

The Rainbow Connection:

Fostering Inclusivity, Empowerment, and Advocacy for LGBTQ+ Students through Staff Professional Development & Student Psychoeducation

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Introduction

LGBTQ+ students, an often overlooked group within our schools' diverse populations, have unique needs. As a teacher and counseling intern, this action research has been focused on these academic and social-emotional needs, and the ways in which they can be addressed at the macro and micro levels.

Objectives

The intended objectives of the action research project were to examine the experiences of LGBTQ+ students and their Allies, and to explore the most effective ways of supporting them in a heteronormative, and at times, homophobic educational environment.

Findings

Throughout the investigation it became increasingly evident that in addition to the need for LGBTQ+ affirmative care and psychoeducation for students, staff education and professional development are lacking in the schools, as evidenced by the following findings:

- LGBTQ+ Students experience bullying, harassment, and discrimination in various forms (microaggressions, derogatory terms, non-inclusive policies, acts of omission);
- School staff are often unaware of how to address their unique needs due to:
 - general lack of understanding about the LGBTQ+ population,
 - insufficient diversity-based training,
 - minimal training of legal/ethical guidelines,
 - limited awareness of of curricular & community resources available;
- LGBTQ+ Students want and need resources that are current, empowering, and relevant to their experiences.



Conclusion

There is still much to be done in the way of creating inclusive school environments for LGBTQ+ Students and their Allies. One of the most effective ways to begin addressing the challenge is to educate staff and students. Additionally, by developing LGBTQ+ affirmative resources for students that encourage them to advocate for themselves and others, they feel a great sense of empowerment.

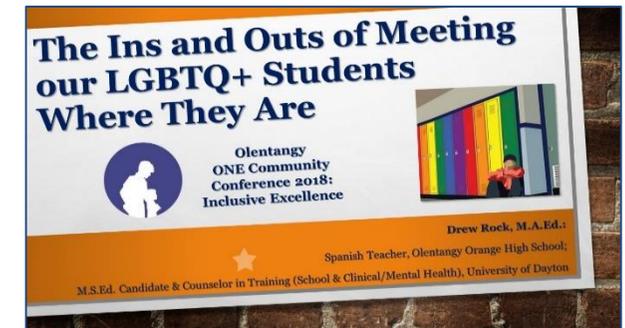
Outcomes & Products for Students

- Formation of Gender & Sexuality Alliance;
- Establishment of SafeSpaces for LGBTQ+ Students throughout school;
- Psychoeducational Student Groups for LGBTQ+ Students & Allies;
- Student-Created Website for Education & Advocacy:

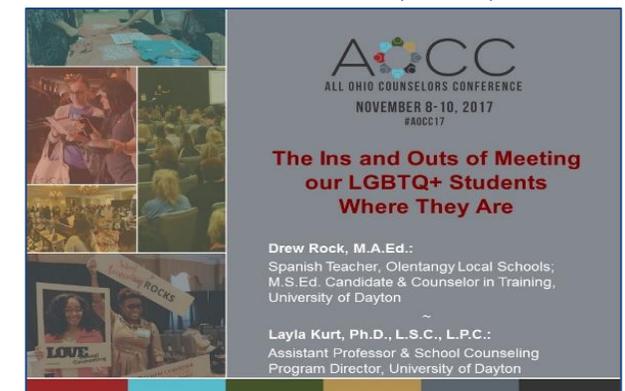


Outcomes & Products for Staff

- Professional Development Workshops for District Staff & Local Community Stakeholders Olentangy Local Schools:
 - Olentangy Educators' Think Tank;
 - Olentangy Local School ONE Community Conference:



- Workshop Presentation for All Ohio Counselors Conference (AOCC):



Future Projects

- Presentation Proposal PD Workshop at National level (ASCA Conference);
- Revisions of Local District Policy to include language pertaining to inclusive practices and anti-discrimination of LGBTQ+ students/staff;
- Advocacy-based, fictional novel series for LGBTQ+ adolescents and the adults working with them.