



Moving Beyond the Rainbow

June 23, 2022 by Educator Barnes

Earlier this month, I attended a going-away party for a friend. My friend also invited my husband and sons to come along as well. Inside the place where the party was held, there were rainbow flags everywhere. As I was talking to the man at the front desk to determine the location of the party inside the building, one of my sons tapped my arm. He said, "Why are all these rainbow flags everywhere?" I told him I would explain on the way home.

Not only does an elephant not forget, but neither does an inquisitive child. He reminded me that I promised to explain as I was stepping into my vehicle, and I did to both him and his brother. I asked him if he had heard of the word pride. He said he had but it wasn't the definition associated with the rainbow design. He described it as bragging or being boastful. I told him that pride, as related to the flags, was about being proud of who you are even if that is contrary to people's beliefs of how you should live. Then I asked if he knew what the letters in LGBTQIA meant. He did not know. After my husband and I went through all of the letters, we also explained that some people attend pride events to show they are an allies and support people being themselves. Before I was able to continue, he interrupted and said, "What else do people do besides go to events and hang up rainbow flags?"

This question should not have caught me off guard. My husband, sons, and I are Black. When Black history month comes along, everyone knows I will harp on the fact that Black history is more than a month; it is 365. Additionally, I state we must do more than learn history. We must take action to ensure better outcomes for Black people. It is not only Black History Month that my family hears this. They heard it last month in May during Asian and Pacific Islander Month. They heard it in November during Native American Heritage Month. They heard it from September 15 to October 15 during Hispanic Heritage Month. Additionally, during these months, we talk about intersectionality. We have cousins who are Afro-Latino and who are Black and Korean.

I should not have been surprised by this question, but it made me think about what we are really doing and if it is making an impact. If you look at businesses and organizations, including schools, you will see that many have changed their logos to have a rainbow design. Some even posted a colorful post that said, "Happy Pride Month!" on June 1. Some organizations even had representatives at the pride parade, and of course, those attendees had to post the obligatory picture on their social media accounts to prove they were at the pride parade and their organization supports people from the LGBTQIA+ community. But do they really?

If people who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community were asked, would they say their organizations where they work are safe for them to be themselves. Would LGBTQIA+ students say their school or school district is a safe place for them to be themselves? Do they feel loved and protected? If the answer is no, then the posted rainbow flags with the matching temporary rainbow styled logo does not matter.

Let's narrow in on schools. I am a heterosexual, cisgender female, and hopefully seen as an ally to the LGBTQIA+ community. I know teachers who are part of the community who have

shared horror stories. They weren't allowed to mention they were in a same-sex marriage or relationship. One was asked to take wedding photo off of display. If I can have a picture of my husband and I in my room, why couldn't this person? A few have told me they don't even mention their status, and they "live in the closet" at school because it is simply easier. Some are even scared to included LGBTQIA+ people in their curriculum as my Indy K12 colleague Andrew Pillow shared that we all can and should do. They fear being accused of indoctrinating children.

What is the impact on LGBTQIA+ students when the LGBTQIA+ teachers in their school do not feel safe in the school? These students exist in all school settings (even the religious ones). Research has shown that "LGBTQ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers." This is why it is critical that schools go beyond the rainbow flag. It really is a life and death situation. School leaders need to have a plan for addressing these students' needs instead of being reactive. Policies and procedures for sports, bathroom usage, using a chosen name, attending a school dance with a same sex partner should already exist. We must be proactive and not live in the reactive stage.

If you are in a school building and know that LGBTQIA+ staff and students do not feel safe, included, supported, or loved, be a real ally and speak up. It goes a longer way than waving a pride flag