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The possibilities and potential of a pedagogical partnership between university and community-based initial teacher educators for LGBTQ+ specific inclusion and diversity

Gavin Murphy[1]* and Melanie Ní Dhuinn[2]

[1]Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland, [2]Marino Institute of Education, Dublin, Ireland

In this study, we explore the possibilities and potential of a pedagogical partnership between university and community-based initial teacher educators for LGBTQ+-specific inclusion and diversity. We map and discuss important initial teacher education (ITE) and broader inclusion and diversity policy contexts relevant to this pedagogical innovation as part of a Sociology of Education module. We describe and conceptually frame the innovation as equity, social justice, inclusion and diversity focused, and as rooted in democratic ITE reform. We then explore its impact on student teachers by drawing on the discussion board posts and reflections required as part of the module. Based on our findings, we offer ITE system-focused, ITE programmatic and personal reflections as teacher educators to conclude in considering how such pedagogical partnerships and innovations can enhance ITE for inclusion and diversity and, fundamentally, in pursuing more democratic schools and society.

KEYWORDS

initial teacher education (ITE), LGBTQ+, teacher educators' learning, partnership, social justice, inclusion, community-based teacher educators

Introduction

Typically, there have been ongoing challenges for initial teacher education (ITE) in how it educates and prepares student teachers for diversity in schools (Rowan et al., 2021), including marginalization or omission of a systematic focus on LGBTQ+ themes and issues in ITE (Goldstein-Schultz, 2020; Coulter et al., 2021; Maunsell et al., 2021; McBrien et al., 2022). While in general, this is an issue of international concern amongst many educational and other researchers, we deemed this especially concerning given the national policy and practice contexts in the Republic of Ireland within which student teachers undertake their professional placement and would later work, especially given the homogeneity of the Irish teaching profession with its "significant under-representation from a range of minority

and/or socially disadvantaged groups" (Heinz et al., 2021, p. 2). Recently an LGBTI+ Youth Strategy (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2018) was published, with an aim to expand teachers' capacities to work more inclusively with LGBTQ+ themes and issues in educational practice. This research project allowed us to respond to this particular (inter)national nexus we observed and, consequently, set out to collaboratively design an innovation partnering with LGBTQI+ charity *ShoutOut*[1], embedded in the pedagogical substance and sequence of an ITE programme's sociology of education module, as well as to explore and reflect on its impact both on student teachers and ourselves as teacher educators (Goodwin and Darity, 2019; White, 2019). This is an important additional step, as it has been observed that appraisals of similar such efforts (e.g., Hansen, 2015) remain unexplored (McBrien et al., 2022).

This specific module input, staggered over three synchronous sessions and supported by asynchronous inputs and tasks, involved university and community-based teacher education providers working collaboratively in partnership to educate and prepare student teachers about LGBTQ+ themes and issues in education to promote inclusion. This manuscript will detail and conceptually frame our approach with the student teachers, and explore its impact on their ITE experience and preparation through analysis of their discussion board posts and reflections–an opportunity which presented itself within the COVID-19 context (Carrillo and Flores, 2020)–and consider applications and implications of our partnership for ITE more broadly. We consider these in terms of our research aim and both conceptual and practical implications that arise, with a focus on equity-focused and socially just ITE provision, and inclusion and diversity.

We describe in further detail the ITE and broader inclusion and diversity policy contexts relevant to this pedagogical innovation moving toward describing and conceptually framing the innovation itself. Subsequently, we address the methodological considerations and decisions we took as we worked through the project. Finally, we outline and discuss our findings, as well as offer ITE system-focused and personal reflections as teacher educators to conclude.

Literature review

Initial teacher education and broader inclusion and diversity policy contexts

Initial teacher education in the Republic of Ireland has undergone a notable series of reforms over the past decade (O'Donoghue et al., 2017; Hyland, 2018), whereby both concurrent and consecutive teacher education programmes

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1 https://www.shoutout.ie/what-we-do/

were extended to 4 and 2 years duration, respectively. Postgraduate student teachers (consecutive programmes) transition into the teaching profession graduating with a master's qualification in line with professional ITE accreditation in other jurisdictions. Since an organisation for economic co-operation and development (OECD) review in 2012, with a subsequent review in 2018 (Sahlberg, 2019), two current priorities of the restructured ITE system are to, first, build on a research-based approach to ITE in higher education institutions (HEIs) and, secondly, ensure the quality of pedagogy and instruction in ITE programmes. Against this backdrop another policy initiative–The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH)–focused one of its funding strands on ITE. Its aims are to increase the number of students from under-represented groups and to provide more role models for students from these groups in ITE.

More recently, The Teaching Council (2020) of Ireland have also reformed its standards for ITE programme provision for HEIs. These reformed standards emphasize inclusive education, which is identified as one of seven core elements of ITE programmes, whereby the definition of inclusive education that is set out embraces and aligns to social models of disability (ibid., p. 4). Furthermore, another of the seven key elements pertains to global citizenship education, where explicit mention is given to sustainable development and social justice (ibid., p. 14). Despite these two core elements that connect to the focus of this manuscript, there is no explicit, specific mention of LGBTQ+ inclusion in the standards. Rather, it is stated more generally that through ITE student teachers:

> "will be prepared for entry to their professional role in the context of a collaborative, inclusive, dynamic teaching profession, helping them to engage with colleagues, co-professionals, pupils and parents and understand their respective roles" (The Teaching Council, 2020, p. 10).

It is important to underline that beyond the impetus in the reformed ITE context, which can also be seen as managerial reform in ITE (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018) aimed "at creating a self-improving professional ITE system" nationally (Hyland, 2018, p. 20), there are several other broader policy context developments that are significant for ITE provision, notably its enhancement for inclusion (Florian and Camedda, 2020), and what follows influenced the conception of this innovation specifically.

First and foremost, the legislative and social progress of LGBTQ+ rights with the Marriage Equality referendum and the Gender Recognition Act, both passed in 2015 is very significant. Secondly, the national commitment to child participation (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015) and to upholding the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (e.g., Ombudsman for Children, 2020) whereby, distinctively connected to LGBTQ+ inclusion, Article 8 confers the right of identity to children and young people and Article

2 enshrines the right not to be discriminated against in the realization of such rights (cf. Sandberg, 2015). Thirdly, the national commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (cf. Stonewall International, 2016 for an overview of SDGs and LGBTQ+ inclusion), where the education sector is deemed a key stakeholder group in the national implementation plan (Department of Education and Skills, 2014; Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, 2018) is notable. Taken together, we took these important developments to inform the rationale for and substance of our innovation, as well as in the education and preparation of our student teachers for social justice teaching more generally (Kitchen and Taylor, 2020) to be responsive to diversity and inclusive in their practice. Given that our innovation is rooted in this backdrop, and as we later elaborate further on our conception of this innovation, we perceive this innovation as reflective of what Cochran-Smith et al. (2018) term democratic teacher educator reform, focused on deliberative democratic education and responding to societal inequities, particularly as they manifest in and through schooling.

Schools, LBGTQ+ ex/in-clusion and implications for initial teacher education

As Ullman et al. (2021) state, prevailing discourses of gender and sexuality in schools tend to normalize and reify heterosexuality and cisgender subjectivities in a myriad of ways, typically involving policies, curriculum, pedagogy, broader teacher practices and relationships, an observation which has also been made in the context of the Republic of Ireland (McBride and Neary, 2021). Such dominant discourses can often result in those students and teachers who identify as questioning or as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, those simply perceived to be part of it, or students who have LGBTQ+ caregivers/parents, having negative educational experiences. These situations can result in rendering them victims of bullying (Moyano and del Mar Sánchez-Fuentes, 2020), being marginalized or excluded, or indeed impacting negatively on their educational success (Rowan et al., 2021). Therefore, featuring LGBTQ+ inclusive education (cf. Fahie et al., 2020) in ITE is a crucial consideration and other comprehensive national research indicates that further consideration of sexuality education is especially warranted in ITE (Maunsell et al., 2021; Costello et al., 2022).

In Ireland, national research has demonstrated that there are ongoing challenges in ensuring LGBTQ+ students have positive and inclusive educational experiences, despite the advances in the broader inclusion and diversity policy context nationally as outlined previously. The most extensive piece of recently commissioned national research is *The 2019 School Climate Survey* (Pizmony-Levy and BeLonG To Youth Services, 2019),

whose findings are described as a "wakeup-call for all of us passionate about learning and education" (ibid., p. 2) given 73% of LGBTI+ students feel unsafe at school and 48% of LGBTI+ students reported hearing a homophobic remark from a teacher or staff member, raising to 55% when it came to transphobic remarks. Unfortunately, 86% of LGBTI+ students felt excluded by peers and 77% experienced verbal harassment. The report signals, however, that almost all LGBTI+ students who took the survey identified at least one school staff member supportive of LGBTI+ students and notes the positive effects of support for students, spanning teacher intervention and curriculum. For these and similar other reasons, a myriad of international literature reports on attempts to educate and prepare qualified and student teachers about LGBTQ+ inclusion, its implications for teachers, and/or underscores the importance of capacity building for LGBTQ+ inclusion (Szalacha, 2004; Payne and Smith, 2012; Greytak et al., 2013; Lee and Carpenter, 2015; Mitton-Kukner et al., 2016; Coulter and Miller, 2018; Coulter et al., 2021; Suárez et al., 2021). Much of this literature is included and reviewed in a recent OECD working manuscript on the inclusion of LGBTQ+ students in education systems (cf. Chapter 3 of McBrien et al., 2022).

When student teachers are educated and prepared to be LGBTQ+ -inclusive, it can evoke an emotional response, including various levels of (dis)comfort (Heinz et al., 2017; Cutler et al., 2021), similar to engaging with other so-called "difficult" knowledge (Dadvand et al., 2022) educating and preparing student teachers to be responsive and empathetic to diversity dilemmas more broadly (Neary, 2020). Therefore, being aware of this broad and critical affective dimension for student teachers in exploring such topics necessitated consideration of our pedagogical and analytic approach, and more specifically, to deliberate how our approach may have alleviated any negative impacts where possible, particularly in the online environment in which our innovation was situated due to COVID-19 (Carrillo and Flores, 2020).

Pedagogical partnership and initial teacher education

Nind et al. (2016, p. 9) define pedagogy as:

> "fundamentally concerned with what people perceive to be meaningful, important and relevant as they engage in teaching-related activity and develop competency and expertise in a practice… pedagogy is about values, identities, relationships, and interactions bounded by context."

Nind et al. (2016, p. 10) argue that we must "reflect on and study" how pedagogy is experienced and, as social justice teacher educators, this can inform our "knowing" for practice, most

especially about the features that most enhanced the desired impact of the pedagogical approach (Goodwin and Darity, 2019), which we co-constructively designed in partnership with *ShoutOut* as community-based teacher educators specializing in LGBTQ+ inclusive professional development. However, oftentimes in ITE discourse, the prominence of scholarly notions of pedagogical partnership is limited to either school-university partnership (cf. Heinz and Fleming, 2019; Green et al., 2020) or staff-student partnership (cf. Shagrir and Bar-Tal, 2021). We aspire, in this study, to be generative and expansive in connecting the notion of pedagogical partnership between university and community-based teacher educators (White, 2019), focused on the promotion of equity and justice (de Bie et al., 2021) in our ITE programme and partnered teacher educator practice. Such approaches, as de Bie et al. (2021) state, require further research.

Framing and describing the innovation

First and foremost, in line with the concept of teacher educator democratic reform "to identify and work with others to eradicate the structures and systems that produce and reproduce school and societal inequity" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018, p. 581), we align to Ellis et al.'s (2019) articulation of the critical importance of innovations in ITE to continue to center on social justice and equity. Ellis et al. (2019, p. 5) similarly signal "teacher education's role in the reproduction of inequitable and unjust situations around the world," which we associate with the Coulter et al.'s (2021) assertion of the need to educate and prepare student teachers to better serve LGBTQ+ students and the observations of recent research in Irish schools (Pizmony-Levy and BeLonG To Youth Services, 2019). Again, to represent our approach, we draw on White's (2019) notion of university and community-based teacher educators given that as Cochran-Smith et al. (2018, p. 582) express:

> "Some teacher educators involved in democratic reform have established local innovative teacher preparation programs and partnerships working with community groups as coequal teacher educators."

In McBrien et al.'s (2022, p. 46) analysis of gaps and initiatives for ITE and ongoing professional learning for LGBTQI+ inclusion, they note "there is a general lack of mandatory administrative and educational staff training on LGBTQI+ awareness and inclusion." In terms of our initiative, the Sociology of Education is a mandatory module situated in the overall ITE Programme. It covers a range of foundational concepts and topics in the sociology of education and, in this iteration during 2021 and high-level COVID-19 restrictions, invited several community-based partners to co-teach on the

module online and structured its assessment drawing on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Of the 12 mandatory sessions in the module, two lectures and one tutorial were afforded on the topic of LGBTQ+ inclusion, which was co-constructively designed and facilitated with *ShoutOut* to respond to the gap we identified, as outlined in the introduction, in the students teachers' ITE. Collaborating with *ShoutOut* facilitated us university-based teacher educators to draw on their longstanding experience in providing education programmes in schools and workplaces, as well as benefiting from their "outsider" status as community-based teacher educators of whom student teachers could ask honest questions.

To build student teachers' capacities in respect of LGBTQ+ inclusion, we sought as teacher educators to: provide a language to discuss LGBTQ+ individuals and their educational experience inclusively; raise student teachers' awareness by informing them about the contemporary (inter)national policy context(s) influencing their practice (including, as mentioned, the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy, children's rights, and SDGs); relay key messages from the corpus of (inter)national research literature and reports on LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools; present, discuss and prompt reflection on key readings of research and reports pertaining to LGBTQ+ specific bullying, safe schools, and implications for young people and their education; encourage student teachers to consider and be confident in reflecting LGBTQ+ in their subject area curricula and pedagogical practice; and consider practice-based vignettes raising themes and issues in the lectures.

A further dimension of the innovation, given the online learning environment arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and our desire to establish our innovation's impact, invited students to, as necessary, anonymously submit questions on a shared document during lectures and asked student teachers to submit written reflections on module input and tasks in the virtual learning environment (VLE) infrastructure. For each of the reflective tasks, we also asked them to consult a particular pedagogical resource referred to in or related to the lectures. One of the university-based teacher educators also engaged in dialog with students based on their reflections during the module.

Methodology

This study aimed to explore the impact of an innovation in the pedagogy of a sociology of education ITE module involving formal (university-based) and informal (community-based) teacher educators. The study is specifically concerned with the possibilities and potential of a pedagogical partnership between university and community-based initial teacher educators for LGBTQ+ -specific inclusion and diversity. This manuscript reports descriptively on our efforts as well as on the opportunistic evaluation whereby both formal (institutional "insiders") and community teacher

educators (institutional "outsiders") were committed to analyzing and reflecting on the reflections from participants and, by working together, challenged each other to arrive at deeper understanding of participants' experiences, as well as opportunities for future curricular enrichment and extension, as well as imagining possible pedagogical alternatives.

Sample

Our manuscript draws on empirical data generated by student teachers' (*n* = 85) discussion board posts and reflections from the LGBTQ+ specific sessions of a Sociology of Education module in ITE. Throughout the module, students were required to contribute asynchronously a minimum of eight posts to the discussion board on topics posted by teacher educators and were also required to asynchronously post a minimum of five reflective private journal entries on the university VLE. Attendance at synchronous sessions (i.e., the lectures and tutorials for these LGBTQ+ specific and all other sessions) was a programme requirement.

Method

The content of student teachers' discussion board posts and reflections are the focus of this article given that they became the predominant expressive and collective online asynchronous space for articulations of student teachers' experience of this innovation. As Dyment and Downing (2020, p. 330) state in their systematic review of online teacher education, our study:

> "represent[s] scholarship of [ou]r own teaching and learning, as [we] report through scholarly publications on a particular innovation or trend in [ou]r practice."

To trace student teachers' perceptions of its impact on them, as well as to examine how it informed–if at all–their practice, we analyzed these discussion board posts and reflections. Overall, students' discussion board posts and reflections signaled the valuable role of the pedagogical partnership between university and community-based teacher educators, that the selected (in)formal resources impacted and influenced their teacher mindsets and identities, and the effect the synchronous and asynchronous approaches had on the transformation of the students' educational experience (Carrillo and Flores, 2020), equity and social justice mindsets, identities and practices, specifically related to LGBTQ+ -specific inclusion and diversity.

Several ethical considerations were considered as part of the procedural application of ethical approval from our institution, which we were granted. First, in the deontological sense pertaining to the substantive nature of the curriculum and pedagogical practices we planned to engage. In so doing, we drew on contemporary, (inter)national and multidisciplinary best-practice evidence bases, as well as our joint, shared knowledge and experience as university and community-based teacher educators. Second, we considered potential consequentialist ethical issues for ourselves, the university and community-based teacher educators and student teachers. In so doing, we considered how the space would be safe, for example. We concluded that the ethic of care framing our approach held generative potential for all, despite the challenges in addressing the topic, amongst others, in ITE. Thirdly, ethical issues pertaining evaluation were considered. As scholar practitioners working in university-based teacher education, we felt compelled to undertake a scholarly appraisal and evaluation of our efforts. These considerations included the ethics of retrospective opportunistic evaluation and the tensions connected to being an insider-researcher. Relational ethics and an overarching and shared philosophy of moral pluralism underpinned our collaboration, enacted through regular, open, and reflexive dialogue that centred on endeavoring to deeply understand our student teachers' experiences of our approach. We undertake to further comment on our insider positionalities below as we outline our reflexive approach to data analysis.

Data analysis

We adopted a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2022) including data familiarization followed by "deep, engaged, and critically open reflexivity *throughout* the research process" (ibid., p. 18). This approach privileged the contribution of our deliberative and iterative coding discussions together in the review, refining and production of themes. With these themes, we sought to convey a story and set of organizing concepts to represent the "rich, complex, and multifaceted" (ibid., p. 20) nature of the data. We maintain this approach to data analysis complements the aim of this research, rooted in the Big Q qualitative paradigm (ibid.). During analysis, we drew–in part–on the literature framing our study and reflexively considered our insider positionalities (Sikes and Potts, 2008) as teacher educators, embracing subjectivity in our analytic approach as both a gay male member of the LGBTQ+ community and cishet ally.

Findings

In this section, we present the four themes we produced having engaged in reflexive thematic analysis of student teachers' contributions to discussion boards and reflections. We accompany each theme with excerpt quotes from student teachers' discussion board posts and reflections.

Placement experiences and (in)visibility

> "I do not believe enough is being done within schools to make the school environment a safe place for the LGBTQ+ community."

Overall, it was clear in the data that student teachers were educating very many young LGBTQ+ young people. Many recounted how they had observed homophobic and transphobic bullying during their school placement. In student teachers' reflections they mentioned the problem of colleagues turning "a blind eye" to homophobic bullying, adding that when they intervened with students themselves on the issue of LGBTQ+ specific bullying the response they often received was that such comments were "just a joke." Some student teachers mentioned that based on their placement experiences to date, their placement schools did not actively celebrate, promote, or educate students on LGBTQ+ inclusion related issues. Furthermore, some students also referred to the gender-segregated nature of Irish post-primary schools, as well as the legacy of the Catholic Church's historic monopolistic control on governance in the Irish education system as particular challenges to LGBTQ+ inclusion.

When reflecting on their placement experiences and connecting these experiences to the research that the student teachers referred to in the sessions connected to the innovation, as well as read independently, they relayed their lack of surprise to the statistics mentioned (as outlined in Pizmony-Levy and BeLonG To Youth Services, 2019). Student teachers made particular reference to the use of pronouns and the lack of intentional consciousness-raising about this matter during their placement experiences.

> "I know that in my current placement school, assumed female pronouns remains an issue and not every teacher or student understands why correct pronouns for an LGBTQ+ student is so important."

Student teachers commented that the resources provided enabled them to feel more confident about using pronouns with care and integrity, which arguably helped them to avert the "guilt" and "shame" that one student teacher experienced when misgendering their student, although we elaborate on the emotional cadences expressed below further.

Overall, drawing on their placement experiences student teachers recounted that, when it came to supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion and diversity, much of the work in schools was episodic rather than embedded, and in general pointed to the necessity for more sustained visibility and proactivity for LGBTQ+ students in schools through curriculum, policy and school leadership.

Impactful elements of the pedagogical innovation

Analyzing the student teachers' discussion boards and reflections indicated several impactful elements of the pedagogical innovation. First, and most broadly, the relevance of the sociology of education for student teachers' practice was clear given it provided them conceptual and linguistic tools to articulate inequities, ex/in-clusion, and both historically and institutionally influenced challenges connected to respond to diversity in their practice.

Student teachers leveraged the concepts and terminologies central to the innovation (e.g., heteronormativity, cishet, etc.) to articulate the school experiences of LGBTQ+ students as a minoritized group. They drew on the theory and research both informationally and transformationally to critically reflect on the implications from inclusion and diversity perspectives for their identities as teachers and their classroom and broader curricular practices.

A particularly impactful dimension of the innovation was the session focused on terminology, which several student teachers referred to as influencing their practice. Student teachers also commented on the practice-relevant and research-based resources selected to inform and support the sessions. The resources assisted the student teachers to convey the aforementioned experiences during placement, to apply their sociological knowledge to these experiences, to define terminology reliably and succinctly, as well as empower them to be responsive to their equity and social justice concerns as practitioners for LGBTQ+ students.

> "these lectures have given me so much, as well as further making me appreciate my powerful and invaluable role as an educator in making the lives of our young people more empowered."

A final and important dimension of the innovation that student teachers signaled as impactful concerns the collaboration between and dual approaches of the university and community-based teacher educators, spanning the two lectures, VLE, and tutorial session with students. Students appreciated the dialogic approaches employed by both university and community-based teacher educators in synchronous (e.g., submitting questions through an anonymous link to be answered by *ShoutOut*) and asynchronous ways (e.g., university-based teacher educators' engagement in the discussion board posts). Together it was possible to provide student teachers with

a richer ITE experience by drawing on our respective funds of knowledge and experience in teacher development.

Emotions and the affective

The emotional cadences we observed on discussion boards were vast. We observed students recall a range of other negative emotions that galvanized their commitment to being more inclusive. Students shared their emotional responses to having heard about and/or read the research referred to in these sessions, most especially statistics around exclusion, bullying, and lack of belonging they read as "shocking," "astounding," "unnerving," "disturbing," "upsetting," "saddening," "bewildering," "frustrating," and "disappointing." We interpreted that students' emotional expressions connected to three main areas (i) the lack of change in schools since their own school experiences and taking cognizance of the recent legislative and social progress in Irish society, particularly in schools, (ii) concerns for LGBTQ+ students' wellbeing (e.g., bullying, exclusion, safety concerns, absenteeism, isolation and lack of sense of belonging, mental health and the interconnection(s) between these phenomena), and (iii) personal reflections as a member of, or ally to, the LGBTQ+ community, whereby one student teacher reflects:

> "From first-hand experience I can recount the trials and tribulations of being a queer student growing up in our disappointing education system which oftentimes ignores homophobia and transphobia as it occurs."

Another student shares that:

> "This lecture made me extremely happy, as a member of the community who was bullied for most of his primary and secondary school experience due to my sexuality, seeing that future teachers are getting this kind of education makes me feel more safe and secure in knowing that the next generation of queer students may have a better schooling experience than myself."

And a final student:

> "As someone who has only recently begun to identify as queer, these lectures were empowering and made me feel seen and valued."

Given these observations, we maintain that the privacy and spatial dimensions of experiencing the sessions online also serendipitously contributed to student teachers' reflections, most especially conceptions of the lecture–given its possibility to evoke negative and discomforting emotions–as a safe and simultaneously positive, validating space.

Impact on and reprioritising practices toward LGBTQ+ inclusion and diversity

One student critically pointed to our system-level educational priorities, demonstrating the impact of the innovation on them:

> "The focus and attention on exams, courses, points and curricula seems grossly misplaced when contextualized by this report, which details the physical, emotional and sexual harassment suffered by LGBTI+ students in Ireland."

Indeed, a reflection on curriculum and curricular priorities more broadly was clear. Many student teachers articulated how, in their various subject areas, they would embed LGBTQ+ inclusion in proactive ways, as they aimed to promote visibility and a sense of belonging. They shared that they felt more confident in putting into practice their awareness of inclusive pronoun use, owed to the sessions, and shared reflections on this from practice. They also stated they would feel more compelled and confident to intervene in observations of LGBTQ+ bullying and not engage in by standing behavior or "turning a blind eye." We assert these as three striking practice-based examples of student teachers' transformations toward an equity-centred and social justice mindset related to the innovation.

Discussion

Despite the affordances in the Irish policy context we described, this is the first study to explore an LGBTQ+ -specific inclusive pedagogical innovation, as well as the possibilities we seized (e.g., funding, collaborative approach, virtual environment, and UDL assessment modalities) and the potential that the pedagogical innovation had for both student teacher and teacher educator development. We contend that further research on pedagogical innovations, despite the higher education publication landscape which, in some contexts, undervalues higher education pedagogic research (Cotton et al., 2018; Tierney, 2020) is critically important. Despite these challenges, often exacerbated by managerial reform and associated challenges including those related to COVID-19 (Shankar et al., 2021), the pursuit of and publication about democratic reform is possible and worthwhile. Nonetheless, we are cognizant of the necessity for sustained infrastructural resources, including funding, to lead collaborative pedagogical innovations in ITE beyond initiation, and toward embedding and sustaining such innovations. We also concur with Maunsell et al. (2021) both about the necessity of continued support beyond ITE across the continuum of teacher education and focusing on a broad systemic approach beyond innovations or interventions in teacher learning alone.

That said, an important consideration and possibility realized by pedagogical innovations such as this as a feature in foundation studies of education, and others in the broad inclusion and diversity domain, is to empower student teachers with knowledge and ensure their access to cognitive and material resources that they unfortunately may not glean from their school placement experience(s). As ITE reform globally incrementally prioritizes placement as the primordial fund of knowledge for developing student teachers' practices, we advocate for the continued significance and contribution of university-based ITE especially in pursuing democratic values and professionalization of student teachers. University-based teacher educators are also typically best placed to deeply understand and scaffold student teachers' learning, as well as the pedagogical and ethical challenges inherent in teaching about more difficult topics. Complementing university-based teacher educators' work with community-based teacher educators' knowledge and experience can further help ensure student teachers are educated and prepared for the realities of practice.

The combination of university and community-based teacher educators' efforts complemented each other as aforementioned and was a direct asset to the innovation and the student teachers' broader ITE for several other reasons. First, the combined expertise and experience of both groups of teacher educators enhanced provision. Second, the insider (university-based) and outsider (community-based) blend facilitated student teachers' exposure to a teaching team formed of members beyond their university and, as the data analysis revealed, some felt it easier to approach outsiders when, for example, asking questions. Third, in co-teaching sessions together, we modeled allyship to student teachers, as well as more broadly reflected the notion that being an expert and inclusive practitioner demands collaboration and relational expertise (cf. Edwards, 2017). Finally, in terms of data analysis and future planning, the broad membership of the team enhanced our reflexive capacities and considerations about how most successfully to continue this work.

The collaboration inherent to the successful planning and teaching of these sessions between the university and community-based teacher educators was enabled by the online environment and its benefits for working collaboratively. As we continue to debate and (re)define policies about ITE, and reflect on implications for who is and who identifies as teacher educators for new times (White, 2019), further exploration of collaborative potential and conducive structures such as the online environment through which to engage in collaborative teacher educator work will be important. As and when COVID-19 public health policies (have) permit(ted), and we revert consciously or otherwise to pedagogy-as-normal in ITE, we advocate for more deliberative reflection on the beneficial pedagogical affordances of the online environment for ITE, paying particular attention to those affordances related to university and community-based teacher educators and in achieving greater equity, inclusion, and diversity. Aligned to

this, a key consideration will be to reflect on how researchers can "be encouraged to work together to establish a shared research agenda. . . to develop broader and more relevant insights than is possible when individual researchers simply profile their own "innovation"–again and again" Dyment and Downing (2020 p. 331).

Furthermore, acknowledging within the Irish context that a reformed ITE landscape as we outlined in the introduction is imminent, as well as reform of relationships and sexuality education, teacher educators ought to be afforded intentional and developmental opportunities connected to inclusive education and inquiring into their practice by building capacity. We believe this would be greatly enhanced by university and community-based teacher educators working together, as evidenced by this study. A further note is also merited in the context of the Irish ITE landscape. With new national ITE standards which facilitate collaboration between university and community-based teacher educators, further research on how to optimize and best support this collaboration will be important. Furthermore, continued support and efforts to diversify the teaching profession and school leadership–including LGBTQ+ specific diversity–are required. For some student teachers, this innovation was the first time they felt included and visible in their ITE curriculum broadly conceived. This has implications not only for ITE, but also for induction given that a recent literature review points to the importance of quality mentors(hip) modeling diversity and inclusion, including LGBTQ+ specific inclusion (Ellis et al., 2020).

Therefore, a particularly striking and encouraging finding for us was the articulations of the visibility and empowerment the substance of this pedagogical innovation offered the LGBTQ+ student teachers and allies in this module. Their reflections demonstrated the recognition they felt by having this pedagogical innovation in place for themselves and for future student teachers. Other reflections, from students who did not declare that they were LGBTQ+, communicated a sense of enhanced professional competence and agency as student teachers to educate inclusively so that current and future generations of LGBTQ+ students in schools will feel more included and represented. Although we cannot say this conclusively, we believe that there could be spin off effects here for equity and social justice issues more broadly, and more research in this vein is merited.

Conclusion

As ITE regulation and accreditation advance globally, and the scope of inclusion and diversity ever (and importantly) expands, how these phenomena converge in ITE programmes offered by all programme providers remains uncertain and is undoubtedly influenced by the affordances of local policy contexts. Given the perception of the perceived constrictive

nature of the ITE regulation and accreditation landscape (managerial reform) and the expansive nature of the scope of inclusion and diversity (democratic reform), their reconciliation is, in some people's views, an impossibility. Our own experience serves to reassure us that, while it remains a challenge, it is not impossible. We also maintain given the concerning backdrop of research pointing to the needs–often intersectional–of the LGBTQ+ community attending schools, where autonomy is afforded to ITE providers and teacher educator leaders that this important topic, as well as other typically marginalized topics in inclusion and diversity, should be included. Programmatic dimensions such as credit weightings may determine what, how and whether specific inclusion of LGBTQ+ related curriculum is included in student teachers' education, as well as personnel. We argue that these factors should be challenged and addressed given the evidence of transformational learning in respect of inclusion and diversity presented in this research.

Furthermore, looking to the future toward a renewed ITE policy context in the Republic of Ireland, we argue that this approach sows the seeds of and presents the generative possibilities of collaboration around inclusion and diversity between university and community-based teacher educators. We also believe that it is imperative for modules such as this to collaborate with charities and not-for-profit organizations to foster democratic reform in ITE and the formation of a more equity-focused, socially-just, rights-based, inclusive and diversity aware and responsive teacher professional identity in student teachers. Therefore, adopting similar approaches may be of interest to teacher educators and policy-makers more broadly in thinking about the accreditation and transformative potential of ITE, approaching other topics beyond LGBTQ+ -specific inclusion and diversity and, fundamentally, in pursuing more democratic schools and society.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the School of Education Ethics Committee, Trinity College Dublin. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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