

Creating a Safe and Inclusive Classroom

IN MANY WAYS, schools have become safer and more welcoming places in the past 10 years. Yet a common challenge educators still face is exactly how to support their students—how to provide safe spaces in their classrooms, and how to be inclusive of all identities.

According to results from a 2015 survey conducted by GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), many teachers still do not feel comfortable addressing bullying behavior based on sexual identity, and few incorporate LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) people and topics in their teaching. (For more on how educators address bias in schools, see page 23.)

The following resources can help educators address LGBTQ issues in their classrooms and schools.

Teaching Tolerance

The Teaching Tolerance website, produced by the Southern Poverty Law Center, offers lessons and activities on topics that include appearance, gender expression, and sexual orientation, as well as race, religion, immigration, and gender equity. These resources, available at www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources, are searchable by keyword, topic, grade level, and subject.

Lessons are geared toward kindergarten through fifth grade and encourage students to think through characteristics they ascribe

to either boys or girls. These lessons enable students to challenge gender norms and stereotypes they may have already internalized.

GLSEN's Safe Space Kit

GLSEN's mission is to ensure that "every member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression." To further that goal, the organization has created a toolkit to help educators be allies to LGBTQ youth.

This resource provides strategies to support LGBTQ students, educate all students about anti-LGBTQ bias, and advocate for changes in school. The kit includes GLSEN's *Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students*, which provides strategies for assessing and improving school climate, policies, and practices, as well as for creating safe spaces.

To download the free guide, or to download and print a Safe Space sticker or poster, go to www.glsen.org/safespace.

GLSEN also offers classroom resources and professional development materials on its website. One such resource, *Ready, Set, Respect!*, is designed

for elementary school educators. Available at www.glsen.org/readysetrepect, it offers lessons on name-calling, bullying, and bias; LGBTQ-inclusive family diversity; and gender roles and diversity.

Anti-Defamation League

The Anti-Defamation League provides many classroom lessons on bias, bullying, diverse perspectives, and discrimination. To browse them by age group and topic, go to www.bit.ly/2fRu28Z. The website also includes a list of 700 titles of anti-bias and multicultural literature available for educators and parents of children of all ages. Find this list at www.bit.ly/2ey4qy5.

—AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT



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