

LGBT Issues in the Classroom: Things to Consider

- If you do not feel comfortable dealing with this topic in depth, you don't have to. Every teacher has to find his/her comfort level when handling issues that may be controversial in the classroom.

It may come up anyway, though. If it does, consider:

- You could very well have an LGBT student in your class. You certainly have students who know or will meet LGBT people. Some of your students will have positions of influence some day in their countries or communities. If you do nothing more than show an open and positive attitude towards this subject – and polite but clear disapproval of derogatory language – you will have an influence even if it is not apparent at the time.
- You may save your students from future embarrassment or worse by letting them know now that overtly anti-gay (or racist, misogynistic, and anti-Semitic) comments will not go over well in an American classroom.
- If students want to “debate” some aspect of this topic (e.g., same-sex marriage), consider how an LGBT student sitting in your class might feel listening to his/her classmates talk about it this way.
- If you do decide to discuss LGBT issues – and this goes for many other topics as well – make it clear that a civil tone and respectful language must be used at all times. Differences of opinion can be expressed without insulting or demonizing the other side. You may first want to model and practice some of the language of polite disagreement.

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Resources for Educators

1. Gay Lesbian Straight Educators Network (GLSEN)

GLSEN is a national organization that seeks to educate teachers, students, and the public about the damaging effect of homophobia and heterosexism on school communities. Although their work focuses on K-12, it is relevant to other educational settings.

<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/home/index.html>

To find lesson plans, curricular tools and teacher training resources, go to:

<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/educator/index.html>

2. It Gets Better Project

The It Gets Better Project's mission is to communicate to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth around the world that it gets better, and to create and inspire the changes needed to make it better for them. You can find videos, blogs, and other resources at:

<http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/>

3. StoryCorps

If you are unfamiliar with the StoryCorps oral history project and its potential as a teaching tool, you can find introductory materials on this page:

<http://storycorps.org/education/>

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Network (GLSEN), and StoryCorps have collaborated to create Unheard Voices, an oral history and curriculum project that will help educators integrate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) history and issues into their instructional programs. You can find the curriculum at:

<http://storycorps.org/education/storycorpsu/resources-for-educators/storycorps-lesson-plans/unheard-voices-curriculum/>

4. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

The HRC is the largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans. You can find information about the HRC and the issues that they are working on at:

<http://www.hrc.org/>

5. Breaking the Ice: Addressing LGBT Issues in the ESOL Classroom

A series of videos from the British Council

<http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/seminars/breaking-ice-addressing-lgbt-issues-esol-classroom>