
Raising awareness of LGBTQIA+ issues

Webinar handout

by Katherine Reilly

Why should we use LGBTQIA+ materials in English language classrooms?

It is important to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment where all students feel respected and represented. Thus, incorporating LGBTQIA+ perspectives into teaching materials, classroom discussions, and delivery, educators can help foster empathy, understanding, and acceptance amongst students of any background.

Despite its significance, many educators

- lack the proper training and knowledge
- have access to limited resources
- think that preparing these materials is time-consuming
- are apprehensive of using these materials

This article will explore four different areas in which teachers can incorporate LGBTQIA+ materials into their classes.

1. Language use in materials:

Issue: You use an ELT textbook that has little to no representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals or makes references to diverse and inclusive practices. Many textbooks contain heteronormative examples and exercises that assume all relationships are heterosexual. This can make LGBTQIA+ students feel invisible or marginalized.

What can we do better?

- Evaluate and adapt teaching materials to ensure they are inclusive and representative of diverse identities, including LGBTQIA+ individuals and relationships.
- Encourage students to critically analyse language use and representations in texts, promoting awareness of stereotypes and biases.
- Provide supplementary materials or create new exercises that incorporate LGBTQIA+ themes or characters to reflect the diversity of human experiences.

2. Classroom Discussion and Activities:

Issue: During a discussion about family or relationships in an English language class, you/a peer unintentionally exclude(s) LGBTQIA+ perspectives and issues.

What can we do?

- Facilitate open discussions about diverse family structures, relationships, and identities, including those of LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Incorporate literature, films, or other media featuring LGBTQIA+ characters or themes into lesson plans to stimulate discussion and promote empathy.
- Encourage students to share their own experiences and perspectives, fostering mutual understanding and respect among classmates.

3. Teacher language and behaviour

Issue: A teacher inadvertently uses language or behaviours that may be seen as insensitive or discriminatory towards LGBTQIA+ students, such as making jokes based on stereotypes or using derogatory terms.

What can we do?

- Attend or ask your school to provide professional development workshops or training sessions on LGBTQIA+ issues and promote inclusive language and behaviour.
- Establish clear guidelines and expectations for respectful communication and behaviour in the classroom, to create a safe and supportive learning environment for all.
- Reflect on your own biases and assumptions, developing a commitment to ongoing learning and growth in LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

4. Inappropriate peer interaction and bullying

Issue: An LGBTQIA+ student in an English language classroom faces bullying, harassment, or exclusion from their peers based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and reluctance to participate in class activities.

What can we do?

- Implement anti-bullying policies and interventions that specifically address harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Foster a supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and reporting incidents of bullying or discrimination.
- Facilitate peer education programs or discussions about LGBTQIA+ issues, promoting empathy and understanding among students.

A recording of Katherine's webinar can be watched here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/breaking-down-barriers-mini-event>

A free copy of her book, 'The Show Must Go On' can be downloaded here:

<https://katherinereilly.blog/2021/05/07/new-publication-the-show-must-go-on/>