What’s in a Name?
Exploring Discourse Around ‘Gay-Straight Alliances’

Catherine Alexandra Kates
Faculty of Social Work,
University of Toronto

What’s in a name? This paper explores this question by trying to understand the discourse and debate that surrounded the naming of ‘Gay-Straight Alliance’ in the new Accepting School Act of Ontario, passed in June 2012. This paper aims to understand discourse through issues of language, narrative, power, inclusion, and knowledge creation that were utilized by the Progressive Conservative Party, New Democratic Party, and Liberal Party in Ontario, as well as the Catholic Church and Toronto Catholic School Board, in public hearings and in the media at large. As a social work student completing my practicum within the Toronto District School Board at the time this legislation was being debated, I had the privilege to speak to staff and students to understand their lived experiences with Gay-Straight Alliances. By working with students that identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-spirited, Queer, Questioning, or Intersex (LGBTTQQI), I had the privilege of gaining first hand insight into how heteronormative society and homophobia continues to marginalize LGBTTQQI students. This paper brings to light how many of our approaches normalize the exclusion of LGBTTQQI youth and perpetuate heteronormative worldviews within the school system. Although much more comprehensive work is needed to ensure LGBTTQQI youth are not confined to the margins, Bill 13 is one small step toward creating an alternative and more inclusive discourse within schools that is responsive to LGBTTQQI students’ unique needs and challenges.

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The suicide of 15-year-old Jamie Hubley, an openly gay student at Jackson High School in Ottawa, sheds light on the tragic consequences of homophobic bullying. Before killing himself, Jamie blogged about how much pain he was suffering because he had come out of the closet and was now speaking out for LGBTTQQI youth. Jamie was one of many youth regularly bullied and verbally abused, and like many other youth, Jamie’s blog began to reflect his isolation and loneliness (Clarke & MacDougall, 2012).

To address such issues of bullying, Ontario’s Accepting Schools Act, commonly known as Bill 13, was proposed to promote inclusion in schools. Bill 13 passed its third and final reading with a vote of 65 to 36 on June 5th 2012. The bill’s stated purpose was to make “every school safer while ensuring all students have the support they need to grow and reach their full potential” (Ministry of Education, 2012a, p.1). The Act stipulated legal obligations for school boards and schools to proactively disrupt bullying by creating prevention initiatives, as well as clearly outlined tougher consequences for acts of bullying. In addition, Bill 13 promoted respect for all students, “regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability” (Ministry of Education, 2012a, p. 1).

The Act also recognized for the first time, the unique needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-spirited, Queer, Questioning, or Intersex (LGBTTQQI) youth, and the importance of these youth being able to have a representative voice within school communities so that young people, like Jamie Hubley, could establish a safe and supported space that addressed the diverse needs of LGBTTQQI students. As the Act reads within the Preamble:

The people of Ontario and the Legislative Assembly…Believe that students need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitude and values to engage the world and others critically, which means developing a critical consciousness that allows them to take action on making their schools and communities more equitable and inclusive for all people, including LGBTTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, intersex, queer and questioning) people (Ministry of Education, 2012a, p.1).

The Discourse Surrounding Bill 13

Following the addition of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), Bill 13 sparked a complex discourse in mainstream media and public forums. This paper understands and explores discourse as defined by Foucault’s as

ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious

Diamond and Quinby (1998) added to my understanding of discourse by identifying discourse as “a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance” (p. 185). Utilizing these concepts, the paper integrates an analysis of responses from, and commentary by, youth, political party actors, and the Catholic Church in order to understand how concepts of inclusion, diversity, and marginalization are understood, normalized, framed, and publicized within existing systems of power that continue to propagate a heteronormative worldview. This paper seeks to understand how strategies of domination and resistance continue to shape our social and political consciousness and political frameworks. As a social work student within the TDSB at the time, I also had the opportunity to understand the impact of homophobia and heteronormative culture by talking to staff and working therapeutically with young people who identify as LGBTQQI. In aiming to understand the central question, “What’s in a name?”, it is imperative that we understand the discourse driving these conversations and debates.

Throughout the literature and my personal experiences within the school board I found the word “gay” continues to hold incredible power and meaning for LGBTQQI youth and, as well as for political actors and religious groups. The resistance to using the word gay in its positive form and the way this word is used colloquially in schools as an insult gives a sliver of insight into the heteronormative framework in which we operate. The backlash that ensued when this word was included in Bill 13 helps to bring to light the systems of oppression and marginalization that continue to keep LGBTQQI youth from developing a positive identity and securing safety and support within schools and the larger community.

**Gay-Straight Alliances and their Impact**

GSAs are student-led mechanisms used to create inclusive and safe school environments for LGBTQQI youth who are often targets of bullying and marginalization within the mainstream heteronormative education system (GSA Network, 2013). GSAs have been around since the 1990s and function to establish partnerships between LGBTQQI and heterosexual students and create allies within the school community. They “exist to provide support to LGBTQQI students, to educate others about sexual orientation, and to counter the homophobia, marginalization, and bullying to which many queer and questioning youth are still subjected to in schools.” (Clarke & MacDougall, 2012, p.155).

Abuse and marginalization experienced by LGBTQQI youth is a real concern today in Canada. The First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian Schools (2008) involved 1700 students from across Canada. Results of the survey revealed that three-quarters of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students feel unsafe in at least one place at school, and that 97% of transgendered students feel that school is unsafe. Nine out of ten transgender students, six out of ten LGBT students, and three out of ten straight students have been verbally harassed because of their gender expression. One in four LGB students also report having been physically assaulted because of their sexuality (Taylor, Peter, Schachter, Paquin, Beldom, Gross, & McMinn, 2008, p.15). Statistics Canada
found that LGBTTQQI youth and adults experience three times as much discrimination as heterosexuals, as well as higher rates of violent victimization including sexual assault, robbery, and physical assault (Beauchamp, 2008). Another study by Benibgui (2011) estimated that LGBTTQQI youth are 14 times as likely to commit suicide.

High schools, and the corresponding developmental stage of adolescence, is a difficult time for all youth, as they begin to forge their own identities, take greater risks, and rely more on peer relationships. Developing a positive identity within a heteronormative environment is challenging for LGBTTQQI youth. Social supports from family, community, and religious groups, may not be as accessible for LGBTTQQI youth. Youth marginalized by a dominant heteronormative school culture face the anxiety of feeling different and may be on the receiving end of negative and hurtful remarks and violence. Many LGBTTQQI youth report feeling isolated because information around LGBTTQQI people is difficult to access, and LGBTTQQI youth may not feel comfortable talking to their parents or friends about their sexual orientation (Morrow, 2004; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Taylor et al., 2008). GSAs in high schools are believed to be one of the ways in which LGBTTQQI youth can begin to feel safe in exploring and forging a positive identity during adolescence (Fields & Russell, 2005; Herdt, Russell, Sweat, & Marzullo, 2007). A 2011 study supports the belief that GSAs help to prevent depression, victimization, substance abuse, and suicide (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011). Research also demonstrates that school clubs that address marginalized populations provide increased engagement and positive feelings of inclusion within the school community (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran 2011). Furthermore, within high schools with GSAs, there are fewer instances of homophobic bullying, and LGBTTQQI students report having more positive school experiences (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran 2011; Inkelas, 2004; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2004; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009; Tatum, 1999; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010).

**Social Inclusion and the Accepting Schools Act**

Inclusion is a key concept within Bill 13, with the purpose of amendments being, “To create schools in Ontario that are safe, inclusive and accepting of all pupils” (Ministry of Education, 2012a, p. 1). Omvidar and Richmond (2003) define social inclusion as:

> making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society...this reflects a proactive, human development approach to social well-being that calls for more than the removal of barriers or risks. It requires investments and action to bring about the conditions for inclusion. (p.viii)

In Canada, social inclusion is often viewed as “a continuum, where exclusion is the problem and inclusion is the solution” (Shakir, 2003, p. 2). In practice however, inclusion policies may risk being rooted in moral assumptions and value judgments that position minority populations as “the other” and their worldviews on the periphery. Minority beliefs are either “tolerated” or minority groups are expected to conform and integrate into dominant ideology. This approach does not create radical change in how society functions, nor does it work to understand the exclusionary processes and barriers
which maintain dominant discourses. The process of ‘othering,’ and the ideology of ‘tolerance,’ positions minority groups, such as LGBTTQI youth, as threats to society, to be feared or viewed suspiciously. For instance, there is a lack of youth literature that includes stories about queer teens and their intimate caring relationships, while heterocentric relationships continue to be promoted within school curriculum and school culture. Although schools may tolerate different types of relationships, so far there has not been a major shift to promote diverse and representative relationships that serve the current student population.

Policy options in Canada range from being paternalistic and simplistic, promoting acceptance and tolerance, to a more complex understanding of inclusion which aims to understand root causes of inequality and the power dynamics that keep people on the margins (Shakir, 2003). Understanding how different political parties and influential stakeholders understand and promote inclusion—particularly the inclusion of LGBTTQI youth—necessitates an understanding of policy objectives, the ways in which power is exercised, and the institutionalization of power within systems (Foucault, 1994).

Bill 13, attempts to address issues of bullying and inclusion with a preamble stating that,

The people of Ontario and the Legislative Assembly: Believe that all students should feel safe at school and deserve a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting, regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability; Believe that a healthy, safe and inclusive learning environment where all students feel accepted is a necessary condition for student success; Understand that students cannot be expected to reach their full potential in an environment where they feel insecure or intimidated (Ministry of Education, 2012a, p.1).

Although there seemed to be collective commitment to addressing bullying, attempts to take a comprehensive approach to inclusion of LGBTTQI youth stirred up controversy when the following amendment became the focus of public debate:

303.1 (1) Every board shall support pupils who want to establish and lead activities and organizations that promote a safe and inclusive learning environment, the acceptance of and respect for others and the creation of a positive school climate, including… (d) activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name gay-straight alliance or another name (Ministry of Education, 2012a, pg. 1).

By giving students the right to establish GSAs, the Bill attempted to ensure that clubs adequately represented the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and recognized the unique challenges faced by the LGBTTQI student community. Although this was a small and conservative step toward creating a school system that values the protection and inclusion of LGBTTQI youth—and an equally small attempt to allow space within
dominant discourse for the voices of marginalized youth—this addition was met with strong opposition, and sparked heated debate across Ontario.

What’s in a Name?

A key point of controversy was over language. The word “gay” is commonly used in schools in a hurtful manner, and many teachers ignore these offensive comments made by students, unintentionally condoning the continued discrimination of LGBTTTQI students (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Allowing students to utilize these terms in a derogatory manner only perpetuates the marginal and ‘less than’ place LGBTTTQI youth hold within our school-system. Here we see language used as a form of domination by heterosexual youth, and underlies the importance of reclaiming the word ‘gay’ for LGBTTTQI youth.

The Ontario GSA Coalition believes the dispute centers on the use of the words “gay,” as the terms “straight” and “alliance” are not seen as offensive. In fact, the TDSB has not opposed the name of any other school clubs, except for Gay-Straight Alliances. Bill 13 allowed students to create and name their clubs Gay-Straight Alliances if they chose to do so. This is important to students because over the last ten years, many schools have refused to allow their students to create GSAs, particularly within religiously affiliated school boards (Callaghan, 2012; Lapointe, 2012).

Lapointe (2012) reported that in her interviews with students at Catholic Secondary Schools in Ontario, two self-identified queer females noted “their school tried, but could not beat the gay out of them” (p.14). These students have now switched to a public school. Another teacher I worked with reported that when trying to set up a GSA, her school resisted and told her that a GSA must be student initiated, and there was no student interest. The following week, this teacher met a recent Alumnus who indicated that she had asked for a GSA throughout her three years at high school, but had been told by the principal there was not a teacher to support the process, so they would be unable to start the club. In 2010, The Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) banned GSAs, allowing students to discuss social justice issues only within the Catholic context through groups entitled the Safety, Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equity Club (Houston, 2011). Students are often encouraged to name their clubs “Respecting Differences,” however, as the Ontario GSA Coalition states, “forcing us to call our LGBT clubs ‘Respecting Differences’ clubs is not respectful” (p.8).

The power of words was also acknowledged by the government through Bill 13. Originally when Bill 13 was introduced, the Liberal government said Catholic trustees could determine the name for new anti-homophobia student clubs. However, after consultations with students who said they did not want principals or trustees dictating the names of their clubs, Laurel Broten, Ontario Minister of Education stated:

We know that words matter. The message that we’re giving to Ontario students today is you will be listened to; it’s your club. The Premier and I were both very clear that it was not for us at Queen’s Park to tell them what the name of their club should be, but neither should it be for someone else sitting in some other office in the province to tell them what the name of their club can’t be. (Leslie, 2012).
Allowing students to use the word gay, if they choose to do so, is an important statement of support for LGBTTQQI youth who struggle against the negative connotations attached to a word central to their identity.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) had also pushed hard for changes to the bill. Peter Tabuns, NDP member, proposed the amendment that allowed students to name their clubs GSAs. Liberals ensured NDP support in a minority legislature by adopting this motion. The NDP did not believe that allowing students to call their clubs GSAs violated their religious rights. Tabuns stated, “We’re not asking anyone to change their faith. We’re saying that students should be able to name a club” (Swan, 2012).

Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty highlighted that by ensuring students have the option to use the language that suits their needs, we send a strong signal to all kids that they are accepted for who they are (Globe and Mail, 2012). Ultimately for the Liberal and NDP parties, allowing LGBTTQQI youth the freedom of expression not always guaranteed by school principals, is a strong step toward a more inclusive school environment that recognizes power imbalances, and creates space where LGBTTQQI youths’ voices can be heard. The inclusion of the language of ‘Gay-Straight Alliance’ in Bill 13 reflects a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of power and oppression which aim to create and maintain difference, and keep members of the LGBTTQQI youth at the margins of school communities.

Bill 13 was met with strong resistance from the Catholic School Board and the Catholic Church. Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, stated publically, “Why is a piece of provincial legislation being used to micromanage the naming of student clubs? Should one student suddenly be able to determine the method to deal with the issues in a school” (Leslie, 2012)? In May 2013, almost a year after Bill 13 had been passed, Catholic school board trustees still brought forward a motion to ban GSAs in Catholic Schools. The motion was defeated seven to four (Brown, 2013).

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association took a different approach by supporting the GSA name. “If the students feel that a club should be called a GSA—that it makes a difference to them—then we respect and accept that choice,” the association said in a 2012 release (Boudreau, June 5, 2012).

The Progressive Conservatives supported the Catholic Church’s viewpoint, and proposed their own anti-bullying bill—Bill 14—that did not include the language of “Gay-Straight Alliance.” The Progressive ConservativesPCs claimed Liberals were using Bill 13 and the inclusion of Gay-Straight Alliances merely to create further tension with the Catholic school system.

Lisa MacLeod, a Progressive Conservative PC MPP in Ontario, stated that, “The government has decided in this case to be aggressive, they want to provoke the Catholic education system for whatever reason,” (Leslie, 2012). This discourse continues to propagate an ideology that keeps LGBTTQQI youth, and those who support more inclusive policies, as something to be suspicious of.

The Heteronormative Narrative

Heterosexism “systematically privileges heterosexuality relative to homosexuality, based on the assumption that heterosexuality, as well as heterosexual power and privilege, are the norm and the ideal” (Chesir-Teran, 2003, p. 267). The manner in which the
Progressive Conservatives and Catholic Church addressed Bill 13 brought to light the continued perpetuation of the dominant and powerful narrative that normalizes heterosexuality. This creates heterosexism that excludes LGBTTQI students from accessing a safe and supportive learning environment.

The dominant narrative that continues to frame homosexuality as “not normal” creates a false story that validates discrimination and exclusion and impacts on self-conceptions and assumptions around behavior (Butler, 2004; King, 2003; Titchkosky, 2008). In schools this is often reinforced by teaching conformity to “norms” and “natural” sexual and gender roles (Flowers & Buston, 2001). This creates a narrative where LGBTTQI youth are different and suspicious, rather than addressing homophobic heteronormative behavior.

Schools, particularly within the Catholic Board, often consider sexuality and gender to be private, and not appropriate for discussion (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). In this way, issues of sexuality are equated with sex, and LGBTTQI bodies begin to be construed as sexually deviant or dirty. This construct creates a discourse that attributes lesser values to bodies not subscribing to normalized heterosexual relationships. This is another way the dominant narrative, equating sexuality with sex, excludes LGBTTQI youth from engaging in public discourse.

The discourse presented by the Catholic Church and Progressive Conservative Party normalizes this homophobic narrative and prioritizes the Catholic Church’s religious views above the needs of another minority group. The Catholic Church and Conservatives claim to promote tolerance through acceptance of difference, but are hesitant to address LGBTTQI youth issues in a way that transforms systematic marginalization to create a safe and diverse community for young people. The Cardinal writes in a letter, “I question, however, why provincial legislation should make this particular method normative in a Catholic school, which has its own different but effective methods of attaining the goal of addressing bullying and providing personal support for all students, ones which, unlike GSAs, arise out of its own fundamental principles and are in harmony with them.” (Collins, 2012).

Religious beliefs that promote homophobia are often justified because of misleading discourse around “the right to religious freedom” (Clarke & MacDougall, 2012). In fact, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms clearly states that religious rights shall not undermine the human rights guaranteed to all citizens. The Catholic School Board continues to utilize the argument of religious freedoms, to excuse the fact that they are not addressing the needs of their students, and to establish clubs that are monitored, censored, and infringing on the basic human rights of LGBTTQI students. When LGBTTQI issues are addressed by the Catholic School Board, conversations are part of a slew of diversity issues that do not reference particular LGBTTQI challenges or recognize the homophobic heteronormative attitudes that prevail in society. Again, Catholic schools escape true inclusive policies by promoting “tolerance” for difference as they whitewash policies so that underlying power structures remain intact.

What is a Safer Space?

Students in Canada are required by law to attend school and their safety must be guaranteed. As Anderson (1994) states, “Regardless of the root cause, if gay and lesbian
students are being hurt in public schools, then change must begin there” (p. 21). GSAs aim to provide a safe space for LGBTTTQQI students.

The creation of a safer space for LGBTTTQQI youth through GSAs raises a number of questions around who controls this “safer space” and makes decisions around what these clubs can talk about and the issues they can address. The Catholic Church made their opinion clear on the matter in a statement by Thomas Cardinal Collins (2012) who writes, "Trustees and principals are legitimate stewards of the spiritual tradition of the school, and in a Catholic school that includes the Catholic faith tradition. Why should the power of provincial law be used to override that legitimate adult authority so that this one particular method can be imposed by any student who wants to do so” (p. 1)?

Canada is a signatory of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNRC), which guarantees every child’s civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Article 12 of the UNRC gives children and young people the right to participate in decisions that affect them. In Canada, the government is increasingly recognizing the importance of child participation in politics (CIDA, 2011). One of the principles of the Ministry of Child and Youth Services in Ontario is to, “Listen to our clients and their families and take their diverse needs into account, ask the children, youth and families we serve for feedback on our service and improve our services based on feedback received” (Ministry of Youth and Child Services, April 27, 2010). In addition, Bill 13 ensures all students’ rights to freedom of association, and freedom from discrimination.

Giving students themselves the right to define clubs reflects a move away from the hierarchical top-down approach of school boards and principals that may disenfranchise those not in positions of power or dominance. Giving students a voice helps position youth as empowered actors in their own development. Student led clubs also create a space for meaningful dialogue and discussion, and give students an opportunity to learn how to live and work respectfully, compassionately, and collaboratively with people who may have different values, views, and beliefs.

However, Conservative leader Tim Hudak reinforces a hierarchical approach by stating that, “My dad’s a former high school principal and I think principals run the schools, not kids. Principals work with parents, teachers and the school board to run the schools.” (CityNews, June 5, 2012). Not only does this statement disempower young people, it silences the voices of LGBTTTQQI youth, confining a student population to the margins, where they become even more invisible. In addition, this statement also derails the conversation around homophobia inside schools by focusing instead on discussions of decision-making.

Another question which triggered debate was around who would decide what content is allowed to be addressed within the clubs. Often clubs are limited by schools’ and teachers’ perception of what is acceptable, rather than determined by students themselves or by the curriculum. The Catholic School Board trustees labeled sexual orientation as an "inappropriate [issue] for open-forum discussion," and insisted that principals hold a veto over clubs. When working with a 13-year old client who identifies as bisexual, she reported that she was not allowed to speak about LGBTTTQQI youth rights at her Toronto public school, because she was told it was not appropriate for children her age.
Moving control from the school boards to the students, and empowering students as meaningful actors, makes it more likely that clubs will address issues in a way that is contextually relevant and useful for that particular group and their individual identities. By allowing students to form clubs that validate their LGBTQQI identities and create safety for open and meaningful discussion, we can provide a vital service to the student body and a valuable lesson about acceptance. In this way GSAs that create safe spaces may help pave the way toward safer and more inclusive school communities.

**Conclusion**

The Catholic Church and Progressive Conservative Party have maintained that allowing students in Catholic schools to name their clubs GSAs goes against the Church’s freedom of religion and expression. This argument prioritizes religious freedom and ignores that LGBTQQI youth also have the right to freedom of expression. The bill at no time aims to contradict the teachings of the Catholic Church, but rather looks to protect all LGBTQQI students’ rights, in all publicly funded schools in Ontario. The bill simply offers LGBTQQI youth the same rights as other students—the opportunity to form and name student clubs that adequately represent their diverse needs.

The fact that a heated debate emerged because of the addition of the Gay-Straight Alliances into the bill points to the fact that homophobia is alive and well in Canadian society. Although Canada is often framed as a cultural mosaic, it is important to reflect on how dominant discourse continues to normalize the exclusion of LGBTQQI youth within our school systems and promote a heteronormative worldview. This policy is one very small step toward ensuring equal rights for LGBTQQI youth and begins to build a better understanding of what inclusion means in practice.

The changes included in Bill 13, however, do not fully address the root causes of exclusion that keep LGBTQQI youth on the periphery of school communities. The current legislation does not address the particular challenges faced by LGBTQQI teachers or the difficulties they face in being open and comfortable in disclosing their own sexual identity. The legislation also fails to include the necessary curriculum changes to address the heteronormative worldview that is taught in our school system and continues to keeps LGBTQQI youth at the margins of school communities.

Research also shows that teachers do not always easily decide to support GSAs. Teachers are often worried about whether they can credibly support and advise LGBTQQI youth if they themselves identify as heterosexual. Many teachers are worried that their jobs may be threatened if they come out or support GSA student clubs. Some teachers even say they are reluctant because they are concerned they may appear to be recruiting young people to a LGBTQQI lifestyle (Valenti & Campbell, 2009). These barriers will continue to exist in schools unless teachers are also supported to take on the responsibility of supervision, and administrative barriers and penalties imposed by publically funded schools boards, including the Catholic Schools Boards are removed.

Safe-space discourse may also position LGBTQQI youth as victims needing protection, rather than addressing the underlying reasons why a safe space is needed in the first place. Our ultimate aim should be to create safer, more inclusive schools, rather than peripheral clubs to accommodate safety. Ensuring safety throughout schools for all
LGBTQTI youth needs to be a priority for the government and all school administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

The passing of Bill 13, however, does offer reasons to be optimistic. The Bill recognizes that to ensure inclusion, the GSA language is imperative. In line with the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Bill aims to ensure LGBTQTI youth access a right routinely denied to them and begins to create a different discourse which better serves their lived experiences. As Micili (2005) states:

A key to social change is that privileged groups come to realize that their position is unearned, that it is a matter of social definition and established traditions of power, rather than inherent or demonstrated superiority. Once they recognize this, they see that the rights and advantages they enjoy should be granted to everyone (p. 226).

I look forward to a day when LGBTQTI students can enjoy the same rights and advantages as all students.

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Catherine Alexandra Kates graduated from the University of Toronto in June, 2013 with a Master’s in Social Work and Community Development from the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. Prior to returning to school, Catherine was an international campaigner and advocate for children’s rights and child protection. Catherine is currently advancing her interest and passion in working with children, adolescents and families, as a clinician at Boost, Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention on the Assessment and Treatment Team.