

Safe Is Not Enough: Better Schools for LGBTQ Students by Michael Sadowski. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. 281 pp., \$29.00.

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The preponderance of literature related to LGBTQ youth prior to the mid-2000s tended to focus on the ways in which claiming a minority sexual or gender identity led to persistent disadvantage in American society. Schools in particular were found to be spaces where homophobia and transphobia were omnipresent, leaving queer young people with low self-esteem, high levels of fear, and numerous reports of victimization (D'Augelli et al. 2001; van Wormer and McKinney 2003). Since the mid-2000s, though, a new stream of literature has begun to explore the ways in which LGBTQ youth are resilient and in what contexts they thrive (McCormack 2012; Savin-Williams 2005). Michael Sadowski's book *Safe Is Not Enough: Better Schools for LGBTQ Students* is an important contribution to the latter tradition.

Sadowski traces the genesis of elementary and secondary school programs meant to address the needs of LGBTQ youth as being motivated by a need for safety. Given that LGBTQ youth were (and admittedly still are in 2017) in environments where they were subject to physical and psychic violence, the primary focus of sympathetic educators was to minimize said violence. Now that social attitudes are increasingly positive and legal protections are more common, Sadowski argues that a framework of safety is insufficient for today's schools to adequately support LGBTQ students. Rather, he encourages educators to go beyond a paradigm of safety through adopting curricula, developing outreach programs, and transforming school cultures to reify active support for sexual and gender minorities. Efforts such as these create an active climate of embracing LGBTQ youth instead of perfunctorily reacting to incidents of bias.

Through his examination of American elementary and secondary school programs that foster environments that go beyond promoting basic safety, Sadowski's case studies highlight several institutions that have enjoyed success in

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creating an environment where LGBTQ students are not just welcomed but a vital part of the educational experience. Sadowski highlights several secondary schools that have been successful in weaving LGBTQ issues and thinkers into the curriculum. Ms. Barber-Just's LGBTQ Literature course at Amherst High School in Massachusetts provides a powerful example of how a course can catalyze learning for all students while normalizing the discussion of sexuality and gender in schools. Her course has become one of the most popular at Amherst High, featuring queer writers such as Willa Cather, James Baldwin, Rita Mae Brown, and Virginia Woolf. Sadowski shows how Ms. Barber-Just's course has become a space where students engage in both critical thinking and identity work. Helpfully, Sadowski and his case-study subjects provide many artifacts of practice in the appendices of the book, such as Ms. Barber-Just's syllabus, for other scholar-practitioners to use in developing similar initiatives.

It is easy to conceive of an LGBTQ literature course in the liberal political context of Amherst, Massachusetts. However, Sadowski is careful to broaden his analysis beyond schools in liberal political contexts or with homogeneous student bodies, demonstrating that the inclusion of LGBTQ issues can be made manifest in many types of educational institutions. In the case of Nixa High School in the Missouri Ozarks, Sadowski shows how students in this politically conservative context can still affect change and create community. Through nurturing relationships with others in Nixa, particularly those that may find queerness morally objectionable, the school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) was able to engage in charitable work and legislative liaising. These creative responses to climate have created a space that went beyond providing safety for its members, teaching them about political activism and social change. Sadowski also presents the case of the Park City, Utah, GSA. Park City's GSA collaborated with the annual Sundance Film Festival to leverage the influx of liberal urbanites to raise funds for LGBTQ-related causes in the area. Such examples buttress Sadowski's argument that even schools in less friendly climates can move beyond promoting a safe space to creating contexts in which sexual and gender minority persons can meaningfully engage with their communities.

LGBTQ identities also intersect with race, class, and other social identities to create unique experiences; as such, LGBTQ issues can be thought of as white LGBTQ issues by default. To trouble this narrative, Sadowski also profiles schools that serve diverse student populations to demonstrate how moving beyond a safe-schools paradigm can benefit students of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly through leveraging the assets of the surrounding community. For instance, his examination of Farrington High School in Honolulu, Hawaii, a school that serves a population that is predominately low-income students of color, drew on collaborations with the community to offer accessible programming for LGBTQ students. Particularly because interested

students may have cultural and financial barriers to participating in a more formalized program, the educators at Farrington have found ways to use relationships with organizations such as the University of Hawaii and the Boys and Girls Club to start conversations about issues related to gender and sexual identity.

It is notable that *Safe Is Not Enough* provides a thorough chapter on trans student issues, particularly as such issues are likely to become the next cultural touchstone in LGBTQ rights debates. Although California has enacted a law largely accommodating to trans people's needs regarding self-identification, gaps still exist; Sadowski profiles how the Independence Continuation High School of Los Angeles has been able to use in-house policies to protect student confidentiality and self-identification while still acting in compliance with federal regulations related to identifying documents. Sadowski's examples in this chapter may be of particular use to school districts grappling with the challenges of providing inclusive spaces for trans students in the midst of conflicting societal or legal directives.

Perhaps the most innovative chapter of Sadowski's *Safe Is Not Enough* focuses on interventions in elementary schools directed at including multiple types of people and families in curricula. Traditionally thought to be too politically volatile, the introduction of elementary school students to LGBTQ issues can be executed at an age-appropriate level, as Sadowski's case studies demonstrate. Sadowski profiles two schools in Washington State that use the Welcoming Schools program, a curriculum that encourages students to think about abstract topics such as courage, respect, and compassion, particularly as they relate to gender and nonnormative behavior. The program also encourages instructors to consider who may be shown in any representations of families used in the classroom; students who are LGBTQ or who come from LGBTQ families notice such representations, which can connote whether they are validated while at school. Another powerful example of creating inclusive classrooms for young learners is Ms. Alexandra Hollet's work with her elementary school classroom in Chicago. Using the tenets of action research, an approach that encourages the researcher to create a cyclical and mutually beneficial relationship with her subjects, Ms. Hollet started to explore what issues of gender and sexuality her young students were already talking about with one another. Based on those existing interests, she convened conversations with all her students in the classroom about how others should be treated, how someone might feel if called names, and what the words they were using actually mean. Ms. Hollet's intervention created a more inclusive climate in her classroom—several of her students have chosen voluntarily to form an after-school allies club—but it also serves as a powerful example of how instructors can leverage students' own interests to bring the issues they are already discussing into the classroom environment.

Sadowski's *Safe Is Not Enough* highlights several examples of how some American schools have moved beyond the deficit-based paradigm of safety to one of

success and integration. That said, readers might be left wondering how they might go about implementing programs similar to the ones Sadowski profiles in their own educational institutions. Sadowski provides an appendix with artifacts of practice that are meant to help educators adapt resources, mentioned previously. However, it would have been preferable had Sadowski spent time within each chapter discussing how the case study exemplifies not only the theme of interest (e.g., successful GSAs in conservative contexts, integrating LGBTQ issues into elementary curricula) but also practical, generalizable directions for change in the field. The afterword of the book does not provide enough space to matters of application, and it provides little analysis of how such programs could be translated to various educational contexts beyond the ones from which they originated.

There is another tension present in Sadowski's narratives: that safe is not enough, but that some of his profiled institutions still struggle in some ways with meeting this baseline. In particular, the cases of trans students' restroom concerns at Academy for Young Writers in Brooklyn, New York, read as incomplete. How can students such as Lucas, whose story Sadowski follows in his book, hope to thrive if he is concerned with which toilet he is able to use? Of course, Sadowski advocates for more progressive bathroom policies, but this debate—although an important one—seems mired in the tradition of deficit-based examples that his narrative is trying to surpass. The unique challenges students face at Decatur High School in the Atlanta, Georgia, area are another example of Sadowski's safe-is-insufficient argument falling somewhat short. To respond to the need for dialogue expressed by their LGBTQ students, the school counselor started a regular conversation group. The student narratives included in Sadowski's book indicate that important identity work takes place in these spaces at Decatur High; however, Sadowski did not elect to explain how such an intervention is a novel practice that moves beyond providing response-based interventions for LGBTQ populations, which is anchored more in the framework of safety than in the framework of transformation he espouses.

Michael Sadowski's *Safe Is Not Enough: Better Schools for LGBTQ Students* provides many inspiring examples of elementary- and secondary-level educators creating contexts in which LGBTQ students see themselves in the curriculum, take space to explore complex questions, and engage with the larger community. Instead of asking how LGBTQ students might be kept safe at school, Sadowski urges his readers to think about how to promote holistic success for LGBTQ students through transforming their educational contexts. Such endeavors would have the benefit of creating more inclusive schools while avoiding underestimation of the capabilities and potential of LGBTQ young people. The book is highly recommended for any elementary- or secondary-level educator who has a deep interest in fostering the development of LGBTQ students. That said, readers might have to engage in the task of adapting such useful ap-

proaches to their own cultural, political, and educational contexts largely on their own. Those who are more broadly interested in LGBTQ youth development also should consider reading *Safe Is Not Enough*, as its promotion of an environment in which sexual and gender minority young people can thrive, not just merely survive, is timely and needed.

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