

I was bullied as a student for being different. As much as I tried I could not fit in. I had few friends. I suffered being called names like fag. I really wasn't sure at the time what it was that was so wrong for this to be my experience. It was relentless.

How different my life would have been, my educational experience, as well as my socialization, if all of us were able to understand and respect differences. Learning that differences aren't necessarily to be feared, would have gone a long way in changing not only my life but all students.

I didn't understand and embrace who I really was as a gay man until I was 55 years old. My negative school experience, as well as my family culture contributed to that delay caused by fear.

I hope for a world where classrooms are part of the safe spaces that allow all students to share openly and with authenticity their own stories. What a change it would be if respecting differences was modeled and encouraged, even expected.

As a pastor I know the importance of safe spaces of openness and honesty without fear of retribution. Kids in my congregation thrive in those environments.

I fear that HB8 will make our classrooms in Ohio less safe for those kids on the margins. Many of them do not come from safe and stable situations at home. The student may end up in harm's way.

School may be the one place for them. Let's not make our teachers take on the extra roll of tracking and reporting who shares what in classroom discussions. Also, let us not contribute to more experiences such as mine.