Code-Switching Queer Controversy: Pre-K-8 Educators' Perceptions of LGBT-Inclusive Policy Framing

Jon M. Wargo
University of Michigan – Ann Arbor
United States

&

Alex Katz
Northeastern University
United States

Abstract: This paper uses sensemaking theory and frame analysis to examine how a non-system actor's framing for advancing LGBT inclusion, what they called *code-switching*, was taken up. Drawing on qualitative interview data generated as part of a larger mixed-methods study, this article examines the material and ideological affordances and constraints of elementary educators implementing the Inclusive Curriculum Law in Illinois (House Bill 246), a law promoting LGBT representation in history textbooks and curriculum. Findings highlight how the impetus to code-switch created a disconnect between policy and perceived practice, which in turn complicated organizational efforts to transform inclusive instruction. As our analyses illustrate, problem framing—refracted here through a non-system agent—not only shaped the direction of proposed solutions but also played a critical role in coordinating individual action and sensemaking.
Keywords: sensemaking theory; frame analysis; policy implementation; LGBTQ+; code-switching

Controversia queer sobre el cambio de código: Percepciones de los educadores de Pre-K-8 sobre el marco político inclusivo LGBT

Resumen: Este artículo utiliza la teoría de la sensemaking y el análisis del marco para examinar cómo el marco de un actor no sistémico para promover la inclusión LGBT, lo que llamaron cambio de código, fue adoptado. Basándose en datos de entrevistas cualitativas generados como parte de un estudio más amplio de métodos mixtos, este artículo examina las posibilidades y limitaciones materiales e ideológicas de los educadores de primaria que implementaron la Ley de Currículo Inclusivo en Illinois (House Bill 246), una ley que promueve la representación LGBT en los libros de texto y currículo de historia. Los hallazgos resaltan cómo el impulso para cambiar de código creó una desconexión entre la política y la práctica percibida, lo que a su vez complicó los esfuerzos organizacionales para transformar la instrucción inclusiva. Como ilustran nuestros análisis, el marco del problema– refractado aquí a través de un agente no sistémico– no solo moldeó a la dirección de las soluciones propuestas, sino que también jugó un papel crítico en la coordinación de la acción individual y la creación de sentido.

Palabras-clave: teoría del sensemaking; análisis de marcos; implementación de políticas; LGBTQ+; cambio de código

Controvérsia queer sobre troca de código: Percepções dos educadores pré-escolares ao 8º ano sobre a formulação de políticas inclusivas para LGBT

Resumo: Este artigo utiliza a teoria do sensemaking e a análise de enquadramento para examinar como o enquadramento de um ator não-sistema para o avanço da inclusão LGBT, o que eles chamam de troca de código, foi adotado. Com base em dados de entrevistas qualitativas gerados como parte de um estudo maior de métodos mistos, este artigo examina as possibilidades e restrições materiais e ideológicas de educadores do ensino fundamental que implementam a Lei do Currículo Inclusivo em Illinois (House Bill 246), uma lei que promove a representação LGBT em livros didáticos e currículos de história. A descoberta destaca como o ímpeto para a mudança de código criou uma desconexão entre a política e a prática percebida, o que por sua vez complicou os esforços organizacionais para transformar o ensino inclusivo. Como nossas análises ilustram, o enquadramento do problema–aqui refratado através de um agente não sistêmico– moldou não apenas a direção das soluções propostas, mas também desempenhou um papel crítico na coordenação da ação individual e na criação de sentido.

Palavras-chave: teoria do sensemaking; análise de quadros; política de implementação; LGBTQ+; mudança de código

Code-Switching Queer Controversy: Pre-K-8 Educators' Perceptions of LGBT-Inclusive Policy Framing

In August 2019, when Governor Jay Robert Pritzker signed into law Illinois House Bill 246 (H.B. 246), the Inclusive Curriculum Law, little did he know that the first year of policy implementation (the 2020–2021 academic year) would be backdropped by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and a white supremacist insurrection of the U.S. Capitol

building. The bill, requiring that the roles and contributions of LGBTQ+[1] individuals be included in history and social science education prior to completing grade 8, was unique (Leone, 2019). Unlike other states with queer-inclusive policy, the Illinois law asserted that this was necessary content for elementary-age children and middle-grades youth.

The road to passing this legislation, however, was fraught. At first, a coalition of advocates across grassroots organizations, lobbyists, and legislators—understood in the policy implementation literature as non-system actors—formed in support of curriculum legislation that would mandate the teaching of LGBTQ+-inclusive history in public schools. The Illinois Safe Schools Alliance (the Legacy Project, the Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago) and Equality Illinois came together to form the Inclusive Curriculum Advisory Council of Illinois to take on this legislative effort (Attie, 2020). Referred to as the Inclusive Curriculum Law, legislation was first drafted in 2017 and then introduced in the 2018 Illinois legislative session as Senate Bill 3249.

Unable to confirm enough votes to pass the legislation, and with a coalition of opposition efforts framing the bill as propaganda inappropriate for children, the bill was not brought to a House vote in 2018. After a pivotal midterm election, the bill was reintroduced, unchanged, as H.B. 246 in 2019. The bill passed in both the House (60-42 on March 13, 2019) and the Senate (37-17 on May 23, 2019). The bill then went on to Governor Pritzker in June and was subsequently signed into law on August 9, 2019, with an effective date of July 1, 2020. Although relatively implicit in its evolution, several of the organizations forming the coalitional advocacy group became fervent in developing professional development tools and resources to help aid in implementation. These organizations acted, in many senses of the phrase, "as architects and implementers of [this] key polic[y]" (Aspen Education & Society Program, 2015, p. 1). One such group, the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, hosted an hour-long webinar in August 2020. This online webinar, "Deepening Our History: Implementing the Illinois Inclusive Curriculum Law," was open to the public and streamed to registrants with the aim of underscoring the "gaps and opportunities that exist in implementing inclusive curricula on the local and state level" (Stonewall National Museum & Archives, 2021, para. 3).

Focusing on educators' sensemaking of a snapshot of this webinar, in this article, we underscore how participants' understanding of the problem space was fraught. Recognizing that local actors *are* policymakers (see, e.g., Coburn, 2006; Cohen, 1990; Spillane et al., 2002), we analyze how a group of Illinois teachers made sense of queer-inclusive problem framing by demonstrating how the possibilities of practice and implementation depended, in part, on how they made sense of not only queer inclusion but also the broader purpose of public education and, more specifically, the profession of teaching. In doing so, we highlight how problem-solving processes are shaped by the iterative processes of frame resonance and dissonance, each action mediated by contestation and the sensemaking dynamics of (mis)interpretation. In particular, we ask:

1. How does an external educational organization frame the problem space of LGBT inclusion and implementation of Illinois H.B. 246, the Inclusive Curriculum Law?
2. How does this organization use code-switching to marry their argument about educators' professional responsibility to implement LGBTQ+-inclusive policy with their audiences' understandings (and values) about teaching?
3. What sense do educators in Illinois make of this framing and solution?

---

[1] In this article, we toggle between *LGBTQ+* and *LGBT*. Although we use *LGBTQ+* here as a more inclusive descriptor, the acronym does not appear in the statutory text of Illinois Public Act 101-0227 (H.B. 246). H.B. 246 uses *LGBT*, not *LGBTQ+*, to define the parameters for what content must be taught and included.

Ultimately, as we demonstrate in our analyses, the law offered minimal guidance to implementation, rendering awareness and perceived action subject to extra-legal non-system agents' resourcefulness—and the frames these actors identified—as salient to their intended audiences. For participants who found resonance with the greater goals of H.B. 246, code-switching—as a frame— was relatively irrelevant as their perceived actions in forwarding LGBT inclusion were already aligned with how they understood their job as public school educators. In contrast, those who opposed it found friction with the frame for infringing on their personal beliefs and its lack of "relevance" to reality. Abstracting out from how individuals made sense of code-switching, we close by articulating how the frame, as the non-system agent's facilitator intimated it, provided individual solutions to a structural problem, thus constraining the implementation of the law as it oversimplified resulting actions and practices that would forward LGBT inclusion without taking into account the realities of everyday school life.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, we framed this study similarly to those interested in interrogating how educators—as agents of instructional change—understand policy implementation. As such, we braided sensemaking theory from organizational studies with literature on framing and frame analysis to interrogate how teachers understood and made sense of an external organization's framing of LGBTQ+-inclusive policy.

Sensemaking

Individuals construct meaning from and make sense of their social surroundings. These meanings, in turn, frame and name their reality (Porac et al., 1989). This process, sometimes called *sensemaking*, begins with individuals bracketing a phenomenon, giving meaning to it, labeling it, and then capturing it as it is understood. As a theory, sensemaking is prospective and retrospective (Weick, 1995). It leads to agents "lift[ing] equivocal knowledge out of the tacit, private, complex, random, and past to make it explicit, public, simpler, ordered, and relevant to the situation at hand (Obstfeld, 2004)" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413). As a social process, when individuals engage in sensemaking, they draw on personal, material, and socioenvironmental resources. "Individuals," however, as Spillane et al. (2002) suggested, "do not make sense of their world in a vacuum; their sense-making is situated in particular 'thought communities,' including, but not limited to, professions, nations, political parties, religions, and organizations (Mannheim, 1936; Resnick, 1991; Zerubavel, 2000)" (p. 393). Thus, as agents of curricular policy implementation, educators rely not only on their existing knowledge and prior histories of participation but also on the what (in terms of policy) they understand themselves to be responding.

Sensemaking is driven by interpersonal interactions and the surrounding social phenomena that allow individuals to conceptualize and interpret the intricacies of their environments. An individual generates their self-conception on the basis of anticipated, perceived, or realized social interactions with others. As a function of said social interactions, the individual internalizes others' real or imagined perceptions of them—as well as others' real or imagined perceptions of a given situation, context, or social cause—interprets these perceptions, and adapts their behavior to be more aligned with their social environment. Although sensemaking is dependent on intrapersonal, individualized conceptions of oneself, an individual's self-conception is contingent on their interactions with others and their subsequent interpretations and internalizations of said interactions. Weick (1995) elaborated on sensemaking's interpersonal and social elements in asserting that "sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others. Even monologues and one-way communications presume an audience. And the monologue changes as

the audience changes" (Weick, 1995, p. 40). Indeed, Weick noted the unique bidirectional relations among individualized self-perceptions, social interactions, and subsequent internalization. Individualized sensemaking denotes an individual's perceptions and conduct, which are contingent on the behavior and social standards directly and indirectly enforced by their surroundings.

When making sense of a policy that requires complex change—for example, educational initiatives focused on LGBTQ+ inclusion that may ask teachers to shift or reconsider their personal beliefs surrounding gender and sexuality in schools—sensemaking becomes more challenging to trace. Thus, one must also understand how the policy is discursively shaped, framed, and interpreted. If an individual interprets a social policy as unclear or lacking concrete guidelines for implementation, they might be less likely to implement this policy in their respective social environment. Additionally, the extent to which a policy is interpreted to align with an individual's given social context is crucial to the degree to which said policy is adopted and implemented. Suppose an individual perceives their social environment as hostile or unwelcoming toward approving and adopting a given policy, for instance. In that case, they may be less likely to work to incorporate it into their environment even if they agree with its importance and relevance. According to Weick (1995),

> The strength of sensemaking as a perspective derives from the fact that it does not rely on accuracy and its model is not object perception. Instead, sensemaking is about plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention, and instrumentality. (p. 57)

Indeed, an individual's constructions and ideations of social policies and their relevance, importance, and logistical feasibility are directly informed by their respective social environments and their real or actual limitations to policy implementation. We recognized these sensemaking processes and phenomena in examining the extent to which H.B. 246 was implemented by participating educators and the educators' degrees of personal resonance with the framing of the LGBTQ+ inclusion, as underscored in the "Deepening Our History" webinar. Given the purpose of this article and our focus on the frame of code-switching, we turned to the literature on framing and frame analysis to better nuance how participants made sense of code-switching as a directive in implementing H.B. 246.

Frames and Frame Analysis

Frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). They "call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions" (Entman, 1993, p. 55). Frames (and framing) have their roots in social constructionism and symbolic interaction. Informed by Goffman's (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* and Bateson's (1972) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, framing—as a rhetorical practice—is a persuasive activity that leaders use to connect their argument to a set of commonsense understandings about the issue at hand.

Frames register power. They help explain how people make collective sense of incoming messages as they seek to gain control of situations. As Lane (2020) summarized, framing can be done "through diagnosing problems (diagnostic frames), influencing the course of collective action (prognostic frames), setting expectations for interactions (normative frames), or detailing how behavior will be monitored (regulatory frames)" (p. 11). Diagnostic framing involves identifying the problem and attributing blame or causes, thus playing a role in defining how the issue is perceived (Cress & Snow, 2000). Whereas groups may identify multiple causes or put the blame on more than one element, they tend to elevate a single factor as the primary one (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988). According to Entman (1993), this is understood as *salience*. A prognostic framing

follows the diagnosis of the problem and then offers solutions to it, specifying strategies, tactics, and targets. Often, the prognosis corresponds with or follows from what has been stated in the diagnostic framing (Benford & Snow, 2000; Cress & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988).

Frames, and the act of framing, are successful when they provoke stakeholders to mobilize and act, which is often described as frame alignment. Understood as a positive result, frame resonance, a result of frame alignment, occurs when an audience—in our case, elementary educators—buys into the logic of the broader movement. Two ways in which this can be achieved is through what Snow and Benford (1998) called *empirical credibility* and *experiential commensurability*. Empirical credibility suggests that the phenomena can be subjected to empirical verification and substantiated with evidence. In contrast, experiential commensurability relies more on how the so-called evidence provided by empirical credibility is filtered and understood. As these logics attest, framing operates as the "mobilizing potency" and can create "a deep responsive chord" (Binder, 2002, p. 220) that motivates individuals to act. Frame friction, or dissonance, may also occur. Responses that subvert the ideological expectations for how action should unfold (i.e., experiential commensurability) create dissonance in the intended audience, which can be understood as frame friction.

Frames organize the perception of social phenomena, thus informing individual sensemaking. As a heuristic, frame analysis aims to reveal "the general patterns and tendencies of what is being talked about, by whom, and in what ways" (Johnston, 1995, p. 218). It offers "conceptual tools for investigating the ways in which ideas are produced and invoked to mobilize people to action" (Coburn, 2006, p. 346), allowing them to drive collective action. Given that interpretation and "negotiation among and between frames is likely to be shaped by structures of power and authority (Fligstein, 2001; Isabella, 1990)" (Coburn, 2006, p. 347), frame analysis facilitates a holistic assessment of social institutions, hierarchies, and power dynamics. Individuals are shaped by and make sense of problems through these interpretative frames. Thus, by partnering sensemaking theory with framing and frame analysis, we sought to understand how an external organization used code-switching to frame personal and professional action surrounding policy implementation and how individuals made sense of this framing.

Method

For this study, we drew on a larger investigation examining Illinois teachers' sensemaking about H.B. 246 and the material and ideological affordances and constraints of teaching queer-inclusive social studies. Below we briefly detail the methods for generating and analyzing data.

Data Collection

We generated data in two phases using what Cresswell (2009) qualified as a "sequential transformative strategy" (p. 212). In Phase 1, we sampled all prekindergarten (pre-K)–Grade 8 educators in Illinois's 20 most diverse public-school districts. Districts' diversity rankings were determined by three indicators: the percentage of students belonging to the most represented race and ethnicity, caregiver and student culture surveys, and the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. These districts were those where no one race represented more than 75% of students and families qualifying for free-or-reduced price lunch is greater than 50%. Adapted from GLSEN's National School Climate Survey and Egale's Every Teacher Project instrument, our survey comprised 50 items. Divided into four sections, the survey opened with questions about participants' school contexts. In the next two sections, Likert-type scale items asked respondents about their personal beliefs and potential biases in their professional practice and the material and

ideological supports/constraints of implementing H.B. 246. The fourth section was composed of several demographic items.

The survey was sent out to 5,103 educators via email in September 2020. Due to district email filters, we could not reach a large (but indeterminate) number of educators. In total, we collected survey responses from 407 pre-K–8 teachers from across public schools in the 20 districts sampled in Illinois, yielding an overall response rate of 8%. As such, we note that there is potential for response bias in our sample. However, our response rate is similar to that of other email-based surveys of educators and administrators during the latter years of the "fake news" era (see, e.g., Clark et al., 2020; Kahne et al., 2021). Most respondents self-identified as White (73%), and the remainder (27%) self-identified as people of color. Similarly, 78% of participants self-identified as women, 20% as men, and 2% as transgender or two-spirit. Ninety-three educators taught pre-K-2nd grade, 125 taught Grades 3-5, 155 taught Grades 6-8, and 34 taught visual or performing arts. For additional participant demographics, see Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Phase 1 Participant Demographics, based on Race

		Total		White		People of Color (POC)	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Summary Totals		407	100%	297	73%	110	27%
Sexual Orientation	Bisexual	28	7.0%	20	5.0%	8	2.0%
	Gay	13	3.2%	11	2.7%	2	0.5%
	Heterosexual/straight	319	78.2%	237	58.2%	82	20.1%
	Lesbian	10	2.5%	9	2.2%	1	0.2%
	Queer	7	1.7%	6	1.5%	1	0.2%
	Questioning	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
	Other	12	3.0%	8	2.0%	4	1.0%
	Chose not to answer	17	4.2%	5	1.2%	12	3.0%
Gender Identity	Woman	319	78.4%	242	59.5%	77	18.9%
	Man	85	20.9%	60	14.7%	25	6.1%
	Transgender	2	0.5%	1	0.3%	1	0.3%
	Two-spirit	1	0.2%	1	0.3%	0	0.0%
County Political Holding	Blue County	299	73.4%	213	52.3%	86	21.1%
	Purple County	72	17.7%	54	13.3%	18	4.4%
	Red County	36	8.9%	28	6.9%	8	2.0%

Table 2

Phase 1 Participant Demographics, based on Grade Brand of Educator

		PreK-2		G3-5		G6-8	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Summary Totals		107	26%	136	33%	164	41%
Sexual Orientation	Bisexual	6	1.5%	10	2.5%	12	2.9%
	Gay	5	1.2%	2	0.5%	6	1.5%
	Heterosexual/straight	83	20.4%	110	27.0%	126	30.9%
	Lesbian	3	0.7%	4	1.0%	3	0.7%
	Queer	0	0.0%	4	1.0%	3	0.7%
	Questioning	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	Other	1	0.2%	4	1.0%	7	1.8%
	Chose not to answer	8	2.0%	2	0.5%	7	1.7%
Gender Identity	Woman	94	23.1%	104	25.6%	121	29.7%
	Man	16	3.9%	32	7.9%	37	9.1%
	Transgender	0	0.0%	1	0.3%	1	0.3%
	Two-spirit	0	0.0%	1	0.3%	0	0.0%
County Political Holding	Blue County	69	17.0%	106	26.0%	124	30.5%
	Purple County	29	7.1%	16	3.9%	27	6.6%
	Red County	6	1.5%	12	2.9%	18	4.5%

After Phase 1, we invited the participants to continue with the project by engaging in a semi-structured interview. Participating across county and district, 88 participants agreed to be interviewed. Of the 88, 66 self-identified as cisgender women, 21 as cisgender men, and 1 as transgender; additionally, 62 self-identified as heterosexual, and 26 self-identified as LGBTQ+. For some participants, this was their first year of teaching, whereas for a few others, this was their 33rd year in the classroom. The average number of years in the profession for the interviewees, however, was 11. Twenty of the 88 interviewees taught primary grades (pre-K–2), 18 taught upper elementary (Grades 3–5), and 41 taught middle school (Grades 6–8; 14 English language arts, 13 social studies, 3 science, and 11 special education). The remaining nine educators were "specials teachers," teaching either visual arts or music. A group somewhat evenly divided in their knowledge of H.B. 246, 43 participants knew about the Inclusive Curriculum Law, and 45 did not. For these 45, the survey they completed in Phase 1 was their first notification of the new state policy.

Interviews lasted 21–103 minutes each. During interviews, the principal investigator and/or a member of the larger research team asked participating teachers to detail their professional background and training, their beliefs concerning inclusive education, their knowledge of practice in implementing H.B. 246, and the precarity of implementing LGBT-inclusive curriculum amid the global pandemic. Given that one of our central aims in the study was to understand how teachers made sense of the problem space and implementation of queer-inclusive policy, participants were asked to respond to a video-cued question surveying their sensemaking of an introductory section of the hour-long "Deepening Our History" webinar hosted by the Illinois Safe School Alliance. During

interviews, the interviewer used Zoom and other computer-assisted technologies to share their screen and highlight the figure corresponding to the code-switching section of the webinar (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Image Depicting Code-Switching

Note: Reprinted from the Inclusive Curriculum Advisory Council of Illinois's (2023) "Inclusive curriculum implementation guidance" document.

Participants were then played the 1-minute 11-second closed-captioned video clip of the "Personal Belief and Professional Responsibility" section of the webinar, wherein the facilitator, a policy manager, outlined the professional expectations for teachers and administrators:

> So now, let us think about personal belief and professional responsibility. Here, in our country, we can believe what we want to believe. That is our belief system. Where is the line between your personal belief and your professional responsibility? The line is regarding your work expectations. Do you understand the expectations of your work environment? If you are someone on the call that is an administrator that creates the rules that actually sets the expectations and codes of conduct, then it's important that people understand and accept those work expectations. H.B. 246 is the law. It is not controversial. It is the law. The last point for personal belief and professional responsibility lies with this idea of code-switching. Code-switching is normally thought of in a racialized context. So here, we're talking about code-switching related to one's identity. For example, your colleague could be, quote, unquote, "out" outside of the work environment, and at work, they are not. That is considered to be code-switching. They are code-switching. Young people also code-switch, meaning they might be, quote, unquote, "out" at school and not at home, or vice versa. And so, code-switching is an important point to note in terms of your colleagues as well as your young people.

Afterward, participants were asked to reflect on the facilitator's framing and articulate how they made sense of the message.

Data Analysis

With interest in how individuals understood the problem space of queer inclusion and the framing of H.B. 246 by an external organizational actor, we analyzed the 88 interviews. Following Emerson et al.'s (1995) model, data analysis was iterative. First, we examined the language used by the facilitator during the code-switching section of the webinar. Highlighting particular discourse moves, such as underscoring how she required participants to understand H.B. 246 as "not controversial" and that it is "the law," we interrogated how language functioned rhetorically. Next, we generated categories of meaning from our analytic memos and the interview transcriptions. Returning to the literature on sensemaking (see, e.g., Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) and framing (Johnston, 1995), we developed a list of a priori codes (Saldaña, 2016). Using this coding scheme, we located moments of ideological tension to disambiguate participants' sensemaking. For instance, did participants' alignment with the framing of H.B. 246 result from how it substantiated how they understood their role as teachers (e.g., experiential commensurability) or because they encountered students or family members who self-identify as LGBT (e.g., empirical credibility)? Identifying key categories that were supported by the theoretical vocabulary of our frameworks, we then refined them through selective coding, which illustrated the interrelation of categories into an explanatory organizational scheme. Finally, we compared our analyses across the 88 interviews to confirm findings and check for disconfirming evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Role as Researchers

As a white gay-identifying cisgender man, Author 1 designed and entered the project interested in how LGBTQ+-inclusion was foregrounded in states seeking to advance equitable educational policy through state-sanctioned legislation. A former Kindergarten teacher turned educational researcher and teacher educator, his commitments to examining how queerness is taken up in school-sites was and remains anchored in his own histories of participation in the profession and ongoing research-practice partnerships. Author 2, a former undergraduate research assistant, joined the project at the stage of data analysis. Given their interest in educational law, social policy, and identity as a white queer woman, Author 2 assisted Author 1 with rounds of analytic coding, memo writing, and reporting findings. Given our proximity to the problem space and to check bias and the interpretation of results, Author 1 and Author 2 met weekly. Following Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2002), they traced assumptions, positions, and tensions, by asking three questions: What surprised us? What intrigued us? and What disturbed us?

Findings

How a policy gets framed is important. It prescribes value, assigns responsibility, and authorizes solutions. Based on our analyses of both the "Deepening Our History" webinar facilitator's talk and the external organization's (Illinois Safe Schools Alliance) framing of the problem space, we saw that code-switching was used "to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442), what some refer to as the process of *sensegiving*. To chart this process and its uptake, in this section, we first analyze code-switching to disambiguate how (and to what extent) it operated discursively as a frame. Examining how the non-system agent attended to framing tasks in their professional development webinar, we then highlight moments of frame alignment and misalignment, which informed not only educators' interpretation of H.B. 246 but also how they actively resisted or advanced efforts of educational change.

Focusing on how empirical credibility and experiential commensurability intersected with issues concerning what (the content), who (the literal and figurative child and student), where (the

school district and the perception of the community), and why (the policy's temporal urgency), we organize our findings as two discrete categories, frame resonance and frame friction, noting that these processes of interpretation were sometimes overlapping and other times conflicting.

Interpreting the What of H.B. 246

From its earliest drafts in the Illinois House to later being signed into law, H.B. 246 found momentum by operating under the diagnostic frame of human rights. Whether articulated through statistics of LGBTQ+ youth suicide or underscored by data showing the power and promise of an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum (Kosciw et al., 2022), the bill's authors sought to gain traction for it—both in law and in implementation—by amplifying the necessity of LGBT inclusion and the resulting actions of remedying more significant human rights issues (e.g., homophobia, cis-heterosexism). Whereas the language of H.B. 246 is explicitly disciplinary, requiring history and social science instruction to include all of those protected under the Illinois Human Rights Act, the bill's nascency in the legislature was constructed through a pathos of pathologizing. LGBTQ+ students were understood solely as victims, and the problem space sat in the realm of public health. In short, the primary argument used by the coalition was that queer inclusion leads to LGBTQ+ youth feeling a stronger sense of self. However, elements of these moral fault lines were also quite rhetorically imbued in subsequent messaging from non-system actors seeking to remedy possible frictions in policy implementation.

As a frame, practice, and solution, code-switching rested on the individual. It did not highlight how interlocking systems of oppression (e.g., systemic racism, ableism, classism) combined to forward cis-heterosexism and homophobia, but rather remedied these injustices through individual action. Code-switching was used to preemptively demotivate those educators, leaders, and other staff members who may use personal belief for not adhering to H.B. 246 and its goals. Indeed, during the webinar, the frame through which personal action and implementation were to be understood became cloudy. For example, the facilitator began by stating, "Here, in our country, we can believe what we want to believe. That is our belief system." Then, she suggested that there was, however, a relative tension between personal belief and professional responsibility in the workplace. She asked, "Where is the line between your personal belief and your professional responsibility?" In response, she asserted, "The line is regarding your work expectations. Do you understand the expectations of your work environment?" Acknowledging that in addition to educators, there were also administrators and instructional coaches on the call, she continued,

> If you are someone on the call that is an administrator that creates the rules that actually sets the expectations and codes of conduct, then it's important that people understand and accept those work expectations. H.B. 246 is the law. It is not controversial. It is the law.

The facilitator continued by offering a prognostic frame and solution to the perceived problem of personal beliefs impacting professional responsibility through code-switching:

> Code-switching is normally thought of in a racialized context. So here, we're talking about code-switching related to one's identity. For example, your colleague could be, quote, unquote, "out" outside of the work environment, and at work, they are not. That is considered to be code-switching. They are code-switching. Young people also code-switch, meaning they might be, quote, unquote, "out" at school and not at home, or vice versa. And so, code-switching is an important point to note in terms of your colleagues as well as your young people.

Although the penultimate and final statements made by the facilitator only further occluded the professional expectations and action (i.e., code-switching) that were central to the goal of the particular slide and section of the webinar, we believe that they were used to build empathy with those who code-switch their identity for reasons of personal safety and well-being in the workplace. Regardless, it was clear that the facilitator does not provide the procedural specificity for enforcement, or the school and community-based resources required for implementation. Instead, she sought to shape sensemaking through the process of sensegiving.

"Yeah, I Think That's a Perfect Way to Describe It": Examining Frame Alignment Through Participants' Personal Congruency with Code-Switching

Across our analyses of the 88 participant interviews, we found that code-switching prescribed normative value, which suggested that there was a so-called line of professional action regardless of personal belief. The way educators understood code-switching was mannered by their own phenomenological constraints. Here, we discuss how congruency with code-switching was informed by participants' sensemaking surrounding their profession and occupational role and its ability to complement their personal experiences and histories.

Frame Alignment as a Function of Bridging Occupational Role and Professional Responsibility

Many educators found alignment with code-switching through how they understood and saw their role as an agent in the broader action and movement underscoring H.B. 246. This form of alignment is illustrative of what Snow et al. (1986) called *frame bridging*, wherein participants employ an injustice framework that links their experiences and beliefs to actions that advance the broader justice-oriented goal or movement. Indeed, in our interviews, participants discussed their belief that as far as their role as an educator was concerned, their responsibility was not only to deliver the contents of the curriculum but also to understand teaching as a political act. Subjects were mindful of the fact that as educators, not only must they provide enriching pedagogical content to students amid ever-evolving current events, but they also must teach to students with an array of diverse backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences. As such, participants' understanding of their occupational duty and professional responsibility took precedence over their personal beliefs, aligning with the delineated framework of H.B. 246 and its standards for greater pedagogical inclusion. Underscoring this, Sandy (all participant names are pseudonyms), a veteran middle school social studies educator, remarked on their role as an educator and professional responsibility:

> Your place is to present information and to be nonjudgmental in that. So yeah, I think that's a perfect way to describe it, the code-switching…that you can have your own personal belief system, but it doesn't need to come into school. And if you know something about somebody outside of school life, and you want to judge it, then you keep your mouth shut. That's not your place to call them out. We need to be more justice oriented right now. I mean, teaching is political. Mind your business.[2]

As shown in this statement, Sandy both comprehended the workplace expectations of H.B. 246 and echoed the sentiment that teachers' personal beliefs, judgments, and interpretations should not

---

[2] To further participants' anonymity, we qualify the number of years in the profession using Day and Gu's (2010) and Feiman-Nemser's (2001) criteria. That is, novice educators are those with three years or less, early career is defined by 4-9 years of experience, experienced include those with 10-19 years of experience, and veterans are those teachers with 20 years or more.

permeate their pedagogical practice. Anchored in being "more justice oriented," Sandy's alignment with H.B. 246 and the code-switching frame was bolstered by their belief that "teaching is political."

Throughout the interviews, educators made sense of how the ever-shifting social contexts of Illinois—with legislation advancing inclusion across various areas of difference—informed their educational practices and uptake of H.B. 246. Roseanne, an experienced first-grade teacher offered, "So, I think we just kind of evolve with it and teach what needs to be done because the world's changing, so you change with it." Elena, also an experienced first-grade teacher, similarly asserted, "Listen, these are the times we're living in, and you have a choice. As an educator, you can educate this way because you believe in it; you can, I guess, code-switch; or you can find somewhere else to go." As demonstrated by both respondents, their social contexts shaped their frame alignment and their belief of who an educator is in terms of professional responsibilities. In light of challenging, complex, or so-called controversial social issues, these educators perceived their professional obligation to incorporate inclusive teaching practices when social progress pointed toward such inclusion. Notably, Elena viewed adherence to curricular standards as essential to the role of teachers. As a result, an educator's refusal to incorporate new inclusive developments into curricula represented a fundamental neglect of their responsibilities and, as such, should "find somewhere else to go."

For many respondents, especially those who sought social progress and change amid a sociopolitical backdrop of national unrest, code-switching was a welcome response to the normative question, "What do we do?" When it held both narrative fidelity and experiential commensurability, participants aligned with the frame's message. Annelise, for instance, an early career fourth-grade teacher, stated,

> I was glad to hear that they were in the process of making it a requirement to teach. I think this helps everyone know what the bottom line is. I've always believed that history needs to include all history, so I was glad to hear that it was going to be something that should be being added into our standards and stuff as something that we're required to give them [students] some sort of knowledge. That is justice, the content.

Although we can infer from Annelise's response that she made sense of code-switching as "the bottom line," we can also recognize her belief that the content embedded within H.B. 246 (i.e., including LGBT+ people and their histories) advances hermeneutical justice. She believed that the bill would result in the provision of tools (e.g., curriculum, knowledge) for students to make sense of and interpret broader social change.

Other participants were more direct in recognizing code-switching as a mediating tool for advancing the broader justice goals of H.B. 246. Danny, a novice middle school social studies teacher, responded by saying,

> We should be focused on the systemic change that needs to happen in our society. Because if we are able to focus more on that priority and the development of a whole human being, instead of just focused on testing, testing, testing and also instead of focusing on *just* literacy in the pandemic, we will make humongous steps. These steps aren't only for the LGBTQ+ community, the Black Lives Matter movement, or the Chicago Chicanos like me, but as a society as a whole.

Like Danny, many participants aligned with code-switching because it provided experiential commensurability with how they saw their work as teachers. Indeed, H.B. 246 more broadly, with its demand for human rights, was understood as activist oriented. Sandra, an experienced special educator, said,

> Education is the most radical profession you can ever have. I believe that change starts within, and we make these micro changes within our classrooms by our influence, by some people's code-switching if they need that, which can lead to macro changes.

Echoing Sandra, Karen, an experienced elementary music educator, said,

> I choose to teach each of my students so that they can also see equity and know that they are valued. So, however that has to be done, that's what I'm going to do for my students. Teaching *is* activism right now.

For many participants who aligned with code-switching as a frame, there was a resonant relation among the social cause, the subject matter, and its perceived value for classroom inclusivity. This superseded any obstacles rendered visible to implementation. H.B. 246 ignited a desire in those educators who understood teaching to be a profession forwarding social progress and change.

"I Felt That So Deeply": Frame Alignment and Narrative Fidelity

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the frame of code-switching was particularly salient for participants who identified as LGBTQ+. For all those respondents, H.B. 246 was deeply personal. Take, for instance, Rosie, a novice dual-language educator. When asked how she made sense of code-switching, she responded,

> The code-switching thing, I felt that so deeply because I am bisexual. I don't hide this anywhere except my job. I do not feel that it is safe for me to reveal that to all of my coworkers. My kids would be like "That's awesome, miss." It's my coworkers who now have to be OK with it.

Here, alignment exists given Rosie's experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity as a bisexual educator navigating her role. Although she acknowledged the ease she may have with her early adolescent students knowing her sexual identity, she worries about how her colleagues would react to her bisexuality.

For others, such as Roxie, a transgender upper elementary veteran educator, the frame resonated both personally and professionally. In reflecting on the bill writ large and the impetus for some to code-switch, Roxie explained,

> I think my queer kids felt really comfortable this year because they know that I share their identity. I "share one of the letters," as they say, and so that was a different kind of teaching experience. Even my kids who don't "share the letters," they were much more willing to talk and question and ask. It was because of H.B. 246. So, I do agree that kids are better served by people who actually believe in what they're teaching, more so than people who are just reading the curriculum and going, "OK, here's a video. OK, here's Harvey Milk. Here's Lori Lightfoot. Fill out the worksheet. Here's another video. Fill out the worksheet." No, this is not that for me. This is my history. This is personal.

As evidenced, Roxie not only found resonance with the bill given that they "share one of the letters," but also because the content that was driving the work their school and district were doing was grounded in local LGBTQ+ history. Indeed, as Roxie explained in their approximation of how some would follow the curricular script, they recognized the perceived friction some may have. Like Roxie, other respondents were quite open about how the act of code-switching may be a friction for some. A veteran elementary music educator, Michelle said,

> It makes me just want to say, "I'm sorry that your little world is disappearing, but
> your world is still there." They don't have to worry about people finding out about
> their sexuality at work. Every day, I walk around wondering if someone will even ask
> about my partner. They just avoid the topic, my wife, completely.

As shown, Roxie, Michelle, and Rosie—and countless other LGBTQ+-identifying participants we interviewed—stood firm in articulating that code-switching and the contents included in H.B. 246 were personal.

Dissonant Dimensions of What, Who, and Where "We" Teach: Detailing Educators' Frictions with the Framing

Whereas many participants found alignment with code-switching given its goal of advancing justice through inclusion, others found the framing problematic. Indeed, some responded that they found the facilitator's framing of H.B. 246 and the action of code-switching dissonant with how they understood their role as teachers. Code-switching, in short, was too abstract and distant from participants' everyday reality and was oppositional to what they found to be true in their schools and school communities.

"I Don't Know if This Is My Job": Making Sense of Professional Responsibility

For many respondents, regardless of how many years they had been teaching, discussing H.B. 246 and the facilitator's demand to code-switch brought up deep feelings about how they understood their occupational role as an educator. Indeed, for some, code-switching became a lens through which to voice the occupational constraints generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As Deirdre, an early career middle-grades educator, reported, "Well, now, because of the pandemic, we stay within the standards—reading and math—and generally, I follow those." Noting how the pandemic shifted her perspective of the profession, instruction, and her occupational responsibility, she continued by saying,

> My classroom is modified, and my curriculum was modified to a great extent. I do
> follow the curriculum. We have assigned textbooks and slides that we use. I just
> follow that. I guess I do what I am told to do. That's how I understand my job these
> days. I don't know if this [H.B. 246] is my job right now.

Regardless of H.B. 246 being law, questions of whether to teach in LGBT-inclusive ways were somewhat ubiquitous among participants. Gina, an experienced elementary educator, detailed how other teachers in her school may approach implementing the policy: "There are teachers here who either teach what they were taught or teach what they are told to teach. I think, for some, they will do it because it's now, well, it's like the video said: It's their job."

Outside of making sense of code-switching through their understandings of their roles as teachers, many respondents relayed their hesitancy and friction with the prognostic frame and the webinar facilitator's assertion that "it [H.B. 246] is the law." For example, Janelle, an early career elementary special educator, noted, "There's definitely an age level for certain things, especially when you're talking about people being persecuted and whatnot. Who are they to tell me?" When asked to extend her thinking surrounding age and readiness, she replied, "There's just some things you don't want to startle children with. I think this does that." Tim, an early career second-grade teacher, echoed Janelle's commentary:

> The only thing that sprang to my mind, that continues to give me a pause, is what
> truly is my role with such a young group? I've been thinking a lot about that since
> taking the survey. How far do I go? What is an appropriate level for 7- and 8-year-

olds? We talk about the differences in families. I show gay families, families with two moms or two dads. I just don't know. They're so young. What is my role as a primary-years teacher?

Tim's response points to a critical friction in the participants' sensemaking surrounding H.B. 246: What counts as controversy when teaching elementary-age children? Christina, a novice pre-K educator, responded with the following reflection:

I think it's a little intimidating for first-year teachers or teachers who are beginning. This is only my second year. How do we go about effectively implementing this type of environment to our students without offending families? Because at the end of the day, these are their children.

Unlike other respondents, Christina worked in a district that readily implemented H.B. 246. When asked about what these shifts, both curricular and interpersonal, required, she said,

I was a little…scared and awkward when I first started introducing these books in our family unit. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, who is going to come for me?" I mean, they're going to give backlash. Somebody's going to yell at me in front of the students right then and there. Or, I'm going to get an email…that's basically what's going to happen. You can't code-switch for somebody else. This can be controversial.

These sentiments of misalignment, however, became more nuanced for participants depending not only on where they taught but also on how they anticipated responses from the communities they served.

Frame Frictions as a Function of Perceptions of Place and Parents

The inherent friction among educators regarding the personal act of code-switching and the implementation of (real or perceived) H.B. 246 manifested, for some, as a result of their perceptions of place. Indeed, messaging from their immediate environments mattered. As noted by participants, school- and district-wide attitudes and cultures surrounding LGBTQ+ inclusion, or including and responding to other diverse social issues and contemporary movements more broadly (e.g., Black Lives Matter), rendered many educators fearful of "teaching politics." As such, during the interviews, many participants used code-switching to assess the frame's experiential commensurability for their particular communities.

Teachers voiced concerns that their school district and community were "not ready" to incorporate discussions of the LGBT community due to widespread conceptions about the relative appropriateness of LGBTQ+ topics and themes in schools. Sarah, a veteran first-grade educator, offered the following:

I don't think that our district is ready for this conversation, and I don't know that folks who work in social work or public health, or whoever these people are, really have the skill sets to lead and guide teachers in the way to have these conversations and, more importantly, in the way to approach them and teach them that is appropriate here. The tone of our district, I don't see that being a thing. I feel unsafe to talk about it at all. I can't code-switch.

As evidenced by Sarah, more broadly, friction with code-switching and H.B. 246 was a function of her perception of the district-wide culture and attitudes surrounding LGBTQ+-related issues.

For other educators we interviewed, concerns that the district would not receive the policy well due to dissonance and disapproval of LGBTQ+-related themes were compounded by empirical evidence from previous mismanagement of LGBT-inclusive issues. For instance, Alex, an early career second-grade teacher, reported,

> I think in regard to this district, the climate is not one of inclusivity, even if we have students who identify as LGBT. We had a few instances where there has been an issue brought up at a board meeting about someone, a child, who presents a certain way, and how do they use the bathroom or which bathroom do they use? Transgender issues, we found out that this place isn't ready for this. These issues come up, and they are quickly dealt with privately or dealt with in a way that feel very secretive.

Citing a relevant example of the treatment and regard for a transgender student, Alex, like Sarah, viewed the implications of H.B. 246 in light of the reluctance, real or otherwise, of their school district's responsiveness to LGBT inclusion. Although unique to these participants' experiences, many who found friction with the framing of code-switching concluded that their district and school communities would not embrace H.B. 246 and its vision of inclusion.

Frame Misalignment as a Function of Faculty and District Leadership Pushback

In tandem with district concerns about underlying attitudes surrounding LGBT matters, some participants conveyed concerns about the potential for pushback among their faculty and school administrators. Some educators noted that faculty colleagues might hesitate or refuse to implement H.B. 246 because of their personal religious beliefs. Erika, an elementary music educator, for instance, stated, "I would expect there would be some very vocal dissent from my peers. Saying that they will not compromise their religious beliefs for school even if it is law. They'd laugh at this code-switching thing." Illustrating a common refrain for frame misalignment, Erika anticipated that her colleagues would be unlikely agents of inclusive change if it meant that they had to teach in ways that violated their personal religious beliefs.

Amplified by how surrounding districts and school communities responded to instruction during COVID-19, the impetus to act and implement H.B. 246 came with a number of questions concerning school leadership. "How are families going to respond to principals? What will they say to school leaders?" asked Sidney, a novice elementary special educator. She continued,

> It's more than individuals not being supportive. It's "Well, is this my place to talk about it? Is this what we should be teaching? Will my principal back me up?" I think it is more about how people are going to feel. Is this my job, as a teacher, to teach this? I felt that way about COVID. I didn't think we should have moved to hybrid so quick. It was scary, but I did it. I did it because I was told it was my job and that it was what the district told parents.

Nonetheless, it is apparent that the overwhelming threat of evoking public retaliation across their school district remained a prominent source of anxiety for educators in their implementation of H.B. 246.

Some educators anticipated that the sustained political climate and tension within their schools would dissuade school leaders from implementing H.B. 246 or highlight code-switching as a strategy for forwarding LGBT inclusion. David, an early career special educator, offered,

> With the Trumpism that is happening and all this conflict, this divide, these dichotomies, a lot of this…is a political divide. It's teaching politics even if it isn't. And our building leaders feel that these are just liberal propagandas, these policies

> that are being pushed out on us. That's where I see some of the animosity coming
> from: the principals!

For David, widespread political agitations within the school building created a tense climate for discussing social issues during the 2020–2021 academic year. These issues, as noted in his interview, have typically been portrayed as propaganda or indoctrination of a particular political agenda. As a result, he believed that educators may be unlikely to code-switch or adopt the curricular changes proposed by H.B. 246, because they perceive their surrounding school environments to be unfavorable on the basis of underlying religious, political, or ideological antipathies.

Others, such as Jolene, a veteran middle-grades science educator, were also quite apprehensive about implementing H.B. 246 given the political backdrop and system of surveillance forwarded during remote schooling. "I think teachers are very, very careful now," Jolene explained.

> This code-switching thing is interesting. Even if somebody doesn't think the way I
> do, like if they think kids shouldn't know this stuff, I think most will shy away from
> it not because of what they believe but because it could be controversial to families.

When asked what she meant by "controversial," she declared, "Everything we're teaching now is online for the parents to see. They are just right there. Principals, too. I had one [school leader] just slip in my Zoom room. I am always watched."

Taken together, these reflections demonstrate how educators' hesitations in implementation or even to question code-switching as a frame for forwarding individual action and LGBT inclusion was a result of lack of backup from district leaders. Added to the heightened visibility of the curriculum, H.B. 246 and the frame of code-switching became dissonant when educators understood the practice and policy as politically contentious.

Frame Friction as a Function of Relevance

Although not as prevalent as the frictions framing participants' sensemaking of the profession or the perceived pushbacks based on where they taught (e.g., district and school community) and who they served (e.g., principals, administrators, families, caregivers), dissonance with H.B. 246 as a policy and, more specifically, the concept of code-switching was due to its perceived irrelevance both to the curriculum amid the COVID-19 pandemic and to the sustained sociopolitical backdrop of racial unrest. Indeed, some interviewees asserted that although LGBT issues were serious matters worthy of conversation, they should be "sidelined for now." For instance, Crystal, an early career first-grade teacher, asserted, "It's just not a priority for me. It's sidelined for now." For clarification, she added,

> I have a new history curriculum I am doing. It's called Black 365, and I think, you
> know, given with where we are as a country, this is what I have to do right now. I
> have to do race. I can't do gender or LGBTQ+. I teach Black children. I need them
> to know they are loved.

Recognizing how this particular academic year, bookended by sustained anti-Blackness and the murder of George Floyd, affected her instruction, Crystal's misalignment with H.B. 246 was its perceived lack of relevance. Although one can unpack how race, gender, and sexuality are intersecting axes of power and oppression, and gender and sexuality indeed impact race just as race shapes gender and sexuality, her friction with the framing was on its place in the curriculum at this particular pedagogical moment, on deciphering what she believed was needed "right now."

Unlike Crystal, others saw code-switching and the broader bill as irrelevant given the content they taught. Take, for instance, Chya, an experienced special educator. When asked how she made

sense of the webinar facilitator's demand to code-switch, she said, "I mean, this isn't for me. It doesn't matter my personal views. I don't teach the curriculum like this. I add support services." Similar to Chya, some specials teachers we interviewed also saw the framing of code-switching and H.B. 246 as lacking relevance to their curriculum. "I mean, I teach line and color with [the work of] Keith Haring," responded Dwayne, a veteran art educator, "but I don't teach that he was gay or that he had AIDS. I teach art, you know, the content. It's just not relevant to me."

Although each of these responses are complicated—indeed, it would be easy to highlight how Haring, for instance, was a celebrated queer artist whose art provided social commentary regarding youth culture and sexuality or how the Black Lives Matter movement is spearheaded by queer women of color—tensions with H.B. 246 and the act of code-switching remained under scrutiny given its timing of implementation. Regardless of participants' personal beliefs about teaching LGBTQ+ topics, for some, their misalignment with the frame was not because of its goal or broader impetus (i.e., LGBT inclusion), but its "right now" relevance.

Discussion

Code-switching was first delivered as a prognostic frame and solution in the "Deeping Our History" webinar hosted by the Illinois Safe School Alliance in August 2020 and remains a core professional development component and steadfast strategy from the organization in implementing H.B. 246. In April 2023, the overarching Inclusive Curriculum Advisory Council of Illinois released an updated implementation guide, which includes code-switching. Although some of the initial Illinois Safe School Alliance's "Deepening Our History" webinar language (e.g., "It is the law") was weakened or redacted, the guidance document maintains that personal bias is one of the central obstacles to policy implementation:

> In the context of building an inclusive school environment, this separation [of one's personal beliefs from one's professional responsibility] prioritizes students and their learning experience. This might mean having to evaluate one's own personal beliefs and determine how they manifest themselves in the classroom. (Inclusive Curriculum Advisory Council of Illinois, 2023, p. 24)

As our findings suggest, however, this act of sensegiving through the frame of code-switching is fraught. In this section, we talk across our findings to shed light on how implementing the LGBT-inclusive policy required educators to take on roles as advocates, activists, and antagonists of implementation. In so doing, we shed light on how this work on individual sensemaking and framing joins that of others who have examined the politics and precarity of LGBTQ+-inclusive educational policy.

Activists, Antagonists, and Advocates: How Policy Mediates LGBTQ+ Inclusive Practice

What sense teachers in our study made of code-switching was ultimately linked to how they understood what was asked of them personally and professionally and how it aligned with either what they believed to be true (i.e., narrative fidelity) or what they experienced at work (i.e., empirical credibility) regarding the problem space of LGBTQ+ inclusion. Indeed, the subjective meanings that participants associated with their inclusive education directly resulted from their perceptions surrounding their school cultures and communities. As a result, problem framing, refracted here through the webinar, not only shaped the direction of proposed solutions but also played an essential role in enabling and coordinating action toward these ends. Throughout participant interviews, we saw educators seeking to adapt, adopt, or reject messages about LGBT inclusion, which transformed into the taking on of roles of policy activist, advocate, or antagonist.

As the literature in sensemaking suggests, situational contexts and environs lead individuals to develop, establish, and maintain particular identities, especially when they align their behavior with frames that correspond to specific movements or justice-oriented aims (Weick, 1995). Accordingly, several educators in this study, whether due to their own intersecting identities or how they understood their role as teachers more broadly, took an activist-oriented role in implementing H.B. 246. Experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity provided the necessary resources for frame alignment for these participants. Perhaps because they self-identified as LGBTQ+, believed in code-switching and the fact that H.B. 246 was now law, or personally experienced discrimination or persecution within their educational communities and were more attuned to the crucial nature of LGBT inclusion in school environments, code-switching—in the words of some of our participants—"made sense." These educators made sense of code-switching and, more broadly, H.B. 246 as an invitation to shift and change instruction immediately, or as some teachers put it, to "actually make it [teaching] political." As in other work showcasing how individual teachers have been tackling queer inclusion (see, e.g., Blackburn et al., 2018; Hermann-Wilmarth et al., 2017; Leonardi & Staley, 2021), our group saw H.B. 246 as an inroad into combating structural inequity and institutional oppression.

Other educators who may have lacked the experiential commensurability of their LGBTQ+ counterparts but held narrative fidelity with recognizing LGBT inclusion as purposeful and necessary can be understood as holding an advocate orientation. These individuals, with complicating tensions surrounding the code-switching framing—at times aligning with the broader goal of the policy but having friction with the directive itself—understood their professional responsibility to carry out the guidelines of H.B. 246 and foster more inclusive classroom environments. These individuals discussed working toward a collective social movement via expanding their preexisting understandings of their roles as educators and practicing allyship with LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and community members.

The role of advocate, however, is complicated. Although we do not have evidence to confirm educators' lack of direct action in forwarding LGBT inclusion, and at the time of our study several had not heard of the bill, research has suggested that even for teachers who engaged in gender and sexual diversity professional development, few worked to disrupt the environmental structures and conditions that create homophobic and heterosexist school cultures (Meyer et al., 2015; Smith & Payne, 2016). Indeed, we felt this tension in analyzing and rereading interview transcripts of those participants who outwardly aligned with the goal of inclusive education but hesitated to counter colleagues, caregivers, or district leaders who opposed such professional development or questioned its implementation. As Caleb, an experienced first-grade teacher, said, "I feel good to be somewhere where everyone is doing it, where we say, 'Yes, it's important.' If I was somewhere else, somewhere where it was not as popular, I would think, Yes, this is important, but I cannot act."

Antagonists, unlike activists and advocates, thwarted policy implementation. These individuals actively opposed the logistical and organizational implementation of the bill and demonstrated a fundamental dissonance with code-switching. Many of these educators exhibited a lack of experiential commensurability, such that H.B. 246 and LGBT inclusion felt too distant and irrelevant for them to justify efforts to implement curricular changes. Other educators whom we classified as antagonists demonstrated opposing empirical credibility, such that they interpreted their environments and beliefs as fundamentally opposed to implementing H.B. 246 via code-switching.

For some, however, their misalignment with code-switching and their antagonism toward H.B. 246 were because they, quite literally, did not see its relevance to their content area. For instance, Dwayne, the art teacher we interviewed, argued that Haring's impact and work in the early years' art classroom stopped with line and color. As recent research has suggested, Haring's art can

be a catalyst in early- and middle-grades art to teach artistic form, raise social awareness surrounding LGBTQ+ people, and underscore Haring's impact on U.S. history (Campos, 2023). From this perspective, antagonists felt dissonance with the code-switching frame given their lack of awareness surrounding the pedagogical "so what?"—a common refrain in pre-K–12 educational policy implementation.

Other policy antagonists, however, were more outright with how their beliefs were challenged. Indeed, these individuals confirmed what previous scholarship has demonstrated insofar as they rejected H.B. 246 solely because of their attitudinal dispositions and biases against LGBTQ+ individuals (Athanases & Larrabee, 2003). Regardless, working under an LGBT-inclusive policy is complicated. As Leonardi (2017) found in working with California teachers implementing the FAIR Education Act, for instance, heteronormativity consistently worked as a "normalizing discourse that limited what teachers believed they were able to do and endorse" (p. 695). Thus, even with the personal task and action of code-switching, the structural systems that support cis-heterosexism, transphobia, and homophobia in schools are sustained.

Policy Distractions and the Personal Precarity of Individual Action

The Illinois Safe Schools Alliance's broader effort and trickle-down strategy, with code-switching as a frame, was stopped short, as many participants cited various reasons why it aligned or did not align with their personal beliefs or their broader school contexts, communities, and district environments. Upon closer examination, however, it is necessary to explore how or why code-switching remains lackluster as an effort of implementation. In short, it operates as what Farley et al. (2021) called a "political distraction": something that obscures "a deeper understanding of the policy context…the lived experiences of students, families, and communities," while diverting "attention from root causes, complex structural forces, and historical and contextual circumstances" (p. 168). Indeed, code-switching distracted participants from broader structural and systemic issues (e.g., anti-transgender legislation, sustained anti-Blackness) in 2020, just as it does now in 2024. Code-switching as a frame for inclusive education suggests ideological solutions at the individual level without dealing with the structural and material realities of unequal schooling for LGBTQ+ youth or our current socio-political context. As McQuillan and colleagues have recently argued (2024), even though "Illinois embedded policy protections and guidance across multiple levers of their educational system, administrators, educators, and students have struggled to resist the most recent period of retrenchment pushing anti-LGBTQ bills and local policies" (McQuillan et al., 2024, p. 34). The promise of code-switching, thus, was and remains a paradox.

Conclusion

Debates surrounding LGBTQ+ inclusion in public schools have only grown since Illinois's first year of policy implementation. Since the 2020–2021 academic year, numerous laws—from banning gender-affirming care to censoring school curricula for including topics of gender and sexual diversity—have come to fruition across the country. For instance, 2023 saw over 520 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced in state legislatures, a new historical record (Peele, 2023). Nonetheless, it is important to note that these forms of curricular controversy do not stop at the level of LGBTQ+ inclusion but are congruent with and interconnected to sustained forms of anti-Blackness, the ascendancy of Christian nationalism, and white supremacy.

In light of these more contemporary phenomena, we close by arguing that problem framing, especially with frames that advance sensegiving, directly impacts the way policies are taken up and implemented (e.g., frame alignment) or how they are discarded and disavowed (e.g., frame misalignment). These messages from external non-system agents matter, especially in precarious

contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein how teachers adopted, adapted, or ignored messages shaped how they took up their roles as policy advocates, activists, or antagonists. Given this, we believe the work presented here builds on and extends critical conversations concerning LGBTQ+ policy today in new and innovative ways. In leveraging frame analysis and individual sensemaking, we were able to not only illuminate micro processes of problem framing during implementation but also trace what sense teachers made in terms of the role of authority, both of the non-system agent guiding the interactive process of sensemaking and also of its more significant meaning and uptake in schools. Ultimately, we underscored how framing activities shaped not only the direction of implementation but also what consequences for motivation, coordination of individual action, and configurations of professional identity and practices were imbued therein.

Acknowledgements

References

Aspen Education & Society Program. (2015). *Roles and responsibilities of the state education agency*. The Aspen Institute. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/roles-responsibilities-state-education-agency/

Athanases, S. Z., & Larrabee, T. G. (2003). Toward a consistent stance in teaching for equity: Learning to advocate for lesbian- and gay-identified youth. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *19*(2), 237–261. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(02)00098-7

Attie, A. (2020, January 7). Queering the curriculum. *South Side Weekly*. https://southsideweekly.com/queering-the-curriculum-lgbtq-history-classroom/

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. The University of Chicago Press.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *26*, 611–639. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611

Binder, A. J. (2002). *Contentious curricula: Afrocentrism and creationism in American public schools*. Princeton University Press.

Blackburn, M. V., Clark, C. T., & Schey, R. (with Penn, J. I., Johnson, C., Williams, J., Sutton, D., Swensen, K., & Vanderhule, L.). (2018). *Stepping up! Teachers advocating for sexual and gender diversity in schools*. Routledge.

Campos, D. (2023). Using art in social studies: The extraordinary Keith Haring. *Middle Level Learning*, *77*(May/June), 2–10. https://www.socialstudies.org/middle-level-learning/77/using-art-social-studies-extraordinary-keith-haring

Clark, C. H., Schmeichel, M., & Garrett, H. J. (2020). Social studies teacher perceptions of news source credibility. *Educational Researcher*, *49*(4), 262–272. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20909823

Coburn, C. E. (2006). Framing the problem of reading instruction: Using frame analysis to uncover the microprocesses of policy implementation. *American Educational Research Journal*, *43*(3), 343–349. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312043003343

Cohen, D. K. (1990). A revolution in one classroom: The case of Mrs. Oublier. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *12*(3), 311–329. https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737012003311

Cress, D. M., & Snow, D. A. (2000). The outcomes of homeless mobilization: The influence of organization, disruption, political mediation, and framing. *American Journal of Sociology*, *105*(4), 1063–1104. https://doi.org/10.1086/210399

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2010). *The new lives of teachers*. Routledge.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. The University of Chicago Press.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(4), 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

Farley, A. N., Leonardi, B., & Donnor, J. K. (2021). Perpetuating inequalities: The role of political distraction in education policy. *Educational Policy*, *35*(2), 163–179. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904820987992

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). Helping novices learn to teach: Lessons from an exemplary support teacher. *Journal of Teacher Education, 52*(1), 17-30. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487101052001003

Gioia, D. A., & Chittipeddi, K. (1991). Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, *12*(6), 433–448. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250120604

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.

Hermann-Wilmarth, J. M., Lannen, R., & Ryan, C. L. (2017). Critical literacy and transgender topics in an upper elementary classroom: A portrait of possibility. *Journal of Language & Literacy Education*, *13*(1), 15–27. http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/15-27_JoLLE2016_236_Hermann-Wilmarth-Lannen-Ryan_Ready.pdf

Illinois Human Rights Act, 775 Ill. Comp. Stat. §§ 5/1-101–5/10-104 (1979). https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs5.asp?ActID=2266

Inclusive Curriculum Advisory Council of Illinois. (2023). *Inclusive curriculum implementation guidance*. https://phimc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ICACI_ImplementationGuidance.pdf

Inclusive Curriculum Law, H.B. 246, § 5 (IL 2019). https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/101/HB/10100HB0246.htm

Johnston, H. (1995). A methodology for frame analysis: From discourse to cognitive schemata. In H. Johnston & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *Social movements and culture* (pp. 217–246). University of Minnesota Press.

Kahne, J., Rogers, J. S., & Kwako, A. (2021). Do politics in our democracy prevent schooling for our democracy? Civic education in highly partisan times. *Democracy & Education*, *29*(2), Article 3. https://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol29/iss2/3

Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., & Menard, L. (2022). *The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools*. GLSEN. https://www.glsen.org/research/2021-national-school-climate-survey

Lane, J. L. (2020). Maintaining the frame: Using frame analysis to explain teacher evaluation policy implementation. *American Educational Research Journal*, *57*(1), 5–42. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219848689

Leonardi, B. (2017). Navigating the relationship between policy and practice: Competing discourses of fear and care in teachers' sense-making about the FAIR Education Act. *Journal of Education Policy*, *32*(5), 694–716. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1320730

Leonardi, B., & Staley, S. (2021). Cultivating a queer mindset: How one elementary school teacher is rattling common sense. *Teachers College Record*, *123*(7), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812112300703

Leone, H. (2019, September 3). New law requires Illinois schools teach contributions of gay, transgender people: 'It is past time children know the names of LGBTQ+ pioneers.' *Chicago Tribune*. https://www.chicagotribune.com/2019/09/03/new-law-requires-illinois-schools-teach-contributions-of-gay-transgender-people-it-is-past-time-children-know-the-names-of-lgbtq-pioneers/

Maitlis, S., & Christianson, M. (2014). Sensemaking in organizations: Taking stock and moving forward. *Academy of Management Annals*, *8*(1), 57–125. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2014.873177

McQuillan, M. T., Lebovitz, B. A., & Harbin, L. (2024). The disruptive power of policy erasure: How state legislators and school boards fail to take up trans-affirming policies while leaning into anti-lgbtq+ policies. *Educational Policy*, *38*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048231218206

Meyer, E. J., Taylor, C., & Peter, T. (2015). Perspectives on gender and sexual diversity (GSD)-inclusive education: Comparisons between gay/lesbian/bisexual and straight educators. *Sex Education*, *15*(3), 221–234. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2014.979341

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Peele, C. (2023, May 23). *Roundup of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation advancing in states across the country* [Press release]. Human Rights Campaign. https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/roundup-of-anti-lgbtq-legislation-advancing-in-states-across-the-country

Porac, J. F., Thomas, H., & Baden-Fuller, C. (1989). Competitive groups as cognitive communities: The case of Scottish knitwear manufacturers. *Journal of Management Studies*, *26*(4), 397–416. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1989.tb00736.x

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Smith, M. J., & Payne, E. (2016). Binaries and biology: Conversations with elementary education professionals after professional development on supporting transgender students. *The Educational Forum*, *80*(1), 34–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2015.1102367

Snow, D. A., & Benford, R. D. (1988). Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization. *International Social Movement Research*, *1*, 197–217. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285098685_Ideology_Frame_Resonance_and_Participant_Mobilization

Snow, D. A., Rochford, E. B., Jr., Worden, S. K., & Benford, R. D. (1986). Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation. *American Sociological Review*, *51*(4), 464–481. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095581

Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research*, *72*(3), 387–431. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072003387

Stonewall National Museum & Archives. (2021). *Deepening our history: Implementing the Illinois Inclusive Curriculum Law and LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum* [Webinar]. https://swshop.stonewall-museum.org/product/lgbtq-inclusive-curriculum-from-stonewall-national-museum-archives/

Sunstein, B. S., & Shiseri-strater, E. (2002). *Fieldworking: Reading and writing research*. Macmillan.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. SAGE Publications.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science*, *16*(4), 409–421. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0133

About the Authors

Jon M. Wargo
University of Michigan – Ann Arbor
wargojon@umich.edu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9100-9091
Jon M. Wargo is an associate professor of educational studies in the Marsal Family School of Education at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor.

Alex Katz
Northeastern University
katz.al@northeastern.edu
Alex Katz is a graduate student in the School of Law at Northeastern University.

education policy analysis archives