

Supporting Student Diversity: Evaluation of an LGBTIQ+ Ally Training Program at a Regional Australian University

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Abstract

Regional universities face unique challenges in promoting inclusiveness for minority student cohorts because they operate in less diverse social and cultural environments than metropolitan institutions. This study evaluates an LGBTIQ+ Ally program informed by Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theory to investigate the effectiveness of Ally training in meeting these challenges. Using the Kirkpatrick evaluation model, the study demonstrates the value of the Borderlands theoretical framework in delivering engaging training that increases participants' knowledge and understanding of LGBTIQ+ issues and their capacity to share knowledge and actively counter discrimination. The program's effectiveness is particularly significant given the global divide between inclusivity advocates and those resistant to diversity. Although institutional impacts are difficult to measure in a small study, evidence from semi-structured interviews with participants suggests that having a strong network of Allies has contributed to institutional change. This research confirms that training programs utilising Borderlands theory can be effective in fostering inclusive university environments for increasingly diverse student populations.

Keywords

LGBTIQ+; Ally program; Higher education; Evaluation; Diversity training.

Introduction

Australian universities increasingly acknowledge the importance of supporting LGBTIQ+ students, evidenced by the widespread implementation of Ally programs across institutions. Allies can be defined as “individuals who are intentionally preparing themselves and/or engaging in behaviors [*sic*] to reduce oppression and support members of marginalized groups” (Martinez et al., 2024, p. 115). Ally programs serve multiple student-centred purposes. At an overarching level, programs provide visible symbols of institutional commitment to inclusivity (Gremillion & Powell, 2019). Within institutions, Ally programs foster a sense of belonging through events and resources (Estrada et al., 2017). In addition, Ally programs regularly offer diversity training to students and staff that builds understanding among the broader university community of the issues LGBTIQ+ people face, and how to help deal with these issues (Skene et al., 2008). This can be more complex for regional universities, where there is often widespread community resistance to LGBTIQ+ inclusiveness (Reynish et al., 2023).

Despite the prevalence of Ally programs in educational institutions both within Australia and internationally, there is limited research evaluating their effectiveness. A literature review of Australian LGBTIQ+ students' experiences by Sharp et al. (2022) found only one article specifically examining an Ally program in a Melbourne university (Curran et al., 2007). There is also a separate, informal report about an Ally program at a university in Perth (Skene et al., 2008). This study contributes to addressing this gap.

The Central Queensland University (CQUniversity) Ally Program, introduced in 2011, has seen a number of improvements since its inception. These have included the application of insights from Anzaldúa's (1987) Borderlands theoretical framework to implement a “pedagogically sound technique to actually teach people the relevant knowledge, understanding and skills for navigating connection in somewhat new and strange educational and social spaces” (Mann, 2022, p. 1). This

study aimed to evaluate the CQUniversity Ally training by investigating participants' views and experiences using a qualitative research approach based on Kirkpatrick's (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016) model of training evaluation. Data collected via semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006). Findings reveal that participants' perspectives align with the program's aims and provide insights into the efficacy of the pedagogical approach. This is of significance for others designing Ally or other diversity education programs.

Positionality statement

One of the two researchers for this project was the CQUniversity Ally Program Coordinator, an "insider" researcher (Gremillion & Powell, 2019) who introduced the program, developed all resources, and conducted all training. This "insider" experience was valuable for aligning evaluation data with the educational objectives of the training (Gremillion & Powell, 2019); however, it created potential bias. To address this, a second researcher from the same institution with no program involvement or pre-existing relationship with the participants was brought in, balancing insider and outsider perspectives. Additionally, an independent research assistant also with no pre-existing relationship with the participants conducted the interviews and anonymised transcripts to ensure participant confidentiality.

The CQUniversity Ally Program uses the initialism LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and the many other diversities), while acknowledging its limitations across situations, timeframes, research contexts, and populations. This initialism is not intended to be definitive but is well recognised in Australia and follows the national peak body, LGBTIQ+ Health Australia (2024). This article uses varied phrasing such as "LGBTIQ+ people" or "people who identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community" and no disrespect is intended.

Design of the CQUniversity Ally Program

The CQUniversity Ally Program first offered training in 2011 at three campus locations. In 2013, availability was expanded to all locations and for distance students through utilising both asynchronous online modules and synchronous, small-group, webinar workshops. The program was intentionally designed by building on previous literature and using an appropriate educational framework. Over several years and through reflexive practice, Anzaldua's (1987) Borderlands framework became increasingly central to the training. As detailed in an article by Mann (2022), concepts from Borderlands allowed the trainer to use her own minority, or "border", identity to enhance her teaching. It also created an optimal environment for the participants for authentic learning, while empathising with the needs of any participants who were themselves minorities in the "borderlands". Lastly, it gave a framework for participants to take what they learned and enact it, whether that be in their workplace or classroom, to help tackle the issues confronted by LGBTIQ+ people within the university. These issues are unpacked below.

Acceptance, campus climate

The most immediate issue was a campus climate with a lack of inclusiveness, or even active exclusion, resulting in LGBTIQ+ people not feeling they belonged or were safe. In Australia, it has been noted that a climate of "heterosexism and cissexism ... [is] widespread on university campuses" (Ferfolja et al., 2020, p. 936). This conclusion was supported by the 2020 *Private Lives 3* report, which found that only 55% of LGBTIQ+ people felt accepted "a lot" or "always" at an educational institution (Hill et al., 2020, p. 37). An article in the Queensland daily newspaper *The Courier Mail* in 2015 reported that CQUniversity "lacked in LGBTI student consultation, providing support for transitioning students, meeting the health needs of LGBTI students, providing specific support for students who identify as non-binary ... [and had] no policy protecting intersex students

from discrimination” (Stevens, 2015). While the Ally program was already well established, this highlighted the need to change the perception of the institution.

In the United States (US), research has shown that LGBTIQ+ programs are effective in creating positive change (Finkel et al., 2003), creating a safe space for students (Formby, 2017), and/or providing a visible sign of inclusion (Brisolara, 2019; Couture & Bang, 2022).

Operating Ally programs in rural and regional universities can be particularly challenging, but this is where need is greatest. Regional areas in which CQUniversity campuses are located are typically “more socially and politically conservative communities” (Brisolara, 2019, p. 16). This conservative culture has been highlighted by news reports (Hines, 2021), including around the 2017 marriage equality postal survey, with one of the largest “no” votes coming from a significant portion of regional Queensland (Abboud, 2017). Here, legislation may be needed to “effect change in areas that may not have naturally emerged in a rural setting” (Brisolara, 2019, p. 23), such as anti-discrimination and human rights laws.

Knowledge

To support students, there needs to be an increase in general knowledge about LGBTIQ+-related terminology and issues. US research has shown both professional staff and academics report a desire for more preparation and/or professional development to improve their practices with diverse students (Couture & Bang, 2022). However, there is limited information in the literature about the ways in which Ally programs go about teaching such knowledge (Vaccaro et al., 2019; Woodford et al., 2014). Not all approaches are equally effective, with a previous Australian study noting that some initiatives resulted in “failed attempts to increase knowledge” (Waling & Roffee, 2018, p. 672). In part, this is due to the limitations of relying solely on workshop-style training (Li et al., 2023). Given that in the diversity space, trainers are often “dealing with a true lack of knowledge” (Broadhurst et al., 2018, p. 393), it is essential that facilitator preparation is “focused on pedagogy” (Catalano, 2022, p. 1).

The CQUniversity Ally Program has a strong emphasis on knowledge acquisition. Within Borderlands theory, knowledge is a powerful “*travesia*, a crossing ... knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 48). Borderlands stresses the unknown and the uncomfortable. This is acknowledged within Ally training by embracing the vagueness of knowledge, the difficulty of learning something new, the “reluctance to cross over, to make a hole in the fence and walk across, to cross the river, to take the flying leap into the dark” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 49). Knowledge is taught through an open, online micro-credential (MC) with terminology, history, and facts. The MC also presents personal stories to help increase knowledge of issues, lived experiences, discrimination, micro-aggressions, and impacts of a hetero- and cis-normative culture. As it is self-paced, those with some knowledge may progress faster than those with little, but the inclusion of integrated “low-risk” non-assessed quiz questions throughout the course ensures active engagement and helps in knowledge retention. A final short quiz allows a “pass mark” for completing the first phase of the training. Subsequently, knowledge of institutional policies, support systems, and professional boundaries is delivered in a separate online platform exclusive to CQUniversity staff and students. Finally, knowledge is put into practice through workshop-based discussions in person or via video conferencing. Here, the Borderlands framework proves instrumental in demonstrating how concepts that might naively be perceived as concrete and definite are discovered upon attempted verbalisation to be “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary [that] is in a constant state of transition” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 3).

Challenging discrimination

A more pronounced issue that exists in university settings is active discrimination. This can range from the difficult-to-call-out “experience with microaggressions [that] predicted stress and anxiety” (Thompson et al., 2021, p. 160) to verbal insults such as “a lecturer had called him ‘a tranny’” (Allen et al., 2020, p. 1083). One study found that 30% of respondents “reported being physically or psychologically harmed” (Ferfolja et al., 2020, p. 941). The effects of discrimination can be astonishingly negative on students’ abilities to study, with “27% report[ing] suffering depression, 47% anxiety and 18% limiting their socialising” (Ferfolja et al., 2020, p. 941). Moreover, there are reported impacts on attendance, assessment, and progress in their courses (Evangelista et al., 2022; Ferfolja et al., 2020; Formby, 2017).

Ally training has been shown to give participants “strategies to help them intervene effectively when homophobia occurs in their classrooms and elsewhere on campus” (Linley et al., 2016, p. 60). Skene et al. (2008) showed that training significantly improved participants’ abilities to confront inappropriate behaviour. Again, it is not always clear from the literature how these strategies were taught, although most documented training sessions were face-to-face workshops (Brisolara, 2019; Finkel et al., 2003; Gremillion & Powell, 2019; Shane, 2022) incorporating “space and time for group discussions” (Roberts & Marsh, 2022, p. 453). In these discussions, it was valuable to have a mix of Allies including both LGBTIQ+ and others (Skene et al., 2008). The CQUniversity Ally training includes role-play scenarios, where the experienced facilitator will “act out” the problematic behaviour and ask the participants to respond. Establishing a supportive environment in a small-group setting is important, again, to enable participants to embrace the “trial and error” that occurs in the borderland, leaving “the familiar and safe homeground to venture into the unknown and possibly dangerous terrain” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 13).

Challenging the institutional “status quo”

Studies have identified institutional-level issues including a lack of leadership for physical facility changes and teaching improvements (Allen et al., 2020; Broadhurst et al., 2018; Lee, 2021) as well as insufficient responsibility and funding (Jiménez et al., 2019; Skene et al., 2008). Programs cannot rely solely on volunteers (Catalano, 2022; Skene et al., 2008), particularly due to the high level of emotional labour (Catalano, 2022) that can lead to facilitator burnout (Skene et al., 2008; Sligo et al., 2023). Researchers have called for reviews of “institutional exosystems (i.e., structures and policies)” (Garvey et al., 2017, p. 815) and involvement of “upper-level administration” (Catalano, 2022, p. 5) to legitimise and embed LGBTIQ+ inclusion efforts across the institution. Embedding practice in policy is also effective in increasing institutional accountability (Lane & Thomas, 2023).

Methodology

Context and approach

A total of 74 staff and 99 students completed the Ally training in its first 13 years, with 56 staff and 14 students still registered in the network. These 70 trained Allies were invited to participate in an interview through an email to the members’ list sent by the Ally program coordinator and trainer, a trusted figure whose involvement demonstrated that the research would be a safe space. The invitation included information about the independent interviewer and how confidentiality would be ensured. Seven staff and one student volunteered. The qualitative approach aimed to examine the experiences of the participants, including the complexities that can only come from a discussion based on open-ended questions, extended responses, dialogue, and prompting from an experienced interviewer (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this project, thematic analysis followed the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006). A “theoretical or deductive or ‘top down’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83)

approach was used to elicit information about the effectiveness of the training, including any alignment to the epistemological considerations around the Borderlands framework. Additional sub-themes were identified in an “inductive or ‘bottom up’ way” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). The project, including data collection and use, was approved by the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee (23931).

A model of evaluation research

This project used the New World Kirkpatrick Model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016), a well-used training evaluation model, from the research design phase through to analysis and discussion. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) note that “there should be a conversation about the specific result that the training should support” (p. 4): that is, not just is it “nice to have” (p. 3) but to ensure the learning is relevant to the job. While this model has been critiqued by some, it is “still widely utilized due to its simplicity and practicality” (Reio et al., 2017, p. 36).

The evaluation model has four interrelated levels: Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, and Results. These levels were considered during all phases of the project, from design to analysis. The fourth level is less relevant in a higher education setting. It is designed to measure impacts on the corporate “bottom line” (Reio et al., 2017, p. 44), rather than more complex effects such as higher levels of belonging among LGBTIQ+ students and lower attrition rates. Nevertheless, the multi-faceted approach was still valuable for comprehensive evaluation.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants who had completed the Ally training at various times since the program was introduced. To inform the deductive aspect of the research, questions were asked specifically relating to Kirkpatrick’s levels. However, as mentioned above, the final level, which focuses on the training’s impact on the organisation as a whole, could not be fully assessed by participants.

Questions based on the first three levels were as follows:

1. Can you please describe the degree to which you found the training favourable, engaging and relevant to you at CQU?
2. Can you please describe what you recall from the training – how well you acquired the knowledge and skills based on your participation?
3. I would like to know your view on the degree to which you feel you have applied what you learned during the training when you are back on the job/in your course.
 - a. Can you think of any instances when you have encountered discrimination in some form, directed either at yourself or someone else? Please describe any actions you took.
 - b. Can you think of any times when someone has come to you for help and/or support around LGBTIQ+ issues? Please describe.

Data analysis

The two researchers did independent, theoretical, inductive coding of the transcripts to identify recurrent themes, and these were compared, discussed, and refined. Second, the researchers used deductive coding to identify themes within the four levels of the model and to reveal if the intended aims of the training were met, including achieving educational outcomes through incorporation of a pedagogical framework.

Results and discussion

Each level is presented separately for convenience, but, as above, there is some overlap. The discussions around achieving the aims of the training are interwoven with the results.

Level 1

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) define Level 1 as “Reaction: The degree to which participants find the training favorable, engaging, and relevant to their jobs” (p. 39). The sub-themes identified (see Table 1) in this level fell into categories of “Good” and “Need to Improve”.

Table 1

Kirkpatrick Model Level 1 Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-themes	
	Good	Need to Improve
Engagement	Discussion-based. Role-playing/use of scenarios.	Interaction, especially online.
Relevance	Role of an Ally made clear. Specific content for work environment.	Update some of the information. Identity — how to respond when someone assumes you are LGBTIQ+.
Satisfaction	Enough information at base level. Length appropriate, achievable. Easy to do, not too difficult.	Structure, overall presentation of all facets. Prior information on expectations.

The small-group, discussion-based approach proved to generally create a welcoming space:

The way that [the trainer] led the training was really a very empathic approach and very generous with her learning style. She gave space for us to get over that awkwardness and have those little jokes amongst ourselves as we were settling in. (P3)

However, for very sensitive topics, the online webinar style was not “the environment for asking the tricky questions and ... put[ting] themselves out there for the risk of ridicule, comment, or whatever” (P1).

Role-plays were effective in engaging participants, despite some discomfort: “a lot of people hear role-playing and go oh, not really me. But doing it with [the trainer], she’s very easy going, very nice, so it made it easier” (P2). It created a safe space to practice: “those interactive activities, to have that safe space to stuff it up and to maybe say something and then go, ‘oh I don’t know if that was the right word’ and catch ourselves. And maybe have a bit of a chuckle” (P3).

The role of the Ally as someone who guides people through the borderlands, rather than being an expert, was articulated: “I’m just a safe space, I’m not there to fix, I’m there to help ... something that I gained from just chatting with [the trainer]” (P8). This was key even for non-LGBTIQ+ people: “I feel a bit ... outside, like who am I to speak about it because I’m not in that space ... I don’t have the same experience as you ... [but] I’m happy to walk that journey with you” (P6). In contrast, the perception of other members of the university community clearly still needed addressing:

I think there’s a bit of an assumption from our students or our staff that are still using the service, that every single person who is performing that role and has done the training, does identify [as LGBTIQ+]. [This assumption] could actually be quite confronting. (P1)

The Ally training was shown to give enough content to bridge the divide between those who were LGBTIQ+ and those who were not: “anyone who was interested in the role who may not have personal experience, either lived ... or professional ... would have enough information with which to support a student” (P1). “I thought I had an understanding but it gave me even more and in a really easy to understand sort of way” (P8). It was noted, however, that the content was extensive and could benefit from being “restructured, maybe slightly condensed” (P2). To combat this, one participant suggested that the expectations could be made clearer before people embarked on the training: “I should have revised or reviewed things before I come [*sic*]” (P6).

Level 2

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) define Level 2 as “Learning: The degree to which participants acquire the intended knowledge, skills, attitude, confidence, and commitment” (p. 42). It is noted that as the Ally training is “opt in” for all students and staff, they already had a positive attitude which may be why no sub-theme was identified around a change in attitude. The remaining themes and sub-themes are shown in Table 2. It is also noted that participants’ learning was further evidenced by their changes in behaviour identified within the Level 3 themes.

Table 2

Kirkpatrick Model Level 2 Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-themes
Knowledge	Terminology and definitions.
Skills	How to respond to difficult situations.
Confidence	Role of an Ally.
Commitment	Further learning — went on to learn more or seek out other information, or went back to the training as a refresher.

The data showed that knowledge was improved: “there was explanation on the terminology ... got into a lot more detail when it was on Zoom” (P6). This was despite it being an ill-defined field: “even if you don’t understand everything, you know, just being able to be open to that” (P4). The findings also illustrated that everyone has something to learn: “it clarified things and some of the terms and concepts that you thought you really had a good grasp on” (P1). The online quizzes consolidated learning: “to interact with it, and the click and slide stuff ... I think those sorts of things were actually really important in terms of keeping my brain going through the material” (P5). Participants also said they were committed to further learning: “I would honestly just like a refresher” (P7).

Participants demonstrated that they understood the impacts of discrimination:

Living with [poor] mental health due to being part of one of those groups of LGBTQIA+ because of pressure they’re feeling because of being disadvantaged, because of being targeted even by lecturers. (P6)

I had a student approach me because there was an incident with another student that had an awareness ... that they were transitioning, and sort of challenged them around where they were going to go to the bathroom So this student wasn't going into the bathroom. And just imagine going to work for a whole day and not going to the bathroom because there were only those binary options. (P5)

One of the most significant aims of the Ally training was to increase participants' knowledge on how to handle difficult situations, a challenging part of navigating the borderlands: "I was like, Oh my God, where do I even begin and she's a very difficult person to speak to" (P7). Acknowledging the struggle, however, was beneficial: "I think that [the trainer] was equally encouraging to everyone to have a go and very open to people not 100% understanding or being uncertain" (P7). Participants further reported a new confidence to take action: "I'm much more affirming ... I'm far less tolerant of [inappropriate] remarks" (P3). They also valued learning new skills: "the incidental learning on how to handle those tricky conversations has been really interesting. And I think I've learned a lot about that as well" (P3).

Level 3

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) define Level 3 as "Behavior: The degree to which participants apply what they learned during training when they are back on the job" (p. 49). The data showed participants' actions post training (see Table 3). Although not explicit in the model, the participants in this study also felt some post-training activities or support were missing (Table 3).

Table 3

Kirkpatrick Model Level 3 Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-themes	
	Applications	Missing
Acceptance, campus climate	Visual indicators — campus or virtual. Updating systems — taking action to make change. Hosting or attending events.	Social interactions for Allies.
Knowledge	Talking with other people about the program. Supporting students — being a contact, talking with them about issues.	Resources to use post training.
Challenging discrimination	Countering discrimination in the workplace.	Refresher or extension training for actions.

There was evidence of how staff showed visible signs of the program in person: "seeing the rainbow card on my door, they know that it's a safe space" (P1), or online: "add little Ally thing and my pronouns to my email signature" (P7). The actions extended to making changes in systems and processes: "if I see something that has a 'she/he' or an assumed gender, I'll usually quietly go and just change it to a they or them ... especially with email templates going out to students" (P7). Also impactful was being involved in events "like our Rainbow Pancake Breakfast" (P1), "being involved in ... IDAHOBIT [International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex Discrimination, and Transphobia] and wear purple" (P4). However, participants suggested events just for Allies to meet each other would be beneficial: "maybe a campus group, so that people can meet up" (P6), "it would be really nice to maybe chat with some other student Allies" (P8).

Participants shared their knowledge by engaging with other staff: "like making sure that other people and other staff members (on campus) know that there are Allies" (P4), and in supporting students: "the fact that they knew to reach out and ask another staff member, well that's a positive" (P1). They felt more resources would be helpful: "having the sub threads or whatever being good resources or something. Someone finds a good video ... then you can be like, 'I think this is really good and it could start discussion about it'" (P7).

The participants provided many examples of facing up to discrimination in the workplace using the skills they had learned in the training. They felt empowered to act, but to do so with empathy, while controlling internal defensive impulses:

And because we can't go around chopping people up with swords, we need to just educate people you know ... there's a little ah-ha moments for people where they might ... just think a little bit differently next time they address something. (P8)

I definitely felt empowered afterwards and like ... in a soft and encouraging way ... that's probably been the coolest thing ... even outside of this learning experience ... It's actually that you know, the methodology of positive influential discussions that can actually apply to any kind of other systemic minorities. (P3)

However, there were still situations that participants found challenging. Two of such challenges are illustrated in these examples:

[My supervisor] doesn't really understand non-binary or trans. There's always the comments, "He, him, shim, bim, dim" thing when they try to be like, "What are your pronouns?" [It] feels really mean to point him out, but because he is of an older generation, there's a lot more taboo, a lot more misinformation, a lot more stereotypes around the community. (P2)

With the latest IDAHOBIT campaign, it was amazing. We had that beautiful image on the screen savers. And I had one person say, "What's this shit all over our screens?" ... The tone was really upsetting. (P5)

Participants suggested that adding opportunities to discuss "how are we going? What have our experiences been? Good, bad, negative" (P4) might help with upskilling in the complex borderlands environment in which Allies are working.

Level 4

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) state that when it comes to training, the "job is not done until its contribution to business results can be demonstrated" (p. 60). Level 4 is defined as "Results: The degree to which targeted outcomes occur as a result of the training" (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 60). As mentioned above, this level was challenging for participants to evaluate from their perspective as non-executives, and hence deductive input was contributed by the researchers. Two staff members, in particular, gave insights that were considered indicative of the "results", or lack thereof, at an institutional level. One staff member noted "a lack of I would say visibility or resourcing from the university really" (P3). They went on to question the precarity of the existing Ally program and training that has been running for over a decade but is still not in the official, operational plan of the institution:

Part of me wonders that as long as we have [trainer] here, people will always go to [her] because she's so well known in our community ... who's that next person in the institution that would really drive those messages It's not like it's specifically tasked anywhere. ... I don't think that was fully recognised by the senior executive. It can't just be [trainer] everywhere doing everything. I think what would really be great is if we had

someone who had the time to, and some resourcing to invest in it. But if the university is really real about it, it can't just be done in someone's spare time or weekends. There's no leverage, like we don't get the Vice-Chancellor there. For us to be an engaged university, there's all these events happening in local communities but I don't know if CQU really puts themselves out there ... and we don't invest in staff to support them either. (P3)

This position was also supported by another staff member:

[Trainer is] only one person, and I know over the years she's strengthening her Allies and her connections and process and policy, but I still feel like there needs to be a more intentional line of reporting ... it's great we've got guidelines and things like that. But I haven't seen significant policy and facility shifts in 10 years. We need something within our hierarchy, within our systems, to increase the intentional work that's being done by the network. We don't have a person within the organisation that that's their core business ... I think that's a big ask for someone to be doing that over and above their core business. (P5)

The researchers took the perspective that institution-wide results would require more commitment from the university executive. At the time of this research, however, the Ally Program Coordinator was well and truly in the borderlands: “There is no one who will feed the yearning. Face it. You will have to do, do it yourself. And all around you a vast terrain. Alone” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 165). For 13 years, she had resigned herself to this fact.

Epistemic contributions and systemic impacts

Informed by this study's findings, the coordinator of the Ally program has revised the training to address the areas identified as needing improvement, or missing, while further strengthening the influence of Borderlands theory in the educational design of the program. For the program designer and facilitator, Anzaldua's words encapsulate the ethos of the training: “I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 81).

Most substantially, the persistence of the coordinator, and her unwavering belief in the profound importance of the program, despite existing in the borderlands, an uneasy “underworld”, has largely contributed to real, systemic change. “Don't give in *mi prietita*¹; tighten your belt, endure” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 202). Thirteen years after the first training was held, and with the support of evidence from this evaluation, the CQUniversity Ally Program was officially instated in the university's operational plan and now has a 0.5 full-time equivalent staff position. Importantly, the person currently in this position is on a regional campus and can foster a safer environment for students and staff in regional areas. In addition, this official position increases the promotion of CQUniversity as a leader in LGBTIQ+ inclusion in regional areas, as mentioned above, where intolerance and hate persist.

¹ Literally translated, this means “my little black girl”. Metaphorically, it represents an outcast, someone different, who has to fight for rights, even the right to exist, that have been taken away by a more dominant culture, in that case the *Gringos*, or white people, in an effort to subdue and suppress anyone seen as lesser (Ripoll, 2020).

Conclusion

Evaluation of the data using the Kirkpatrick Model has demonstrated that the Ally program and training has met its aims. It has improved the campus climate through events and visual indicators of inclusion. It has increased knowledge around LGBTIQ+ issues and terminology, successfully sharing that knowledge with a wider institutional audience. Acknowledging the difficulties in traversing such a borderland can prepare Allies for the journey, and active, instructor-led guidance reinforces this readiness. Finally, advice to others in areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion is that offering training with a strong pedagogical framework, and gathering evidence of its effectiveness, can result in change both for individuals and for the wider organisation. It may take one person at a time, but “I change myself, I change the world” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 70).

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