

LGBTQ+ Voices from the Classroom: Insights for ESOL Teachers

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Description:

This 22-page article describes research into how language and identity development of LGBTQ+ students is affected by their perceptions of whether their classroom climate is accepting of sexual diversity.

Salient Points

Previous research had found that LGBTQ+ learners in heteronormative ESL classrooms may be less willing to produce meaningful language in the ESL classroom, and less likely to construct an LGBTQ+ identity in their new context. In one section of the literature review, Kaiser describes findings that show that most ESL textbooks and curriculum materials either portray a completely heteronormative world, thereby marginalizing LGBTQ+ learners, or they include LGBTQ-related controversial topics for discussion, which can “other” LGBTQ+ individuals.

In his study, Kaiser conducted interviews with LGBTQ+ ESL learners, exploring their perception of heteronormativity in the classroom climate, and the relationship between learning English and developing an LGBTQ+ identity. Despite their perception of their classrooms as progressive and caring, the absence of LGBTQ+ content in the classroom was perceived as detrimental as learners were seen to lack the authority to adequately bring up or engage with the topics. One implication of this is the need for caring, open-minded and skillful teachers who can authoritatively introduce and navigate LGBTQ+ topics (with an acknowledgment that this can be challenging as students filter their interpretations of sexuality through diverse cultural frames of reference). Another implication is the need for teachers to, both sensitively and authoritatively, reframe ESL class content (vocabulary, pragmatics, identity themes) to maximize inclusivity. This can be done, for instance, by including texts on LGBTQ+ issues, as well as by including texts that are not necessarily on LGBTQ+ issues, but are written by LGBTQ+ authors. With this article, Kaiser hopes to present options for teachers to consider as they “craft an inclusive pedagogy” within their given institutional and sociopolitical contexts.

Questions for Reflection

As you read through this document, consider the following questions:

- If one of the interviewees were a student in your classroom, would their experience have been any different from those who were interviewed? Would they encounter silence surrounding LGBTQ+ topics?
- As Mary asks in the article, why do teachers “always talk about culture and discrim[ination] – globalization and culture issues, but they don’t talk about identity issues”?

- What steps could you take to frame/reframe classroom discussions and content to ensure that LGBTQ+ learners in your classroom feel included and are given a voice?
- Do you feel you have the authority and skill-set to ensure that LGBTQ+ learners are neither marginalized nor “othered,” but are included in your classroom? Explain.

Keywords

heteronormativity, Intersection, self-disclosure, framing

Reference

Kaiser, E. (2017). LGBTQ+ Voices from the Classroom: Insights for ESOL Teachers. *The CATESOL Journal*, 29(1). Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1144365.pdf>