

# **It's Not in the Curriculum: Adult English Language Teachers and LGBTQ Topics**

## **Title and Author**

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## **Description**

This 9-page article examines ESL teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer content into their curriculum and instruction.

## **Salient Points**

While the ESL classroom can be a safe place for students to explore their cultural identities and racial topics, ESL educators can be reluctant to plan lessons or allow discussions related to sexual identity. According to the literature, teachers generally want to be inclusive, but may feel they lack expertise in issues related to sexual identity, and are unsure how to respond to homophobic comments, for instance, or how to support learners who are in the process of "coming out". When such topics unexpectedly come up, teachers often change the topic in an effort to respect the learners' cultural values – leading to the continued silence of LGBTQ learners.

Rhodes and Coda surveyed ESL/EAP instructors in college and university ESL programs to explore how they felt about including topics/materials with LGBTQ representation, and the factors that influenced their choices. They found that although some participants wanted to support LGBTQ inclusion, they faced a number of barriers: they did not feel they had the support of their teaching institution (especially if faith-based); curricular materials lacked any LGBTQ representation; they feared offending conservative or religious students; and they felt LGBTQ topics were irrelevant to course outcomes and learner interests.

Some instructors did include discussion activities based on news items related to topics such as same-sex marriage, with the goal that learners engage in civil conversations, think critically, and have some assumptions challenged. Rhodes and Coda found that some teachers viewed unplanned student-initiated discussions of LGBTQ topics as positive "teachable moments." It was very important to those teachers that such discussions were rational and respectful. Other teachers chose to change the topic to avoid emotionally charged discussions and the potential of hurt feelings and miscommunication.

One implication of the study is the need to create and disseminate a repository of materials on a variety of themes that include LGBTQ representation. A second implication is that instructors need to encourage learners to think critically about assumptions regarding sexual identity, for instance by asking "how and why" some identities are more privileged than others. A third implication is that professional

development initiatives can build teacher competence and confidence, countering the apprehension that teachers experience related to LGBTQ topics.

## Questions for Reflection

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

- Which of the obstacles to including LGBTQ representation resonate with you?
- Are you aware of materials designed for adult ESL classes that include LGBTQ representation? Have you used any of them? If you have, what has been the result?
- If you are not aware of such materials, check out the Diversity and Inclusion resources for LGBTQ2S+ learners at this link: <https://continuingeducation.norquest.ca/home/diversity-inclusion/diversity-and-inclusion-resources>). Can you see yourself using these resources?
- How have you responded to unexpected and unplanned student-initiated discussions of LGBTQ topics?
- Consider the following quote:

These spontaneous moments that arise in the classroom can be a way in which to problematize students' normative notions of gender and sexual identities.... Deconstruction can provide teachers with the ability to foster students' critical thinking in regards to students' understandings of sexual norms. Furthering inquiry in which students are asked to discuss and think about how and why certain identities are privileged over others can be a way to trouble dominant discourses such as heteronormativity. (Rhodes & Coda, 2017, p.6)

Should you, and/or how should you, "problematize students' normative notions of gender and sexual identities"? Can you give an example of using "deconstruction" to foster critical thinking around sexual identity in these unexpected and unplanned discussions?

## Keywords

*Sexual Identities, culturally responsive, learning environment, professional development, student-led, local narratives, queer identifying individuals*

## Reference

Rhodes, C. and Coda, J. (2017) It's not in the curriculum: Adult English language teachers and LGBTQ topics. *Adult Learning*, 28(1). Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317790003\\_It's\\_Not\\_in\\_the\\_Curriculum\\_Adult\\_English\\_Language\\_Teachers\\_and\\_LGBTQ\\_Topics/link/5cb1f49ba6fdcc1d49917768/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317790003_It's_Not_in_the_Curriculum_Adult_English_Language_Teachers_and_LGBTQ_Topics/link/5cb1f49ba6fdcc1d49917768/download)