Western
Centre for School Mental Health

Building Educator Capacity to Support LGBT2Q+ Youth: A Case Study of the Educators from the Northwest Territories

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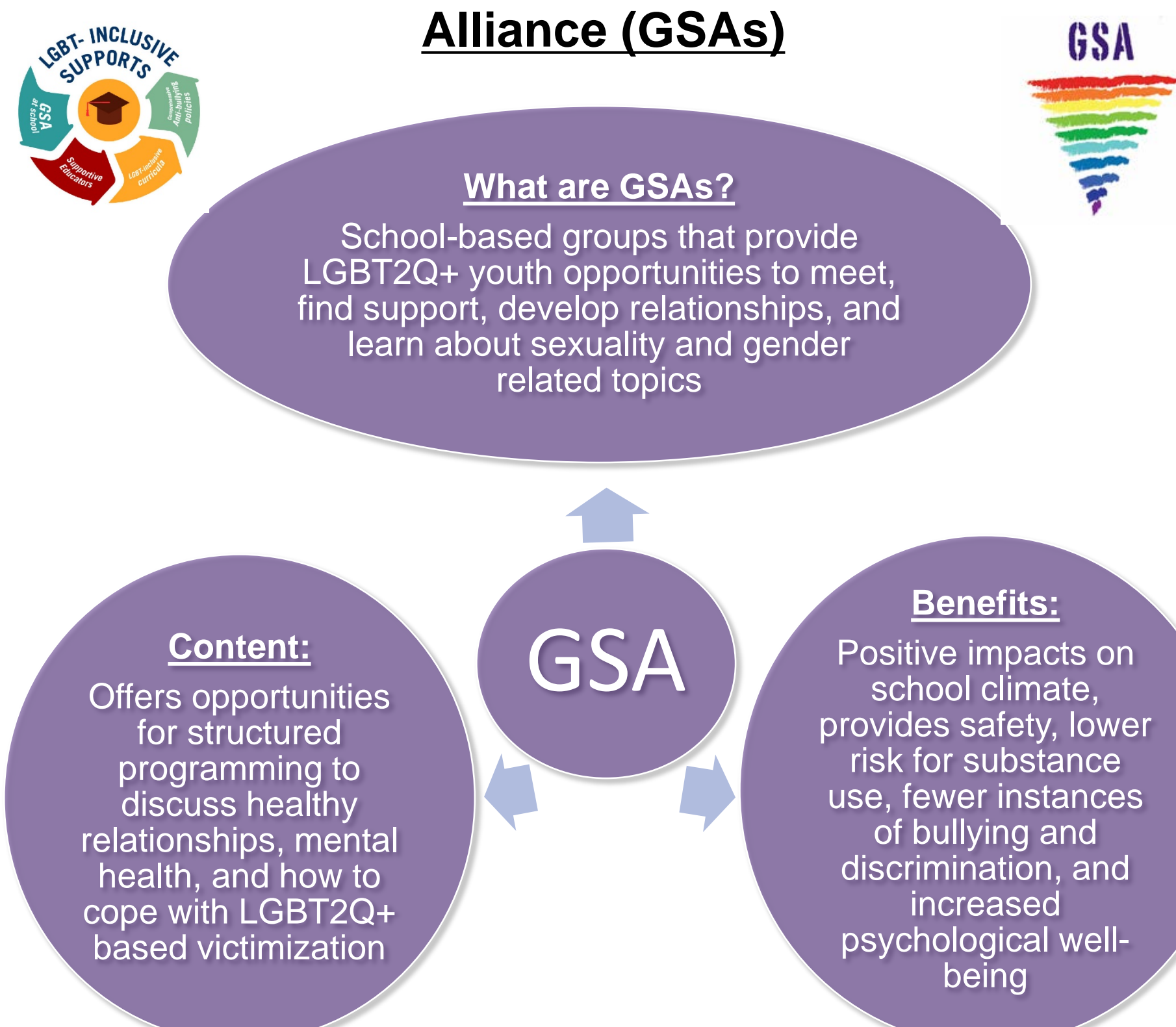
ABSTRACT

Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSA) are school-based groups that provide safe spaces for LGBT2Q+ youth by offering opportunities for allies to meet, find support, develop relationships, and learn about sexuality and gender-related topics. Teachers play a crucial role in supporting effective GSAs but many lack the expertise and context required to support LGBT2Q+ youth in this capacity. To understand the teachers' perspectives, this current study explored the needs and perceptions of 25 educators from the Northwest Territories related to supporting LGBT2Q+ youth both before and after participating in a two-day Healthy Relationships Program for LGBT2Q+ Youth training session. The results showed moderate comfort before the training and indicated increased knowledge and self-efficacy in supporting LGBT2Q+ youth after the training. Additionally, a majority of the educators perceived the biggest challenges facing LGBT2Q+ youth in their schools were: having a sense of belonging; stigma from friends, family, and community; experiencing difficulties establishing a sense of identity; struggling with mental health issues; and bullying. Despite high levels of satisfaction with the training, educators still reported some reservations about their abilities and capacity to implement successful GSAs in their schools. Ongoing research and exploration is required to help inform more effective training to build capacity for educators to better support LGBT2Q+ youth.
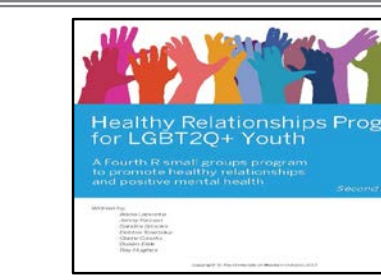
INTRODUCTION

Overview
- LGBT2Q+ youth commonly experience discrimination, harassment, and victimization in schools (Taylor et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2011; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016)
- Schools are well positioned to provide comprehensive mental health promotion programming for LGBT2Q+ youth (Heck, 2015; Lapointe & Crooks, 2018; Lapointe, Dunlop et al., 2018)
- Genders and Sexualities Alliance/Gay-Straight Alliance (GSAs) paired with the Healthy Relationships Program (HRP) for LGBT2Q+ Youth, may support the needs, interests, and motives of these youth

Genders and Sexualities Alliance/Gay-Straight Alliance (GSAs)

What are GSAs?
School-based groups that provide LGBT2Q+ youth opportunities to meet, find support, develop relationships, and learn about sexuality and gender related topics

Content:
Offers opportunities for structured programming to discuss healthy relationships, mental health, and how to cope with LGBT2Q+ based victimization.

GSA

Benefits:
Positive impacts on school climate, provides safety, lower risk for substance use, fewer instances of bullying and discrimination, and increased psychological well-being

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Healthy Relationships Program (HRP) for LGBT2Q+ Youth Extended Training

- **Day 1:** Training provided background information on issues faced by LGBT2Q+ youth, and highlighted both the importance of, and strategies for, successfully supporting a GSA as well as working with the mental health and related issues among these youth
- **Day 2:** Training introduced the HRP for LGBT2Q+ youth which is a small groups positive mental health promotion program that helps youth build resilience through 17 interactive sessions, each lasting 45 minutes. The HRP for LGBT2Q+ youth affirms, validates, and celebrates sexual and gender diversity, cultivates a caring and supportive community, and helps LGBT2Q+ youth develop skills and strategies that promote healthy relationships
  - The HRP program is a flexible roadmap for GSA advisors who may understand the importance of supporting LGBT2Q+ youth, but may lack the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to do so (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016)

Rationale
- The Department of Education, Culture and Employment is seeking to increase the capacity of its educators and schools to support LGBT2Q+ students
- Between October 2018 and February 2019 the Department provided the opportunity for one educator from every school in the Territories to participate in this two-day training

Significance
- Teachers play a crucial role in supporting effective GSAs but many lack the expertise and context required to support LGBT2Q+ youth in this capacity (Poteat & Scheer, 2016; Watson et al., 2010)
- GSA advisors often have limited supervisory experience, possess insufficient LGBT2Q+ knowledge, have minimal training involving LGBT2Q+ topics and issues and feel unqualified to support LGBT2Q+ youth with mental health concerns (Poteat & Scheer, 2016; Taylor et al., 2016; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are educators' perceptions about challenges facing LGBT2Q+ youth and their previous professional development prior to training?
2. How did the two day training impact educators' capacity to support LGBT2Q+ youth?
3. What are the perceived benefits associated with the training and concerns with implementation?

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Participants:
- 25 educators from NT
- Communities: Yellowknife and Inuvik

HRP Training:
- Participation in a two-day HRP for LGBT2Q+ Youth training session

Data Collection (Mixed Methods):
- Pre-Training Questionnaire administered
- Retrospective-Post Questionnaire administered

Data Analysis:
- **Quantitative:**
  - Frequency Statistics
  - Reliability Analysis
  - Paired Samples T-Test
- **Qualitative:**
  - Thematic Analysis- Braun and Clarkes (2006) Six Phase Approach
  - Familiarization with the data, Generate initial codes, Searching for themes, Reviewing themes, Defining and naming themes, Writing up

RESULTS

Research Question #1: What are educators' perceptions about challenges facing LGBT2Q+ youth and their previous professional development prior to training?

Perceived Challenges Faced by LGBT2Q+ Youth

Previous Professional Development Undertaken Related to Supporting LGBT2Q+ Youth:
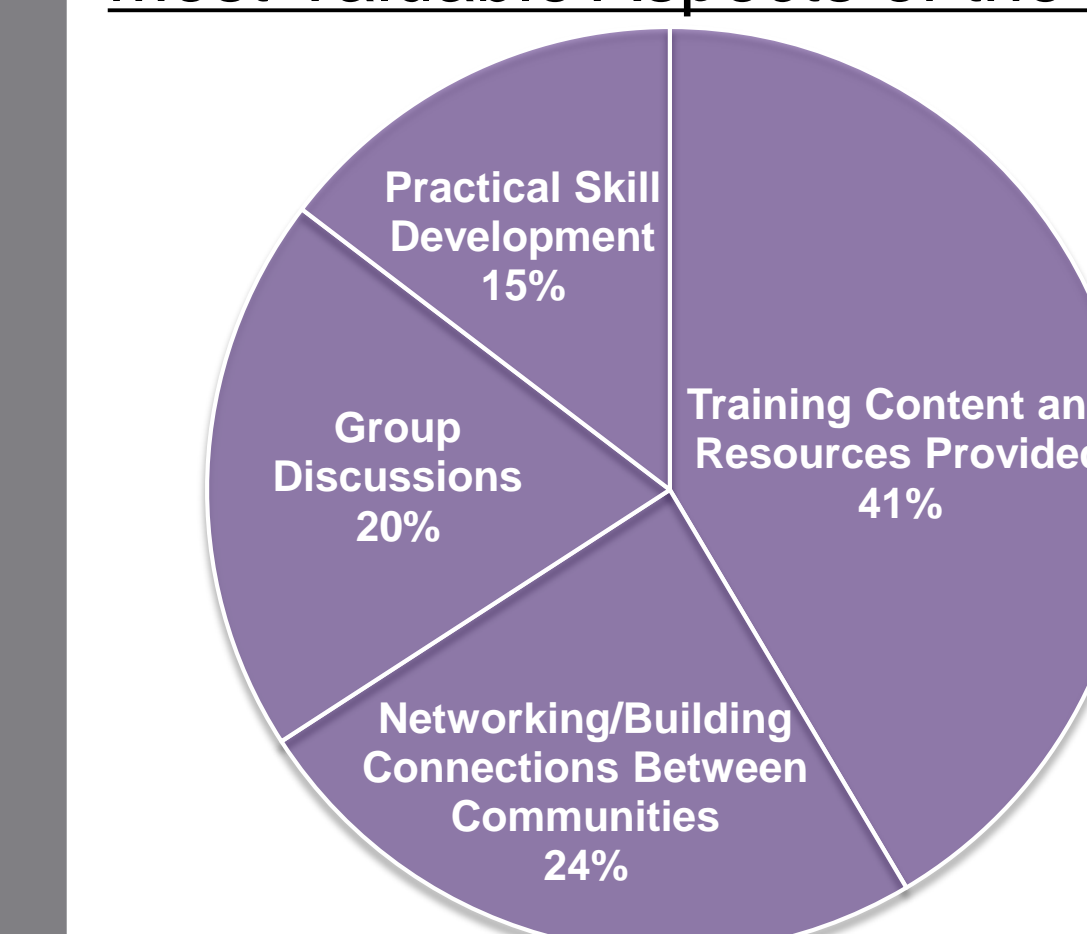

RESULTS

Research Question #2: How did the two-day training impact educators' capacity to support LGBT2Q+ youth?
- All of the educators indicated that the two-day training increased their capacity to work with LGBT2Q+ youth
- A Paired Samples T-Test indicated that both educators' knowledge and efficacy significantly increased from before the training (M=59.44, SD=19.36) to after the training (M=69.36, SD=18.12), t=8.24, p=.000.
- *"I am going to start small by bringing the information to staff and supporting them in bringing this language and these discussions to their lessons"*
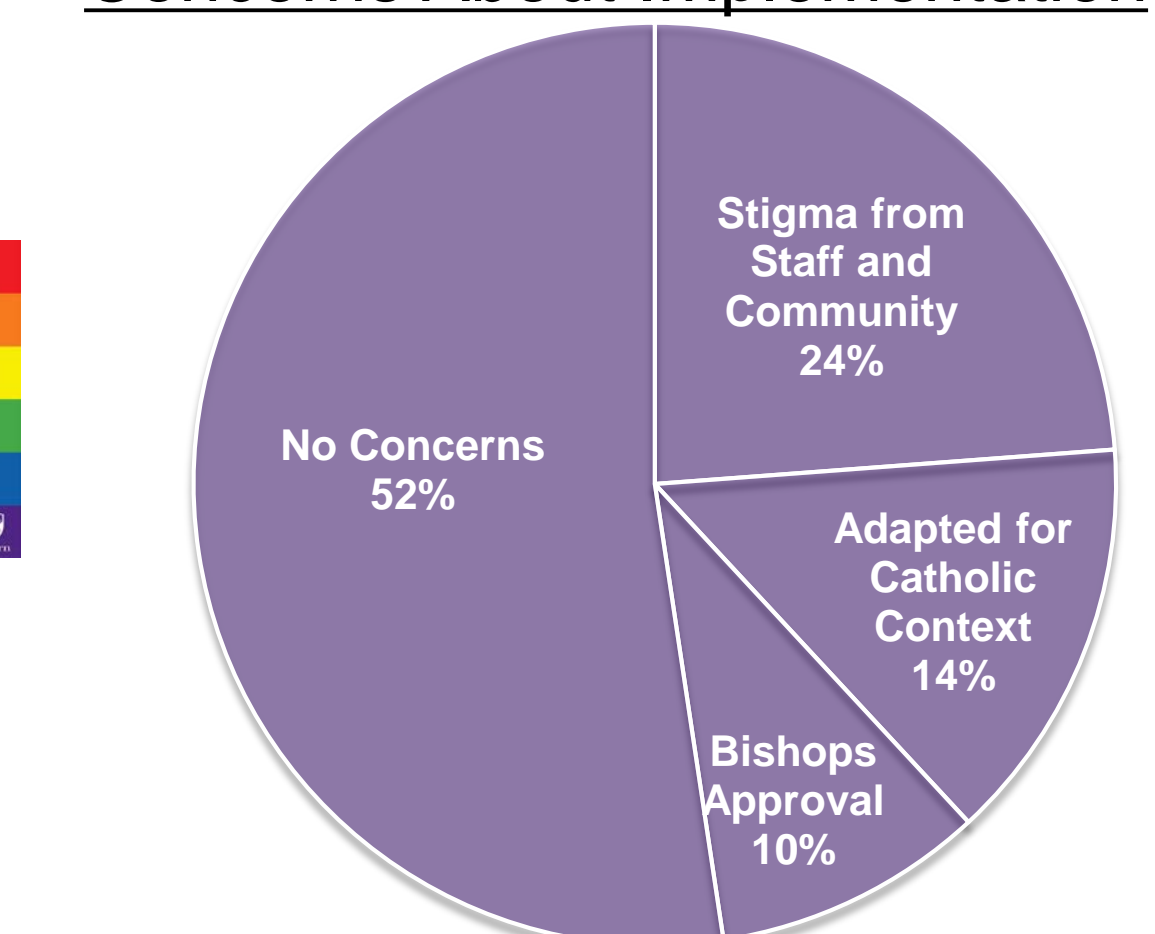
Research Question #3: What are the perceived benefits associated with the training and concerns with implementation?
- Majority of educators reported high levels of overall satisfaction with the program (average rating of 4.8 out of 5)
- *"This was so amazing. I learned more here than I have in any previous professional development. I feel so much more confident in leading my group forward."*
- Over half of educators (15 out of 25) indicated that they felt quite prepared to implement the HRP for LGBT2Q+ youth (4/5).
- There was still some hesitation expressed regarding educators' perceived abilities and capacity to implement successful GSAs in their schools
- *"Being in a Catholic setting, there are always extra factors and restrictions to consider. Education in key."*

Most Valuable Aspects of the Training

Concerns About Implementation

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- Majority of educators indicated that they had minimal or no previous professional development related to supporting LGBT2Q+ youth
- Educators' capacity to work with LGBT2Q+ youth increased after completing the two-day training and high levels of satisfaction with the program were reported
- Roughly 50% of educators expressed concerns about either experiencing stigma from staff and community, having to make adaptations to fit requirements from the Catholic church and requiring the Bishop's approval to implement the program
- Educators will continue to provide data over the course of the school year about their successes, challenges and needs for continued support in this area
- Since youth-led approaches have been found to be effective (Lapointe, Dunlop, Crooks, 2018), future research may focus on building capacity among youth facilitators

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