The need to prepare future teachers to understand and combat homophobia in schools

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Abstract
Teacher training programmes that improve teachers’ capacity and confidence to address homophobia in South African schools will engender non-homophobic school contexts. Currently, there is a dearth of educational research on future teachers’ preparation for homophobic school contexts. By drawing on group interviews with student-teachers; semi-structured interviews with lecturers and course coordinators; and analysing course outlines of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersexual (LGBTI) offerings at three South African universities, this article shows that such programmes exist, albeit in a limited form. While they enable greater awareness, they do not translate into future teachers being enabled to apply their learning in classrooms, school contexts and their personal lives. It is recommended that more systematic efforts to capacitate teachers for their role in engendering non-homophobic behaviour in schools is needed in teacher training programmes at South African universities.

Keywords: higher education, homophobia, sexuality education, teacher training, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersexual issues

INTRODUCTION

The heinous attacks against gays and lesbians provide teachers with a crucial opportunity to open dialogue and critique about the meaning of sexual equality; the ways in which violence is engendered; and the connection between schooling and the responsibilities of learners to the development of South Africa’s democracy.

Obverse homophobic and heterosexist comments and behaviours, whether wittingly or unwittingly expressed by teachers, contribute towards creating homophobic behaviours in schools. Teacher training programmes can play a pivotal role in enabling teachers to create non-homophobic environments. From the experience of organisations such as Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA), a non-governmental organisation based in South Africa, insufficient teacher training preparation is taking place which contributes to repeated homophobic attacks and abusers being suffered by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersexual (LGBTI) learners. Since 2005, GALA has been involved in work in the formal education
sector, including working with Life Orientation (LO) teachers in secondary schools to address the need for the early preparation of young student-teachers in engendering non-homophobic behaviour in South African schools.

The work of Francis and Msibi (2011) and Richardson (2004) evidences that university-based educational research on teacher preparation on LGBTI issues is institutionally bound and essentially focused on considering the pedagogy of anti-oppressive education. This study is part of an emerging field of research in South Africa. Research on LGBTI issues in South Africa tends to be focused on discussing homophobic behaviour and heterosexism in schools. This article extends the discussion on teacher training in LGBTI beyond a single institution to understand the nature of the offerings across more South African universities. While it is recognised that an investigation into the curriculum and pedagogy of facilitating teacher training is imperative, the study highlights the current landscape with regard to the provisioning of such offerings. The article reports on the findings of a study conducted into how student-teachers are prepared for South African schools through investigating the integration of LGBTI issues in teaching training programmes at three South Africa universities. It is argued in the article that where programmes have either been terminated or scaled down, consideration should be given to re-instituting such programmes. However, where the programmes continue to exist, while they successfully raise student-teachers’ awareness of LGBTI issues, they do not sufficiently prepare teachers for managing these issues in the school environment. The article shows how ill-prepared student-teachers are even at those institutions at which a potential course on LGBTI issues was identified. The literature discussion that follows shows that teacher training in sexuality is most likely to take place in LO programmes. Similar to the emerging school-based research on homophobia, university-based research into homophobia and teacher training in South Africa is still in its infancy. The seminal works of Richardson (2004) and Francis and Msibi (2011) describe their classroom experiences of teaching student-teachers on LGBTI issues. The study reported on was qualitative in nature and included group interviews, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis of course outlines. Through the study, the need for enhancing the current teacher training curriculum on LGBTI issues is discussed.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The continued widespread nature of homophobia in society remains germane to the international and national literature (Butler, Alpaslan, Strümpher and Astbury 2003; Pilkington and D’Augelli 1995; Richardson 2006; Rivers 1999; Wells and Polders 2005). Teachers’ potentially powerful role in curbing homophobic behaviour and enhancing learners’ understandings of LGBTI issues in schools is recognised (Francis and Le Roux 2011; Schoeman 2006; Takashi, Komiya, Watanabe and Tsuzuki 2002). Homophobic behaviour entails physical, emotional and psychological attacks which take the form of bullying; hate speech (Mason and Palmer 1996; Mkhize, Bennett,
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Reddy and Moletsane (2010); anti-gay crimes; ‘curative rape’ (Francis and Msibi 2011); and violent attacks in schools and universities (Warwick, Chase and Aggleton 2004). Teachers (Bhana 2012; Butler et al 2003; Richardson 2006; Wells and Polders 2011); school administrators; counsellors (Bush 2010; Butler et al 2003); and political leaders (Francis and Msibi 2011; Msibi 2012) may often be complicit in challenging homophobic behaviour. High-risk health behaviour among LGBTI youth can include substance abuse, suicide (Bagley and D’Augelli 2000), risky sexual behaviour and a fear of disclosing their sexual orientation as a consequence of victimisation and gay-related distress in schools (Bontempo and D’Augelli 2002; Craft and Mulvey 2001). Long-term effects among homosexual adults include internal homophobia, guilt and self-blame due to victimisation (Lombardi 2001). Despite this need there seems to be resistance in higher education institutions (HEIs) to prepare teachers for sexually diverse classrooms (Bacon 2008; Francis and Msibi 2011). The absence of support to train teachers means that LGBTI youth are left without support to confront their identities; as a consequence sexual diversity among the youth is ignored and invisible (Elia and Eliason 2010).

Challenging homophobia entails critically engaging ‘dislikes, fear, avoidance and denial of homosexuality (Herek 2004 in Bhana 2012, 307) as a dislike for gays and lesbians, for example, reinforced exclusion and discrimination characterised by hatred, physical and emotional violence and abuse of sexual minority groups (Bhana 2012; Butler et al 2003). Critically engaging homophobic behaviour from, for example, a critical pedagogic approach (Francis and Hemson 2007a; Francis and Msibi 2011; Richardson 2004) and an inclusive education approach (Elia and Eliason 2010); encouraging a supportive environment in which sexual diversity can be openly discussed among teachers and learners; allocating resources to combat homophobic behaviour such as intervention programmes (Butler et al 2003); and mobilising the profession to engage with sexual diversity are some ways in which homosexual behaviour and compulsory hetero-normative behaviour can be challenged (Nelson 1999).

Teacher-training programmes and professional development programmes are the most systematic forms of intervention, as theoretical knowledge and practical intervention skills can be developed to support the teaching profession in creating sexually inclusive schools. Teacher-training programmes need to educate learners about their responsibilities as future citizens who are aware of the rights of all, including sexual minorities, and are accepted in emergent school-based educational research in South Africa as a crucial intervention to enable good citizenship (Schoeman 2006; Soudien in Potgieter and Reygan 2012).

Sexuality education is globally of great interest and concern. Other than South Africa, Ireland, Taiwan, New Zealand and the United States have targeted teacher training programmes of this nature (Elia and Eliason 2010). Globally, ‘the proper placement of sexuality education, the influence of conservative religions, the battles over the content of the curriculum, unevenness of education from one school to another and the role of values/morals in teaching sexuality’ are prominent concerns.
In South African schools, they are most likely to be offered in the LO subject area (Francis 2012; Helleve, Flisher, Onya, Mukoma and Klepp 2009, 191–192; Potgieter and Reygan 2012, 40) or focused on subjects related to biomedical models of the body (Bennett and Reddy 2009). In this context, teacher sexuality education tends to be entangled with HIV/AIDS education which compromises discussions on sexuality by reducing it to abstinence (Helleve et al 2009, 191–192; Prinsloo 2007, 158).

Recently, Potgieter and Reygan (2012, 39–41) analysed LO learners’ textbooks for grades 7 to 12 in South African schools. Their study demonstrates that full citizenship of sexual and gender minorities is not necessarily encouraged through this curriculum.

Often a plethora of social complexities are covered under LO. What to foreground seems to be dependent on individual teachers’ interpretations. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education 2011a) provides guidance on the kinds of issues to be covered under LO. LO is defined with reference to Personal and Social Well-being, Physical Education and Creative Arts. Sexuality is discussed under Personal and Social Well-being. Reference under this area is made to gender and cultural diversity, constitutional rights and physical and emotional abuse of the child (Department of Basic Education 2011b, 13). While sexual diversity is part of the curriculum from Grade 7 (Department of Basic Education 2011b, 15, 21), no explicit reference is made to LGBTI issues. Without this, it is unlikely that these issues will be explicitly addressed within the curriculum (Helleve et al 2009; Prinsloo 2007, 158). The vast scope of issues covered, the lack of guidance offered to teachers on how to engage with the interface of these personal/social matters, and thereby the overall inadequate treatment of the subject may account for teachers’ reluctance to teach LO. As a consequence, Prinsloo (2007, 158) further stresses that LO is often taught by an ‘available’ teacher who does not have adequate training.

Informal training has also been evident within South Africa over the past 15 years through programme interventions of GALA and the Triangle Project. A seminar during September 2012 organised by GALA further contributed to bringing together educators on LGBTI issues at universities in South Africa. Their work has entailed developing resource materials and supporting teacher training through, for example, guest lecturing.

Fortunately, South Africa’s legislation distinguishes itself from the rest of Africa in providing capacity-building programmes for teachers informed by the protection of the rights of sexual diversity in the country’s constitution, including the legal status of same sex marriages. In most African countries, LGBTI people are legally vulnerable as legislated discriminatory practices range from imprisonment to the death penalty as evidenced in Sudan, Mauritania, Northern Nigeria and Somalia (Gevisser 2012, 14).

Reiss (1997), and more recently, Francis and Msibi (2011) and Msibi (2012), argue for the importance of teacher training on sexual orientation and identities in schools. Such training would: (i) enable students to become better informed and so be
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better citizens; (ii) enable students to understand each other’s positions which would engender empathy and appreciation of difference; and (iii) help students to clarify their own values and attitudes that promote tolerance (Reiss 1997, 347–348). Self-clarification would enhance student teachers’ preparedness to engage homophobia in schools.

Mathews, Boon, Flisher and Schaalma (2006) further indicate that not all teachers can in fact be LO teachers. Selecting LO teachers is recommended as successful LO teachers exhibit special characteristics such as: openness; acceptance of their own sexuality; the ability to facilitate open communication with learners or student-centeredness; being trustworthy and responsible; and the ability to retain classroom discipline. LO teachers further play multiple roles of friend, parent, counsellor and social worker beyond the classroom (Helleve et al 2011, 13–24; Mathews et al 2006, 395; Milton et al 2001, 179–183; Reiss 1997, 346). Given the personal nature of LGBTI issues, facilitators of LGBTI are likely to exhibit similar characteristics.

While evidence of formal and informal training is evident, this is insufficient to eradicate homophobia in schools. This is evidenced by the emerging school-based South African literature of Francis and Msibi (2011) and Bhana (2012), who highlight a trend in homophobic behaviours and attitudes among teachers. The conservative and discriminatory notions held by teachers is evidenced in their tendency, for example: to avoid teaching issues of sexual diversity; to focus on teaching abstinence; to not teach sex or sexuality education; to view homosexuality as immoral; to express explicitly homophobic statements dressed up in religious beliefs and gender stereotypes; and to construct, incite and inflame homophobic behaviour (Francis 2012; Helleve et al 2009; 2011; Potgieter and Reygan 2012).

It has further been established by Mathews et al (2006), Prinsloo (2007) and Helleve et al (2009) that without adequate teacher training on LGBTI issues, teachers are less likely to feel confident, comfortable or positive about teaching sexual diversity. The current research focused on the nature of what exists in teacher-training programmes in South Africa that prepare future teachers for LGBTI issues.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative exploratory methodology was undertaken that encompassed group interviews, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. As no registry exists on teacher training in LGBTI issues in South African universities, a search for LGBTI programmes had to be conducted. University websites were searched, telephonic interviews conducted and informal discussions through networks within the non-governmental organisation environment and at universities were undertaken to find relevant teacher-training programmes. Through purposive sampling, the researchers were able to trace academics at three South African universities which offer teacher training programmes related to LGBTI issues. The support of a contact based at a university who has published in this area was instructive in gaining access to two sites at which the study was conducted. For ethical reasons the identity of
the three South African universities will remain anonymous. At all the sites ethical clearance was obtained. The process to secure ethical clearance at the respective universities took ten months. Data collection at the different institutions took place in 2011, after ethical clearance was obtained.

Group interviews were conducted with students and tutors on their learning, experiences and preparation to teach and engage with LGBTI issues in school. The lecturers and the module coordinators assisted in identifying, selecting and inviting students to participate. A total of 35 participants from across the sites participated (see Table 1).

Table 1: Group interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Group (G1)</th>
<th>Group (G2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 1 (S1)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 2 (S2)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 3 (S3)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants per group interview differed as numbers dwindled due to some data collection taking place close to the end of 2011, during the examination period. This is evidenced by no second group interview taking place at Site 3. The same interview guide for semi-structured interviews was used to guide the group interviews. Questions focused on student-teachers’ motivation for registering; their experience on the course; and their recommendations to enhance the course offerings.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with lecturers and course coordinators of the courses or modules in which it was most likely that LGBTI issues could be found in the curriculum or emerge from discussions. A total of 14 interviews were conducted at all the sites with individual lecturers (6 at Site 1, 5 at Site 2 and 3 at Site 3). Questions focused on establishing the purpose and issues covered in the LGBTI-related modules; lecturers’ experience of lecturing the course; and ways in which the course could be improved to enhance student teachers’ capacity to combat homophobia in schools. The semi-structured interview process is creative as it allows for conversational development which is appropriate for exploratory research as discussed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995 in Gibson and Brown 2009, 89).

Course outlines provided an overview of the course and were collected as primary documentation about the course. The data extracted from the course outlines were the aims or purpose of the course; the topics covered in the course; and the teaching and learning methods.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Thematic analysis (as discussed by Gibson and Brown 2009) of the group interviews and the semi-structured interviews was done. Steps in the data analysis entailed the coding of data in relation to an examination of the commonalities, differences and relationships within data sets and across the data sets. ‘... like knots in the webs of
our experiences ...’, the researcher through thematic analysis was able to use themes as a device for narrative construction (Gibson and Brown 2009, 129). Based on the coding, a thematic map of the data could be developed within and across the data sets.

As Gibson and Brown (2009, 64) state, documentary research enables the use of documents as a means of investigating and exploring the records that individuals and organisations produce. Course outlines were selected as the documentation of the course. An analytically focused documentary analysis was conducted as very specific questions were asked about the documents. The content of the course outlines was also analysed as suggested by Silverman (2011, 65) through searches for explicit reference to words or combinations of words: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersexual.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of course outlines

None of the course outlines make explicit reference to the need to prepare teachers on LGBTI issues. This is consistent with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in which no explicit reference is made to LGBTI issues (Department of Basic Education 2011a, 13). Reference is made to homophobia, heterosexism and sexual orientation in the Diversity and Learning course outlines at Site 1.

At Site 3, references are made in the course outline of the Inclusive Education and HIV/Aids Education module to Sexual Education and Sexual Health, but not in any way explicitly to LGBTI issues. The absence of LGBTI issues in teacher-training programmes investigated in the study indicates the invisibility of LGBTI issues in teacher-training programmes and signals the lack of preparation of student-teachers to address these issues within the context of the schools. In keeping with Helleve et al (2009) and Potgieter and Reygan (2012) without a specific focus on LGBTI issues it is challenging for students to gain insight into LGBTI issues in the school context. Gürşimşek (2009), without specific focus on homosexuality in sexuality education, shows that teachers are unlikely to change their attitudes to homosexuality. Table 2 provides an overview of all the course material that could be sourced. Course outlines could not be sourced from Site 2.
Table 2: An overview of course outlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>Diversity and Learning</td>
<td>First year</td>
<td>Considering Diversity, The Cycle of Socialisation, A Model of Oppression, Five Faces of Oppression, Sexism, Racism and Heterosexism. Gender theories, Gender policy in South African education, Single-sex schooling, Gender of discipline or corporal punishment, Violence, gender and schooling, Masculinity and schooling and Sexuality, and HIV and AIDS (page 1)</td>
<td>To deepen students’ understanding of themselves and others. To examine and explore gender in education with reference to the curriculum and students’ reflections on their school contexts (Gender and Education Course Outline 2011, 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender and Education</td>
<td>Honours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>Inclusive Education and HIV/Aids Education</td>
<td>BEd</td>
<td>Foundational issues, Parental guidance, Human development, Relationships and Sexual health (page 6)</td>
<td>The purpose … is to enable learners to make responsible, wise and informed choices regarding all matters relating to their sexuality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the Diversity and Learning module at Site 1 is the only module in which explicit reference to heterosexism is made, the course outline is discussed more fully here. The module is framed by different forms of oppression. A critical sense of self-awareness in learning is encouraged in the module. This enables an open and engaged approach to teaching and learning which is supportive of discussions on LGBTI issues. The aims of the module are to deepen students’ understanding of themselves and others (Course Outline 2011, Diversity and Learning, 3–4).

Topics covered in the module include: Considering Diversity, the Cycle of Socialisation, A Model of Oppression, Five Faces of Oppression, Sexism, Racism and Heterosexism (Course Outline 2011, Diversity and Learning, 6). Throughout, students’ experiential learning, sharing and participation is encouraged, while also engaging with the academic text and theories (Course Outline 2011, Diversity and Learning, 1–5). Francis and Msibi (2011) argue that participatory methods are essential in encouraging students to be change agency.

A range of assessment methods are used which include individual reflections, group presentations through, for example, poster presentations, individual presentations and reflections on academic texts, discussions drawn from viewing of visual footage and recording interviews with fellow students (Course Outline 2011, Diversity and Learning, 7–14).

Even though a course outline could not be sourced from Site 2, some of the course material was sourced. The readings are explicitly focused on LGBTI issues among
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youth in schools, teachers’ roles and the experience of LGBTI university students which provides a clear indication of the focus on LGBTI issues in the module at Site 2.

Interviews with lecturers

Why teach about LGBTI issues?

Previously at sites 1 and 2, a module was dedicated to LGBTI issues. At Site 2, lecturers remarked on how the LGBTI focus has progressively dwindled even though previously the institution was a forerunner and should have become a flagship module on LGBTI issues in teacher training. There is great concern that while a module on LGBTI at least raised students’ awareness, without any discussion there would be no awareness. As one lecturer stated:

There is a lot of homophobia among our students. We cannot be homophobic as teachers; we cannot assume that everyone is part of a heterosexual setup. Teachers have to be prepared to have two moms or two dads at parent evenings. So if they are homophobic they are silencing a learner. They are drawing a family picture in which one parent disappears (S2).

At Site 3, lecturers were in the process of developing new modules for implementation from 2014. They indicated that no course offerings had ever been included on LGBTI issues. According to one lecturer:

In the 16 years I am at this institution, no course or module has been offered on LGBTI issues ... While we work towards implementing a new curriculum, we have put in place emergency plans which are informal discussions just to get students to start thinking about issues concerning oppression (S3).

The emergency plans included working with first-year foundation students on diversity issues informally, then rolling them out to second- and third-year students in 2012 and 2013 (S3).

The appointment of a new dean with experience in LGBTI issues and anti-oppressive education at the institution led to planning on a range of new initiatives (S3).

Lecturers indicated the importance of implementing this new programme. One lecturer stated:

... I don’t think that our students teach in culturally responsive ways. I think they get a recipe here and they use that recipe over and over again when they go into schools (S3).

The same lecturer further stated from experience of teaching on the emergency intervention programme during 2012:
I was shocked at how students are unaware of oppressive issues in the classroom ... I want them to understand how socialisation impacts on the way you teach ... They don’t question things (S3).

Lecturers also reflected on students’ religious convictions and their views on homosexuality:

It’s a traditional and conservative upbringing, as an Afrikaans-speaking person. Issues of homosexuality, they don’t know what to do with that ... They will immediately refer to the Bible. If a man enrolls in the foundation phase and he’s gay, they actually identify that as paedophile. They don’t have frames to make sense of this (S3).

Despite the unpredictable nature of the module experience and because of students’ experience of real issues, at the site at which explicit reference is made to LGBTI issues, course registrations have increased since the inception of the module. Informants reported an increase in student enrolments for this module from 30 students in 2005 to 427 students in 2011, a growth in student selection while all other foundation modules had stabilised at around 30 students. The growth was reported to continue:

It is an increasingly popular elective module among our undergraduate students, so much so that this year we have to run a double offering (S1).

Having the opportunity to engage in issues that students are confronted with during their daily lives adds meaning to their learning.

Consistently, students expressed their enthusiasm for the module:

I’ve heard about it. It’s about finding your inner self, dealing with yourself and overcoming issues (G1: S1).

I heard about this module from friends ... They told me that it was fun (P2: G3: S1).

The module gave us a chance to talk about what we do not normally talk about (P3: G3: S1).

Facilitating LGBTI issues in teacher training

While lecturers expressed a deep interest and passion for LGBTI issues at two of the sites, they also indicate that special care needs to be exercised on how LGBTI issues are facilitated. Special characteristics, such as openness, acceptance of own sexuality, deep levels of self-awareness and a recognition of the importance to skilfully manage classroom conversations among students, as mentioned by Reiss (1997), Mathews et al (2006), Helleve et al (2011), and Milton et al (2001), were palpable during the semi-structured interviews with the lecturers. As one lecturer stated:
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I think you have to have strong beliefs of what it means to be human. You have to have a strong humanitarian streak (S2).

Another lecturer felt that a person would need to be okay with their own sexuality and be prepared to be judged by students (S1). There is also recognition of the need for the lecturers and the tutors to share their reflections with one another through debriefing meetings on their experiences. At one of the sites, the importance of small group discussions in tutorials was recognised as an important part of the teaching methodology to enable support of personal issues that emerge as a consequence of the open approach with greater ease in smaller groups. This emerged from lecturers’ experiences of teaching LGBTI issues in large classes as in these classes it was much more difficult to engage in individuals’ personal issues (S1 and S2). In one such incident a lecturer relayed that some of the women students started crying in response to the male students laughing during the screening of a video on corrective rape (S2).

Another lecturer stated:

There needs to be safety for both the student and you as a teacher. There needs to be guidelines for teaching. Issues around safety and participation need to be set in place. There needs to be a safe space where they can share (S1).

Lecturers also reflected on students sharing personal information about themselves during the course of the module. Lecturers reflected on students ‘coming out’ to them or recognising and revealing their sexual orientation in the context of the module. As one of the lecturers stated:

Some of the students, the male students are openly gay and they liked that sense of support. That sense of recognition, positive recognition of sexual orientation ... (S1).

INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

Students’ experiences of the module

Facilitating an open and inclusive teaching and learning process means that students are able to express their understanding and reflections honestly:

In our tutorial people were totally against it. People were saying it’s not normal. Some people were saying they will tolerate. People used the Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve. Some people would say they don’t accept but they tolerate. But if you can’t accept ... don’t harm (P3: G1: S2).

If such discussions reflect a lack of tolerance and prejudice, however, the teaching and learning experience can become emotionally heated. Students reflected upon
their experiences of such moments:

... I was surprised that some of the guys said that there is a way we can end gays and lesbianism ... maybe they have to be invited somewhere on an island, then they have to be bonked ... I was seriously surprised and offended because that was cruel. And that person is still not prepared to change (P2: G2: S1).

The open and inclusive way of facilitating requires students to be prepared to listen to opposing views to their own. As one student stated:

We watched footage from Third Degree. People were disrespectful. After watching the group was laughing. The way that group spoke ... was shocking. The talk was on gang rape, corrective rape, and some guys said they should be raped, they should be gang raped to make them straight. I felt heated up and thought how you can do that? (P5: G1: S2).

**Improvement in students’ awareness**

Even though LGBTI issues occupy a limited space in teacher training, they succeed in raising student-teachers’ awareness of LGBTI issues. Richardson’s (2004, 160) seminal work on teaching LGBTI at a university to fourth-year pre-service student-teachers shows how teaching a course on LGBTI issues can assist students in questioning their assumptions about compulsory heterosexuality, homosexuality and same-sex relationships. Students also reflected upon how their awareness has developed while on the course:

One boy he told us he was rejected by his own parents ... that was when my mind opened ... (P6: G2: S1).

Given my experience on this module, of my socialisation and experiences at school I will have a greater awareness of discrimination ... (P8: G3: S1).

Students referred to specific areas they have learnt about during the course:

People are uneducated. I didn’t know about corrective rape until this course. It was new to me, I am grateful I did it, I am more aware of what’s happening in society (P3: G1: S2).

**Homosexuality and religion**

People’s attitudes towards homosexuality are often informed by their religious beliefs (Duff 2010; Rasmussen 2001; Shannahan 2010). As Bhana (2012, 313) highlights, teachers’ Calvinistic and Christian religious backgrounds frame their disregard for homosexuals. Students considered their religious beliefs and homosexuality:

... with my religion we are completely against gays and lesbians. There were a lot of Christians who said ‘the Bible is completely against it’ (P6: G1: S1).
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When you live in the Indian community you don’t know, people don’t talk, your religion shuns this (P3: G1: S2).

My friend is a Muslim and gay. I was okay with it but when I told my mother about it, she said, ‘No, you should warn him against it ... because if you don’t then God will punish you’ ... That confused me (P2: G1: S1).

Our religion states that we should treat everybody equally, but it also says gay and lesbianism is forbidden (P1: G1: S1).

Without teachers who are critically appraised it is likely that discriminatory views and practices will persist among teachers themselves and in schools.

Students’ experience of cognitive dissonance

When students develop self-awareness which entails questioning their assumptions, cognitive dissonance between new knowledge and their family background and belief systems can occur. Students, who in some instances are also tutors, stated:

... as teachers we end up having two identities, a professional identity and obviously you’ve got your personal identity that you were brought up with, go to church and do certain cultural practices. And these really contradict ... Because the church I go to is extremely homophobic, I’m not sure how we can go about addressing this (P1: G2: S3).

After the module ... We go back home ... there they believe that God did not create lesbians. I want to apply what I learnt back home but I can’t (P6: G3: S1).

Students even expressed a sense of despondency with the knowledge they have gained:

... it’s better if you’re around people that have learnt the module because if you take this back home, then they’re gonna be like ‘you’re bringing your university life here’ ... (P5: G1: S1).

I experience such conflict between what I am taught and what I experience at home ... I’m afraid of being educated (P8: G4: S1).

Students did, however, recognise the need to resolve their personal discomfort. What is unclear is the kind of support available to assist students in doing this, as one stated:

There comes a point where you are faced with a choice of either you will continue with your socialisation or you will challenge your socialisation. But then you’ll find that obviously the way that your parents and the way that you read the Bible weighs a little more than your professional identity ... (P2: G1: S3).
Students also experienced hostility from their communities:

... when we come from Soweto, this old woman preaches to us and tells us ... we know that they teach you about gay stuff at ... Just do enough to pass the exam and then go back to the way we think ... (P3: G1: S2).

Students’ self-awareness

Through a greater sense of awareness of the nature of LGBTI issues, students also develop a greater sense of how they could be as future teachers. As Richardson (2004, 160) recognises in his reflections on the contributions of a teaching course on LGBTI issues, even if students are resistant to knowledge which conflicts with their beliefs, the course challenges them to consider the role they could play as educator. Students expressed their reflections on visualising the role they could play as future teachers:

As a teacher I will be able to notice things other teachers will not ... my communication style will be much more open and I will engage in far more conversations about oppression and stereotyping (P6: G3: S1).

I think I will be more sensitive about what’s going on in schools especially in the toilets. When I was at school ... kids were beat up and would be asked ‘which toilet are you going to?’ (P2: G4: S1).

I think the support structures for gays and lesbians to come out are very important. In the schools there should be support (P2: G1: S1).

However, developing awareness and imagining possible future roles may not necessarily translate into teaching pedagogy on discrimination, sexuality diversity or LGBTI issues in the classroom.

Students as change agents

Students expressed an awareness of the need for greater support to translate their learning. Following on from Francis and Le Roux (2012) and Richardson (2004), if students are able to do so, they have an active agency role to play in creating a socially just society. Students recognised this when they stated:

It has definitely created awareness and that’s the starting point. But it needs to do more. It needs to let students think more about what they are going to do. It needs to be more practical, they need to be put in situations where they actually experience certain things (P2: G2: S1).

If you’re sharp enough to take what you’ve learnt and apply it in a situation, but they didn’t tell you how to do it. So the module may help them in life situations but they won’t be able to implement it in the classroom (P1: G1: S1).
The need to prepare future teachers to understand and combat homophobia in schools

Students further reflected upon their experience during practice teaching when they felt unsure of how to respond to homophobia as further motivation for why more support is needed. A sense of ‘not knowing what to do’ was consistently confirmed during the group interview. Students stated:

I was at a Christian school. And I was teaching LO. I was dealing with diversity, religion and values. I chose to deal with corrective rape. It was hectic. Some said they should be sent to Robben Island. It was very challenging (P3: G1: S2).

I went to a primary school. Sometimes you can notice a gay or lesbian child in the class. And the peers notice that. I get nervous and don’t know what to do (P7: G2: S2).

The situation is particularly difficult for the student teachers as teachers in the schools are unable to offer guidance as they do not know what to do themselves. A student reflected on this:

I think even the teachers are terrified to talk about those issues. I used to volunteer at my former primary school and I had two learners who were gay and the class would say yes sir they are gay. I would say write that word and tell me what it means. We are not doing anything as teachers, we just say they are gay and we leave it at that (P4: G1: S2).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study jarringly shows the deeply embedded personalised nature of the teaching and learning process on LGBTI issues evidenced through the confluence of belief systems of: race, culture, gender, religion and ultimately what it means to be human. It is for this reason that special guidance is required to ensure the meaningful development in creating non-homophobic attitudes among future student teachers. This is informed by the needs of lecturers and student teachers expressed during the interviews (see Table 3).
Continual development of student teachers’ awareness of LGBTI issues is required. Without related structured modules, student teachers’ homophobic attitudes are unlikely to shift. Unwittingly/adversely such teachers may discount individuals who do not fit a hetero-normative frame of the family and THUS become complicit enablers of LGBTI abuse in schools. Even living with paradoxes and inconsistency but with awareness and understanding enhances future teachers’ capacity to engage with homophobic practices.

Lecturers too need to be supported in enabling student teachers’ awareness. This includes consideration of lecturers’ interest and commitment and their level of comfort with open dialogue and students’ personal concerns as they may emerge.

Participatory methods are best able to assist lecturers in capturing LGBTI abuse and the need for self-reflection. In such processes, students need support especially since they are required to self-interrogate. Such expectations need to be understood as students express how unsettling the experience may be to them at home and in their communities. Support is required in defining how they may embrace their communities while simultaneously engaging their backgrounds.

This highlights the complexity in improving teachers’ capacity/confidence to address homophobia in that the process can be both arduous and enlightening. Unearthing, recognising and understanding students’ homophobic attitudes; lecturers’ recognition of their sexuality awareness and the maturity they bring into the teaching and learning process; and the importance of facilitating a safe learning space to confront their assumptions, characterises the onerous yet awareness-raising nature of the process. Even though the learning process may at times be heated, allowing for contradictory and even absurd beliefs to be revealed and engaged creates space for dialogue and the generation of awareness from which student teachers can draw future reference.
Further to awareness, student teachers’ sense making capacity through their engagement with key theoretical frameworks is required to support their framing of LGBTI issues in a non-common sense making manner. Theoretical frames will enable student teachers to deepen their confidence in engaging the nature/complexity of homophobia.

Role definition is also relevant, both to their future role as teachers and as socially conscious active citizens in contributing towards enabling the realisation of constitutional rights.

Raised levels of consciousness require student teachers to be encouraged and supported in reflecting on their learning, methods of learning, new understanding, attitudes and knowledge. It further requires them to engage with ways in which their new learnings may be developed for application within their school context, and the development of their professional/community identity.

In this way, awareness raising, knowledge sharing, professional and personal role definition and development, student teachers will be more likely to be much better equipped to engage with homophobic school contexts with confidence and compassion.

CONCLUSION
The aim of the article has been to illustrate why teachers need to be prepared for sexual diversity in schools. The results show that student teachers are ill-prepared to engage with LGBTI issues in schools. From the study, it is recommended that programme offerings on LGBTI issues need to be enhanced to better prepare students to address LGBTI issues.

The article has contributed to the field of LGBTI through the development of key aspects of guidelines which are informed by the needs expressed by lecturers and student teachers in the study. Such guidelines could also be incorporated into on-going professional development/short courses for in-service teachers. Further research is needed into further substantiating these guidelines.

With greater support, understanding and compassion, LGBTI learners, teachers and communities are more likely to experience support and integration into schools and society at large.

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