, such as

parents requesting their children be removed from class when such topics were being addressed (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016) and complaints that children would be harmed through exposure to such learning content (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019). One teacher recalled an incident involving an "Imam from a mosque in the region sending out 'a traditional family values letter' to the community in which concerns were expressed about homosexuality being addressed in schools" (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016, p. 814). Another educator recounted how after discussing the life experiences of a transgender woman with her class as part of a 'Day of Silence' event, there was "school and community uproar, leading to statewide media attention, and a disciplinary letter being placed in her file" (Fredman et al., 2015, p. 67).

Variation in the structure and operationalisation of school systems and procedures shaped the parameters within which teachers could work (Fredman et al., 2015; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017; Ullman, 2018). For example, some teachers worked in contexts in which administrative approval was needed before they could discuss LGBTQ+ issues in the curriculum (Fredman et al., 2015) whilst others felt the rigidity of their school's curriculum made it difficult to adapt what was prescribed (Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017). Furthermore, administrative expectations regarding teachers' practice were not always explicit within policy, with educators reporting implicit messages not to cause waves or promote LGBTQ+ identities as the norm (Fredman et al., 2015; Kelly, 2012; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016). While some school administrations were "not simply supportive of [gender and sexual diversity] but demanding of it" (Ullman, 2018, p. 506), others acted as gatekeepers, limiting flexibility in teachers' practice (Fredman et al., 2015; Ullman, 2018).

In the reviewed studies, the climate of support for LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools not only shaped teachers' confidence in challenging heteronormativity, but left them balancing their professional ideals of inclusive education against the risks of working against the grain. Indeed, teachers felt vulnerable to community and administrative backlash and made pedagogical decisions in consideration of these fears (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Carlile, 2019; Fredman et al., 2015; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Ullman, 2018), as operating outside of prescribed guidelines

might have left them unprotected and their job security in jeopardy (Fredman et al., 2015; Ullman, 2018).

Working strategically within the school and community context

Within the constraints of the school context in which they worked, educators in the reviewed studies worked strategically to include a focus on LGBTQ+ identities in their practice, including drawing upon anti-bullying discourses (Carlile, 2019; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016) and values of pupil safety (Carlile, 2019; Fredman et al., 2015). Pupil welfare was noted to be "the highest shared value among educators, administrators, parents and the public, regardless of other belief or value systems" (Fredman et al., 2015, p. 74). Educators used this shared value to encourage their school communities to consider that mentions of LGBTQ+ identities were important. Arguing that homophobic and transphobic bullying could be targeted towards all pupils helped teachers gain support from their school communities to include discussions of LGBTQ+ identities with pupils, as did emphasising the importance of teaching pupils not to bully others (Carlile, 2019). These discussions were considered by educators to be gateways for more nuanced conversations (Carlile, 2019; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016).

Some educators reported that limitations in policy could be used strategically, with educators "using the lack of specific curriculum and policy to incorporate less overt, but still important, aspects of inclusive pedagogy" (Fredman et al., 2015, p. 47). In this way, policy or lack thereof was freeing for some educators' capacity to challenge heteronormativity. Indeed, many educators drew on other pedagogical frameworks and policies used by their schools to justify the inclusion of LGBTQ+ representation within practice (Carlile, 2019; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017). For example, teachers in English schools reported the 'Fundamental British Values' framework set out by the UK government (Department for Education (DfE), 2014) as a route to including LGBTQ+ content due to its emphasis on equality (Carlile, 2019). Teachers in Australian schools utilised the Australian Curriculum,

Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) guidance to similar effect (Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017), while a teacher in Canada drew on equity policies in the Toronto District School Board as a justification for her activist work (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016). Educators gained a sense of security in their practice when they could justify their curricular choices through their school's policies (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017).

Another aspect to strategic incorporation of LGBTQ+ content within practice involved relational work with parents, thereby mitigating potential resistance (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Ullman, 2018). There was recognition that many parents would have had limited exposure and education around LGBTQ+ identities and should be engaged in reciprocal conversations about what this would entail in their child's curriculum (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Ullman, 2018). Within this dialogue, the vulnerability of sexual and gender minority pupils and families could be explained, facilitating empathic-ally building by emphasising the importance of inclusive pedagogic practices for pupils and families in the school (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019). Engaging parents in these conversations enabled educators to explain the rationale for LGBTQ+ representation in school. Although parents typically had the option to opt their child out of lessons that directly addressed LGBTQ+ content, commitments to an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum with the wider class could still be upheld (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016).

Integrating non-normative representations throughout the curriculum

The reviewed research indicated that there was space within the curriculum for teachers to make "use of possibilities for 'slipping in' texts, activities or items for discussion in which [LGBTQ+] young people or their families [are] represented" (Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017, p. 84), thereby challenging heteronormativity by normalising a range of identities. Examples given within the reviewed studies included diverse family representations being included in written maths problems (Carlile, 2019), and the acknowledgment of queer oppression in relation to broader learning units (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019) and in discussions of historical events (Fredman et al., 2015;

Tompkins et al., 2018). Indeed, one teacher gave an example of discussing the Holocaust with their pupils and including that LGBTQ+ persons were also targeted within this time, saying, “Do you have to teach a 45 minute lesson? No. You could just say that. So baby steps get people to realise that it can be integrated, but it is controversial” (Fredman et al., 2015, p. 75). Teachers acknowledged that while overt inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities within curricular content can be challenging, integrating representation into existing learning topics is one way around this.

Literacy was identified as a subject in which non-normative representations could be explored with pupils across a range of age groups (Helmer, 2016; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017; Ryan et al., 2013). Introducing children’s books featuring LGBTQ+ characters and families reinforced to children the existence of alternative family dynamics and identities beyond their immediate experience (Kelly, 2012). For example, through class readings of ‘And Tango makes three’, a children’s book about two male penguins who fall in love and adopt an egg together, 10-11 year old pupils were able to re-conceptualise family structures and think through the wider social reactions towards queer identities (Cullen & Sandy, 2009). Although some teachers missed opportunities for in-depth conversations around diverse family structures and relationships when reading such books with their pupils (Kelly, 2012), there was a general consensus amongst teachers that these books could be used to engage young people in critical reading practices, encouraging them to reflect and discuss their interpretations and assumptions (Helmer, 2016; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017). Alongside introducing LGBTQ+ specific books, there were opportunities for teachers to queer narratives within other texts and stories. For example, one teacher reflected on a literacy writing unit in which children were tasked with writing alternative versions of well-known fairy tales (Cullen & Sandy, 2009). While the focus of the task was not LGBTQ+ specific, the teacher was able to integrate queer representation by using the example of a lesbian Cinderella and role-playing this character as an introduction to the pupils’ task (Cullen & Sandy, 2009). As well as integrating LGBTQ+ representation directly within lessons, many teachers reported making LGBTQ+ themed books accessible within their class or school libraries (Martino &

Cumming-Potvin, 2016; Tompkins et al., 2018), in turn normalising queer identities by having these available alongside other school books.

Role modelling inclusivity and acts of social justice

Teachers in the reviewed research were identified as providing an invisible curriculum through their actions and words, positioning them as role models to their pupils (Meyer & Leonardi, 2018; Tompkins et al., 2018). Simple actions such as adapting the language they used to address the class or emphasising that all activities and resources were available for all pupils were reflected on by teachers as providing subtle messages that challenged heteronormativity (Tompkins et al., 2018). Teachers' actions informed pupils' understanding of acceptable ways to interact with one another (Evans & Rawlings, 2019; Meyer & Leonardi, 2018). Indeed, one teacher described being conscious of emphasising with her class that a character's gender expression in a story called 'My Princess Boy' was acceptable, knowing this held relevance for a pupil in her class:

> I was just more conscious of the fact that it was important for this student to hear that that's okay from the teacher. And I was also more conscious of the fact that other kids would be hearing me say, this is okay so that when they responded to or interacted with the student, there would hopefully be less of an impulse to be mean or, that kind of thing (Meyer & Leonardi, 2018, p.453).

Equally, in the reviewed research it was argued that teachers' inaction, such as ignoring homophobic behaviour, taught implicit messages that such behaviour was acceptable (Fredman et al., 2015). An adolescent describing his high school experiences after coming out as transgender shared that "if a teacher's calling them the wrong name, it's unlikely that the year group's going to follow up on it" (Evans & Rawlings, 2019, p. 10).

Being a role model entails actions of social justice and proactively challenging heteronormativity by stepping into opportunities as they arise and seizing teachable moments. Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2016) described how a teacher responded to pupils using 'gay' as a

negative word by opening a conversation about homophobia, language meaning, and introducing her class to a children's book with queer characters. Similarly, Tompkins et al. (2018) shared an example of an educator who tackled transphobic comments from a pupil directly, setting a precedent and ensuring such expressions were not tacitly accepted. Engaging young people in these conversations encouraged reflection on their own and others' assumptions and experiences, paving the way for developing a classroom culture in which inclusivity is positioned as a whole-class responsibility. Teachers' capacity to role model an inclusive class culture is important as "an open and affirming [classroom] community doesn't just evolve on its own" (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019, p. 94).

Facilitating a co-constructive learning environment

Within the reviewed research, children and young people were identified as being capable of engaging in discussions around LGBTQ+ identities and experiences (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Carlile, 2019; Cullen & Sandy, 2009; Kelly, 2012; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016; Tompkins et al., 2018) and had developed their own understandings of gender and sexuality. While this often included heteronormative constructs (Cullen & Sandy, 2009; Kelly, 2012), young people showed a willingness to engage in reflective conversations that challenged their assumptions (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Ryan et al., 2013) and when introduced to non-normative identities, were able to assimilate this into their understanding (Kelly, 2012; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016). Children and young people were also able to connect with discussions of LGBTQ+ identities through their own experiences or the experiences of those they knew (Cullen & Sandy, 2009; Ryan et al., 2013) and could challenge norms of sexuality and gender (Carlile, 2019; Ryan et al., 2013; Tompkins et al., 2018). Young people's readiness to engage with LGBTQ+ content suggests that teachers can build on pupils' existing knowledge and experiences, and use this as a platform to challenge heteronormativity by facilitating mutual learning experiences. In this way, the pressures teachers might feel to have expertise or specific knowledge around LGBTQ+ identities may be reduced,

leaving in its place a reciprocal learning environment. Questions asked of the teacher can be "turned back to the class, encouraging children to seek answers from peers and regard each other as knowledgeable" (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016, p. 199). Through such reciprocal dialogue, teachers can act as critical educators, engaging in a learning journey with pupils and positioning them as capable of shaping classroom discussions. As well as fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership in young people, this approach was also considered a protective strategy; the non-directive and child-centred style of pedagogy "protects you and gives you license to talk about a subject that might be considered taboo or unacceptable…" (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016, p.815).

Discussion

The aim of the current review was to answer the question: how can teachers challenge heteronormativity in schools? This research question was formulated with an awareness of the systemic and context-based constraints teachers might experience with regards to implementing LGBTQ+ inclusive practice. While it was understood that practice cannot be disentangled from the context in which teachers work, the intention was to explore what incremental steps teachers could take regardless of these barriers, with a view to closing the gap seen between teachers' positive beliefs about LGBTQ+ inclusive practice and their own actions (Taylor et al., 2016). Barriers identified within the reviewed research resonated with previous literature, including concerns of parental resistance (Steck & Perry, 2018; Warwick et al., 2001), lack of administrative support and potential professional repercussions (Taylor et al., 2016), as well as lack of clarity in policy and guidance (Warwick et al., 2001). However, despite the constraints of their school environments, teachers in the included studies were able to enact or conceive of ways to challenge heteronormativity, the synthesis of which has informed implications for educators.

Implications for educators

One implication involves teachers working strategically, drawing on shared values pertaining to anti-bullying and pupil welfare, utilising wider school policies flexibly, and relational work with parents. These actions are not without their drawbacks. For example, representation of LGBTQ+ identities through an anti-bullying discourse alone can inadvertently pathologise them which does not sit comfortably with a culture of inclusion. However, such a discourse acts as a starting point for LGBTQ+ representation and might well evoke kindness and tolerance between pupils. Further, if taken in unison with other implications, such as integrating non-normative representations into the curriculum, this discourse will cease to sit in isolation. Although teachers' capacity to implement activities with a direct LGBTQ+ themed focus will vary across school settings, dependent on the various barriers or facilitators underpinning their practice, this synthesis suggests that incidental representation may be a possible approach for many. Furthermore, integrating representation throughout the curriculum may act as a protective approach due to its indirect nature, and also moves away from a position of tokenism, avoiding 'othering' LGBTQ+ identities by positioning them outside of ordinary curricular practice. However, this approach also has challenges. While parents are typically able to opt their children out of LGBTQ+ focused lessons, this would not be possible within a curriculum in which diverse gender and sexual identities are integrated. Administrative support may also be a barrier, with gatekeeping regarding the type of resources that teachers are permitted to use. This may be where strategic use of wider school policies comes into play, drawing on schools' broader values. Although these policies and frameworks do not typically address LGBTQ+ identities explicitly, teachers in the reviewed research were able to draw upon statements of equality within these frameworks to justify their work. Such openness to interpretation might be freeing for educators yet might not provide a high level of security for teachers concerned about professional risks and parental complaints. Arguably, this is where relational work could be of benefit. Discussing inclusive practice with parents and administration within the context of such policies invites collaborative interpretation and implementation. Although a level of compromise

might be inevitable, this openness in dialogue may go some way in mitigating resistance and alleviating teachers' fears of professional repercussions.

This synthesis also shows that teachers have the capacity to enact LGBTQ+ inclusive practice through more subtle actions, role modelling inclusivity through the language they use, responses they give to LGBTQ+ based bullying and enabling a classroom culture in which understanding can be co-constructed. While teachers may be met with administration or parental resistance toward overt LGBTQ+ inclusive practices, instilling tolerance amongst pupils is unlikely to be argued against. Through these subtle supportive actions, teachers may promote allyship in the young people they work with, facilitating an interpersonal classroom environment in which LGBTQ+ young people can feel safe and connected, and in which victimisation and adverse outcomes may be reduced (Anderman, 2003; De Pedro et al., 2018; Kosciw et al., 2010).

Strengths and limitations

The implications for teachers' practice developed through this review are intended to be feasible across a range of school contexts. However, teachers' implementation of such approaches will be reliant on their own awareness of heteronormativity and their beliefs in challenging it. As a result, the implications may be limited in scope for teachers' characterised as unaware or reluctant, or for those holding prejudiced beliefs (Kurian, 2019). Many of the educators in the reviewed studies appeared to be invested in challenging heteronormativity. For example, several were involved in delivering an LGBTQ+ inclusive programme as part of the research process (Carlile, 2019; Cullen & Sandy, 2009; Tompkins et al., 2018), others had expressed or demonstrated a commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusive education (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Helmer, 2016; Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017; Ryan et al., 2013) and several were queer themselves, which may have shaped their perspectives on LGBTQ+ inclusive education (Cullen & Sandy, 2009; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2016). As such, it is to the aware teachers who wish to enact LGBTQ+ inclusive practice that these implications may hold the most relevance. For teachers less

aware or confident, systemic-based actions supported through whole-school initiatives will be more likely to influence uptake of practices that challenge heteronormativity. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the synthesis means the review has been shaped by the voices of participants involved in the included studies. Although specific demographic information of all participants is not known, the majority of participants were teachers across England, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, suggesting a predominantly white, educated participant group whose views and contexts of working may not be representative of the wider world.

Thematic synthesis was selected as an analytic approach within this review due to the qualitative and disparate nature of the included studies. This enabled an interpretative synthesis that suited the research question. However, a potential criticism lies in understanding the extent to which each study contributed to the developed themes and how the inclusion of individual studies might have shaped the findings. Sensitivity analysis is one approach often used in research to evaluate the impact of including or excluding data, but there is debate around its merit within qualitative syntheses (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). Indeed, the feasibility of conducting sensitivity analysis in an interpretative synthesis is unclear; once a study has been incorporated into the development of themes, simply extracting this is not a straightforward process and there is little guidance in the area (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). Within the context of this research, sensitivity analysis was deemed unnecessary. Studies were selected for inclusion due to meeting the eligibility criteria, developed to ensure included studies could answer the review question. The relative contribution of each study is of less importance to the research question than the synthesis in its entirety. However, in order to facilitate transparency, actions were taken to demonstrate where the findings arose, detailing which studies contributed to the descriptive themes at stage two of the thematic synthesis (Table 3) and referencing relevant studies in prose within the analytical themes.

Conclusion

Prior research has focused predominantly on barriers around LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching practice and the adverse outcomes experienced by LGBTQ+ young people in non-inclusive school environments. It was the intention of this review to shift the focus towards the individual teacher, whose actions hold weight for young people's school experiences. In doing so, this review has provided insight into the actions individual teachers can take to challenge heteronormativity within school. While contextual and systemic barriers may influence much of teachers' practice, it has been argued that small steps can be taken within the context of these constraints, moving incrementally towards school practices that facilitate inclusivity for LGBTQ+ young people.

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Appendix A

Quality assurance tool: Manchester framework for qualitative studies (Bond et al., 2013)

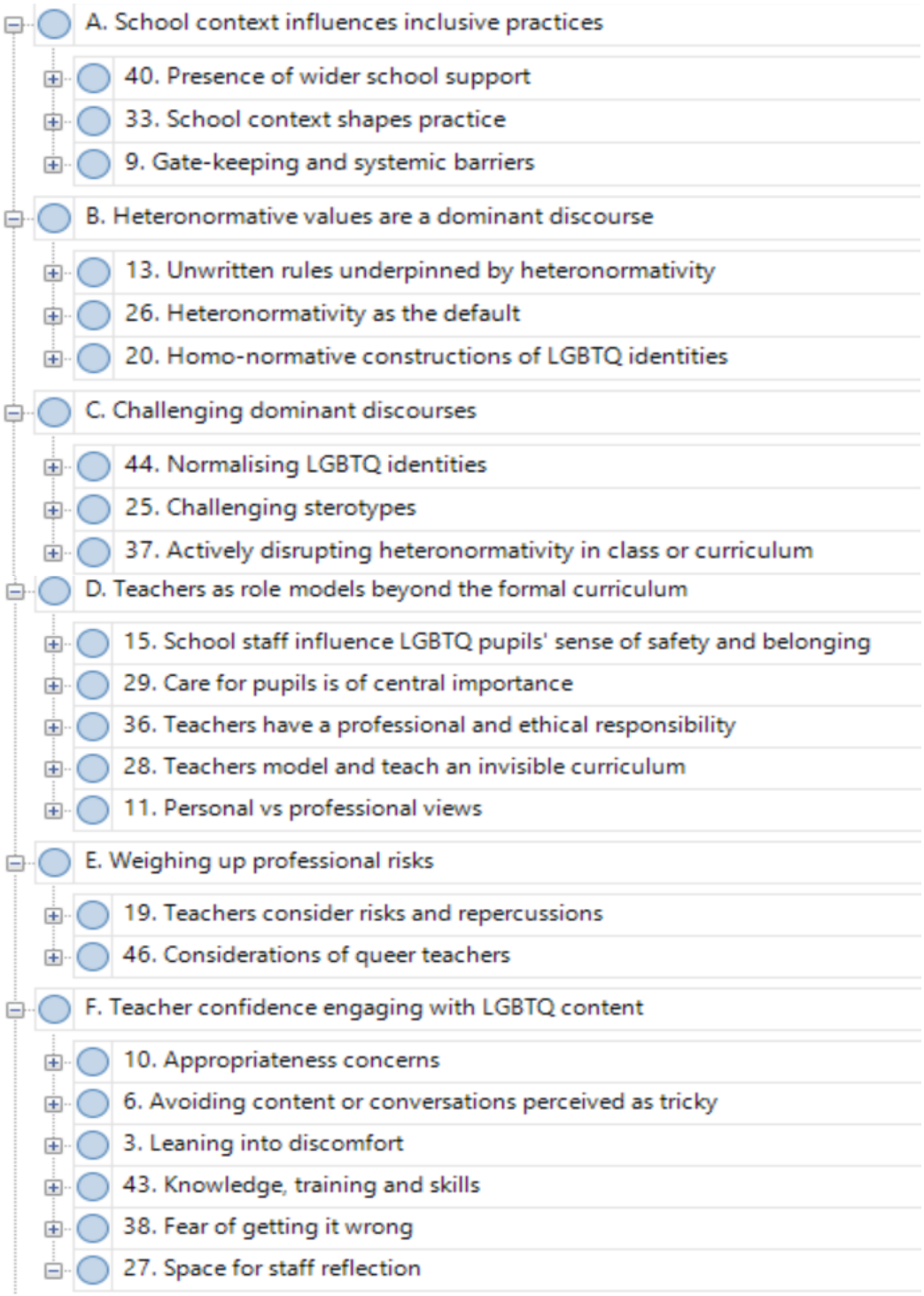
Criterion	Score	R1	R2	Agree coeff.	R1	R2	Agree coeff.	Comment
Appropriateness of the research design *e.g. rationale vis-à-vis aims, links to previous approaches, limitations*	**1 0**							
Clear sampling rationale *e.g. description, justification; attrition evaluated*	**1 0**							
Well executed data collection *e.g. clear details of who, what, how; effect of methods on data quality*	**1 0**							
Analysis close to the data, *e.g. researcher can evaluate fit between categories/ themes and data.*	**2 1 0**							
Evidence of explicit reflexivity *e.g. impact of researcher, limitations, data validation (e.g. inter-coder validation), researcher philosophy/ stance evaluated.*	**2 1 0**							
Comprehensiveness of documentation *e.g. schedules, transcripts, thematic maps, paper trail for external audit*	**1 0**							
Negative case analysis, *e.g. contrasts/ contradictions/ outliers within data; categories/ themes as dimensional; diversity of perspectives.*	**1 0**							
Clarity and coherence of the reporting *e.g. clear structure, clear account linked to aims, key points highlighted*	**1 0**							
Evidence of researcher-participant negotiation of	**1 0**							

meanings, *e.g. member checking, empower participants.*								
Emergent theory related to the problem, *e.g. abstraction from categories/ themes to model/ explanation.*	**1 0**							
Valid and transferable conclusions *e.g. contextualised findings; limitations of scope identified.*	**1 0**							
Evidence of attention to ethical issues *e.g. presentation, sensitivity, minimising harm, feedback*	**1 0**							
Total	*Max 14*			Mean coeff.			Mean coeff.	

Note. In quality assessing studies using the Manchester framework, the researcher used the criterion to attribute a 'score'. The R1 and R2 rating columns which refer to inter-rater reliability were not used.

Appendix B

Thematic synthesis stage 1 to stage 2: descriptive themes developed from initial codes



Note. Thematic synthesis stage 1 to stage 2 - descriptive themes developed from initial codes using NVivo12. Items numbered 1-47 indicate the initial codes developed during stage one of the thematic synthesis. Items lettered A-K indicate the 11 descriptive themes developed from the initial codes.