

BRIGHT IDEAS

BY AND FOR THE MASSACHUSETTS ADULT EDUCATION COMMUNITY
 FUNDED BY THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Volume 9, Number 3

Winter 2000

Is Your Program Safe?

by Stefanie Mattfeld and Lenore Balliro

Why devote a whole issue of *Bright Ideas* to gay and lesbian* issues? Why should we be concerned about our gay and lesbian students? Most of us working in adult basic education want to make our classrooms safe places for our students—places where students feel comfortable to learn, to express themselves, to take risks, to feel part of a learning community. By safe we mean more than protection from harm, we also mean places where students can feel that they are accepted, that they can be who they are without fear of attack, ridicule, censor, or recrimination. How far are we from making our classrooms safe for all of our students, and, by extension, making our programs safe places for all of our staff?

Our students bring a range of experiences with them to the classroom; many of our students are victims of trauma and war, cultural dislocation, negative school experiences, discrimination, and racism. We culti-

*We are using "gay and lesbian" throughout this issue to include gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

vate awareness of students' varied backgrounds; we celebrate multiculturalism; we embrace diversity in languages and ethnic origins. And most of us, I think, would say that we support inclusiveness and social justice, that we want to make sure everyone has a voice and respect in our classes. While some kinds of hostile behavior and attitudes are obvious in the classroom, others manifest themselves more subtly. Teachers have become more vigilant at addressing racism and sexism as important issues in the classroom, but many have still found it more difficult, or have not thought to discuss homophobia or gay and lesbian issues in their classes. One reason might be that many teachers assume that their students are all straight.



One in Ten

It is currently estimated, however, that about 10 percent of the population in the US is gay or lesbian. (See "Myths and Facts," p. 15). Although we might not readily identify our gay and lesbian students or colleagues, one out of 10 people in our programs is likely to be gay or les-

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Please see the SABES Web page <www.SABES.org> for additional articles.

How Safe...

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bian. Many gay and lesbian students remain silent for good reason. "Coming out," or identifying oneself as gay or lesbian, can mean the loss of a job, loss of family, loss of apartment, social censoring, scapegoating, and physical violence. With increasing incidents of hate crimes directed toward gays and lesbians and with the growth of anti-gay campaigns by members of right wing groups, it is risky to identify oneself as gay or lesbian. Further, some of our students come from countries or states where certain sex practices or same sex relationships are crimes punishable by imprisonment or death. These are good reasons for keeping silent.

Goals

We see this issue of *Bright Ideas* as part of a process of anti-oppression, "teaching tolerance" work that has been going on in Massachusetts adult basic education for the past few years. Many teachers have asked for resources and strategies for addressing the "isms"—racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in their classes. In study circles, workshops, and trainings, teachers ask similar questions: What do I say when a racist or homophobic remark comes up in my class? When and how do I introduce anti-oppression materials into my curriculum? Teachers have asked for more resources to develop materials

proactively so they can bring in issues of diversity into their curricula. Many teachers also agree that they need more information, dialogue, and reflection on their own belief systems to more deeply understand the complexity of the issues they want to process with their students.

In reflecting on the audience for this issue of *Bright Ideas*, the advisory board, comprised of gay, lesbian, and

straight practitioners in adult basic education, determined multiple goals for a varied audience.

For gay and lesbian teachers, we want to send a message that you are supported, valued, and recognized. For straight teachers, we hope this issue will help you to build on efforts many of you have already begun, and to underscore the reality that there are gay and lesbian students and colleagues in your programs, even if they are not identified as such. We hope to encourage you to continue examining heterosexism and homophobia in

your classrooms and communities. We hope to suggest how, from a position of privilege within the community as straight people, you can help become allies of gay and lesbian students and colleagues and help build a more just system for all.

For both gay and straight teachers, we hope that this issue can offer information, teaching strategies, and resources that will make classrooms safer and more inclusive for gay and lesbian students. Some of the readings are directed toward teachers to encourage them to think about their classroom, program, and practice, and some readings are resources teachers can make available directly to students.

The goals may be overreaching in such a short publication like *Bright Ideas*. But as the advisory group met and discussed and argued and laughed and agreed and disagreed, we kept finding things that seemed important to include. We know some readers will disagree with what we have included here, and we welcome you to write letters to the editor to include your perspectives. We will print them. We view this issue as a starting point. To make use of it, please check out the web sites, the organizations, and the publications listed in the resources page. Let the work expand!

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Upcoming Issues of *Bright Ideas**

Spring 2000: *Transitions and Bridges*

Transitions between levels (ESOL 1 to ESOL 2); transitions from ESOL to ABE, from ABE to GED or EDP; transitions from GED to "next steps."

Call by: January 20 — Articles due by: January 25

Summer 2000: *Open Issue*

Here's your chance to contribute an article about any theme you'd like. Reviews of web sites, classroom materials, videos, novels are fine. Other ideas include: classroom stories, lesson ideas, examination of teaching issues and problems.

Call by: March 15—Articles due by: March 30

***Bright Ideas will be getting a new look and a new name. Watch for changes.**

What Is It Like to Be Different? Being Gay in an Adult Education Class

By Anonymous

How does it feel to be prejudged in your own class? This was my experience in a pre-GED class. I am a 35-year-old gay man with cerebral palsy. I came to an adult education program for a few different reasons. I wanted to learn about lots of different things. I was pretty sheltered as a kid. I finished through sixth grade, but I left school. I had missed so much school because of my surgeries, and when I came back after each surgery, I felt really lost. I came back to school as an adult to work on my writing and math. I knew I had things to say, but I couldn't put it on paper very well. I wanted to hear about different ideas and approaches to issues, and I wanted to accomplish getting my GED.

Leaving the Program

I didn't end up getting my GED—not yet anyway. I left my class last year. I didn't want to leave. I thought I could find a way around it or through it. What is the "it" that I couldn't find a way through? The triple whammy of being physically challenged, having a learning disability, and being gay. All these things affected me and still do, but having to deal with homophobia in my class really made me hide within myself. Eventually, it was really overwhelming. I started getting down on myself because of it. I started to think about suicide. My self-esteem was really bad. I couldn't be who I was. I had to keep my guard up and watch what I said and how I reacted to things. That affected my learning a lot. I couldn't put all my energy or thinking into learning. Half of my brain was trying to concentrate on what I was learning, and the other half was on guard thinking, "Be careful of what you say. Don't let them find out." Sometimes

other students would say things like "that guy's such a faggot," and it would make me so nervous that I couldn't even think. I would worry that they might say something like that about me. The teacher never said anything about those comments. Maybe he didn't know what to say.

Class Incident

Something happened in class that made me feel even more insecure about myself. One day, at break time, two male students in the class went to the restroom. A few minutes later, the teacher also went to the men's room. Then he returned to the class with the two students. The students seemed really nervous. I knew that something had happened. The next day, we came

of people in the class started whispering "What were they doing?" Some students, especially the younger ones, laughed. One girl made kissing noises whenever they came in the room. Sometimes J and H would leave class and not come back. One older man in the class said, "I hate those f**kin' faggots. They shouldn't be allowed in society." He got really irate about it. He said this at break time when J and H were out of the room. It made me really upset and nervous. It brought back a lot of really bad memories of kids at school calling me and other kids "faggot." My own family used to use that word too. To this day, I can't even talk to my own family about this.

A couple of days later, the

*One older man in the class said, "I hate those f**kin' faggots. They shouldn't be allowed in society."*

to class and the teacher brought up the subject of what happened the day before. He said that there was a time and a place for that. He seemed angry and disgusted and talked in a very stern voice. (The two students had been caught kissing in the men's room.) Then someone came in, and we got off of that subject.

The next day, the teacher said something about this situation to the whole class. He said, "J and H had very inappropriate behavior in the washroom. People like them should do that in their own environment." He started to say something else, but I interrupted him and changed the subject because I could see J and H walking toward the door to come in to class and I didn't want them to hear him talking about them like that. A lot

teacher brought the subject up again, saying the same thing. He also brought in an article from *Readers' Digest* about accepting different sexual orientations. He read it out loud to the class and asked if anyone had any questions. He said that different people have different views about this. He said he didn't agree with some things in the article. A few days after that, J and H just stopped coming to class. I never saw them again after that.

Good Experiences

I've had many different teachers in my life and a few different ones in adult education. With other teachers

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What's It Like...

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who I've had, things were different. The environment was more accepting and made you feel more comfortable. They let me know it was OK to me and that being gay was not an issue. If we read an article from the newspaper in which a gay issue came up, we could talk about it (or anything else) and feel that our opinions were important and that people would not make fun of you. We could talk about everything. We talked about racism, adult literacy issues in the country, issues about disabilities like the one I have, or different kinds of learning disabilities—whatever came up. No one was

made to feel bad because they were different. Everyone was accepted for who they were. Sometimes the teacher would say things in a way that made you feel included—like she would say the word “partner” when she talked about families. It made you feel like you were included and not on the outside looking in.

I had both good and bad experiences being a gay student in an adult education class. I feel its important to write this because it might make it better for other students, so that hopefully they won't have to put up walls that block their learning or feel bad about who they are. I am writing

anonymously because some of my family lives in the area, and I don't feel that I can be out to them right now.

Teachers, Please Listen

For the teachers who are reading this, try to put yourselves in our shoes so you might know what it feels like to be judged. You could be hurting people by making comments in class that imply that being gay is bad or wrong or disgusting. You could be hurting your students without even knowing it.



No Fuss, No Mess

By Martha Merson

I've done it. I've used material with lesbian characters. I've heard the comments. I've felt my face go red. I don't enjoy it. But that's how taboos function. They attach shame and discomfort to topics and thereby prevent certain subjects from gaining any visibility. The prospect of perpetuating the myth that we're all heterosexual here on this planet is distasteful to me. Furthermore, perpetuating myths doesn't serve anyone's education.

Providing images of diversity in sexual orientation plays out as a cycle for me: foray, retreat, another attempt, another retreat. Of the poems, skits, icebreakers, and longer texts I've used, *Working Parts* has been the most successful. In other words, it has allowed me to break the taboo of mentioning lesbians or homosexuality in the classroom with the least discomfort. It is now my tool of choice for raising the visibility of gay and lesbian issues/themes with no fuss, no mess. Of course there are many poems, films, short stories, and articles, each of which opens its own world of possibilities. However, *Working Parts* is my current favorite.

Working Parts

Working Parts is the story of Lori, a lesbian bike mechanic who has a reading problem. All of this is pretty clear by the time the reader has read the back cover and the first full page. (The book at this point holds the pos-



sibility that Lori is bisexual, but there no denying that she is attracted to women.) If you read the back, which I do with groups, you also know that this is “a story of personal revolution.”

When I've read this book with

students, many have been intrigued by the character and storyline.

As I wrote in my article for *Connections*, “Can I Keep This Book?” I read aloud the first few paragraphs and then we talked about the setting—a public library. Lori has a flashback to her days in high school and this description resonates with students who excelled in gym and lunch and laughter and avoided reading and writing. Together we read a little more aloud—just until Lori winks at the librarian and Lori lets us know, “Women and machinery were my specialties.” In every class this got some reaction.

Some students were quick to conclude that Lori must be a lesbian. Of course they didn't say this aloud. “She's a ... you know,” was often as close as they got. For most students, this information seemed to build their interest in the book. They began reading independently immediately, getting absorbed in the book and staying that way.

In one ABE class, students began identifying with Lori based on

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One Foot Out of the Closet

By Anonymous

In a class discussion of current events, a young woman brings up an article from today's newspaper about same sex domestic partnership. The many aspects of the issue are discussed in much the same manner as we do any other topic that comes up in class—in an atmosphere of safety, trust, and respect for differences.

In the teacher's room, over coffee, a fellow teacher excitedly talks about her daughter's engagement. She asks me if I've found my "Mr. Right," and assures me that I will. I respond with a smile that "I haven't found Ms. Right yet, but I'm sure she is just around the corner."

These are the kind of stories I'd like to tell someday. I work toward them, but for now, this is my story.

I Am Anonymous

I am "Anonymous." The dictionary says that means "nameless, unsigned, having unknown origin" And yet, I have a name. Though I write this article anonymously, I am not anonymous. I am many things. I am a woman, a sister, a daughter, a friend, a cat owner (OK, a woman owned by a cat), a poet, a music lover, a teacher, a staff developer, a Leo with Gemini rising (whatever that means). I am the sum of all I have met, and I am unique, and...I am a lesbian. That last part is what compels me to do something I have never done before—write an article anonymously.

I feel torn about writing anonymously. It rings of...fear, shame, gutlessness. I don't like the message it seems to send—that to be gay is to have something to hide. I have nothing to hide. I am out in most aspects of my life—to my family, to my friends, to some of my colleagues whom I have known for many years. I, however, am not out to the learners in my GED class, nor am I out to my coworkers or director there.

People have different ideas about what being "out" means. I have heard people say things like "why do gay people have to be 'out' anyway? What does your being gay



have to do with your teaching?" I know they don't understand. They proudly wear their wedding rings or display pictures of their spouses on their desks or feel free to chat with their colleagues about what they did over the weekend without having to leave out names or change pronouns. Heterosexuals are usually out by default.

Being Out

By being "out" in my work, I don't mean sharing in an inappropriate way the personal details of my life. I simply mean being open and honestly myself. The "out" I mean would allow the scenarios I wrote about above to be reality. It would mean that my identity as a teacher who happens to be gay would not be considered a secret or something to hide.

That question "What does my sexual orientation have to do with my teaching?" is one I have struggled with as well. It doesn't directly have any relation to my work except in the way that any aspect of identity is a part of what I bring to my work. To what extent is it possible to keep who I am out of my teaching? Other aspects of who I am are a part of my teaching—my sense of humor, my

interest in poetry, my style of teaching and interacting, my ethnic and racial background. All those things I bring with me to the classroom. You cannot *not* bring your basic self to your teaching. Teaching is an art and a science, and like any art form, it is partially an expression of who you are.

Being aware of what I bring to the classroom helps me to be aware of the similarities and differences I have with my learners. It helps me be aware enough to ask questions like: How do my learners perceive the world given who they are and who they bring into this classroom we share? How do they learn best? How can I communicate best with them? Bringing awareness and sensitivity to the different needs, learning styles, and backgrounds their learners bring into the classroom is part of what I believe a good teacher does.

Trust and Safety

Creating an atmosphere in which real learning and growth can take place requires trust and safety. The learners I have had over the years can spot a phony a mile away. They know when someone is putting them on, and they know when someone is sincere. I have wondered many times if they notice when I steer clear of topics that come up in discussions like the ones in those scenarios above. I wonder how it makes them feel, and I wonder what it must be like to be a gay learner in my class. Do they feel safe here? Do they worry that they will experience ridicule or discrimination here? Am I creating a positive environment for all of my learners?

And what of the other learners? What of the others who come into class who believe that they don't know anyone who is gay, that GBLT*

*GBLT Refers to Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian, Transgender

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One Foot...

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people are those “other” people, people they have heard about who molest children, who only think about sex, who are bad or dangerous individuals. What about them? Am I challenging them to broaden their thinking? Clearly, my being in the closet does nothing to challenge them to reconsider those myths about gay people. I believe helping people to think for themselves in a critical way is part of my job.

There are many reasons to be out in my teaching, but sadly, there are equally pressing reasons not to be. I teach in a large learning center where differences of any nature are barely tolerated. I have heard the homophobic jokes that the director and the office staff tell. The atmosphere in the center as a whole, outside the door of my classroom is not safe. My job is protected by law in Massachusetts. I am lucky in some regards. I live in one of only 11 states that prohibits firing people simply because they are gay. Still, I worry. Would this director

make it so hard to do my job as an out gay teacher that I would be forced to leave? Would I be able to work with

out in their own way, in their own time, at their own pace. In the last year, I have taken small steps toward

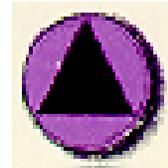
I live in one of only 11 states that prohibits firing people simply because they are gay.

the rest of the staff in a productive way if I were out? Would my learners have a negative reaction if they knew?

As important as those questions are, I know that in the end, if I am not true to myself, to my convictions as a teacher and as a human being, I will not be able to teach in the way that I know I can. I constantly encourage my learners to face their fears, to take risks in the service of learning and growth. How can I not face my own? Coming out is a process they say. Unless you come out on the cover of *Time*, like Ellen DeGeneres, decisions about when, how, and whether to come out are continual. People come

being more out in my teaching:

I have gained support and ideas on how to gradually be more out from the “Page 4 Coalition” (see article by Martha Merson). I have begun to pay closer attention to how I address questions that come up in my class around sexual orientation, and I have begun to explore the possibility of leaving this center in search of a more positive and tolerant environment. I have one foot out of the closet, and slowly, inch by inch, my other foot is following.



Are We Imposing? Is It Too Uncomfortable? Do We Know Enough?

by Lenore Balliro

What are the barriers that prevent us from addressing “tough” issues like homophobia in the classroom?

Teachers often ask: “Am I imposing my agenda on students if I bring up issues that they have not explicitly identified as important to them?” Many teachers feel that it’s too directive, not “learner-centered” enough to introduce in the classroom issues, concerns, or information beyond those listed by students. I have several responses to this concern.

First, isn’t one of our goals as educators to expand our students’

awareness of the world—to ask them to question, observe, reconsider what they already know? We can be participatory in our practice and negotiate curriculum content in a democratic way, but that doesn’t mean we can’t introduce ideas, materials, or issues that students may not have identified as relevant curriculum topics. Second, by not addressing certain issues, the ones that seem too hard, even if they affect students and their communities, aren’t we in fact imposing another kind of bias on our students? Many students tell us in needs assessments that they want to know

more about “American culture.” Issues like racism and homophobia are part of American culture. By eliminating them from our discussions, we are offering a selected version of what we want them to know about American culture. Third, introducing difficult topics and providing a forum for discussion and the dissemination of information does not mean we are forcing a particular ideology down our students’ throats; we are presenting issues for examination and analysis.

Teachers also express that it is

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Confessions and Insights of a “Self-Outed” Heterosexual

By Tricia Donovan

Heterosexual Privilege: Still a more taboo subject than race privilege, heterosexual privilege refers to “the daily

sense of privilege was shaken. I wondered if it was OK for me to be there and thought I should hold back my involvement because I was clearly

lesbian/bisexual/transgender folks feel when their coming-of-age events are secrets only shared with a select few, not freely discussed in the lunch room by the water fountain.

Promotions and even jobs can be denied to those not members of the heterosexual club. It’s never said overtly, “We can’t hire her, she’s lesbian,” just as it is never said, “We can’t promote her, she’s black.” Such “isms” are not the subject of outright talk. They are the silent enemies of those who don’t conform to the established, dominant cultures.

Heterosexuals assume their privilege and benefit from what MacIntosh terms “unearned power” in the blithe manner of all dominant cultures. Heterosexuals make the immediate connections with other staff. They talk with supervisors about their families, spouses, and lives in a way that assumes everyone’s entering the conversation from the same platform of experience. It’s so easy, so familiar, and so blind. They are assuming a sexual commonality where it does not always exist.

What We Assume

We cannot assume that all mothers and fathers are paired heterosexually. We cannot assume that all coworkers are as comfortable as we are in sharing life details. As the old saying goes, “Be careful when you assume, for to assume makes an ‘ass’ out of ‘u’ and ‘me.’” Worse yet, these assumptions marginalize our fellow human souls and provide heterosexual privileges they never earned. These privileges allow heterosexuals to continue thinking they are the “norm,” or that they earned outrightly every honor conferred upon them, when, in fact, they started with

As the editor announced the purpose of the meeting, someone looked around and said, “So, are we all gay or what?”

ways in which heterosexual privilege makes married persons comfortable or powerful, providing supports, assets, approvals, and rewards to those who live or expect to live in heterosexual pairs.” So explains Peggy MacIntosh in her 1988 working paper, “White Privilege, Male Privilege,” issued by the Welsley College Center. MacIntosh goes on to warn: “Unpacking that content (of heterosexual privilege) is still more difficult, owing to the deeper imbeddedness of heterosexual advantage and dominance.” The truth of MacIntosh’s assertions surfaced pointedly at a recent meeting regarding editorial content for this newsletter.

The participants at the meeting had gathered as a focus group to discuss vital material for this issue of *Bright Ideas*. As the editor announced the purpose of the meeting, someone looked around and said, “So, are we all gay or what?” I smiled, but said nothing. Everyone else laughed in what appeared to me to be in a comradely fashion. Of course, I thought, everyone’s wondering, “Is she?” or “What is she?” For the first time in my life I felt isolated and a bit scared because of my sexual identity. My unconscious

ignorant of the deeper issues faced by gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender individuals in our heterosexually dominant culture. I have begun to have just an inkling of what my associates might be feeling everyday: tenuous, nervous, self-questioning.

The Heterosexual Club

How could sexuality have become such a burden? As I listen to those around me, I began to understand that what I felt at that meeting—out of the loop—is often a daily oppression for those in the gay lesbian, bisexual, transgender community. Every day they face the need to struggle for health benefits for their partners with whom they may have shared a life for decades while newlyweds attached less than a month are automatically accorded “family” coverage. They wonder if they should go to the office party with their partners or go alone or not at all because they risk enduring whispered comments as they enter the room and circulate as a couple. How difficult it is for them to listen to the casual, constant discussion of showers and engagements and weddings and assume that everyone is interested in these heterosexual coming-of-age events. How excluded gay/

Confessions...

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an extra competitive edge because their sexuality in no way threatened the dominant culture.

What Do We Do about Our Straight Privilege?

So what do we do about our privilege? First and foremost, we acknowledge it. We bring our little secret advantages into the daylight and admit them. “To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. (For) the silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tools here. They keep the thinking about equality or inequality incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects—Keeping most people unaware that freedom of con-

fidant action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power, and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.” (McIntosh, 34)

In a democratic world, all people are equal. Everyone—gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, heterosexual—has the right to the “pursuit of happiness.” Each one of us has the right to walk tall and be proud of herself. How we treat each other is the measure of our character. How we fashion a life on this diverse ecosystem of the earth is the measure of that achievement. We must stop measuring people on the basis of their sexuality. Rather we need to celebrate our uniqueness and recognize our similarities. Maybe everyone would be better off to have the experience I had to be in the minority for once. To be on the outside makes us vulnerable, yet it makes us alert. I learned much from my colleagues, and I am in-

debted to them for sharing openly in my presence. However, my debt will not be repaid if I carry my new knowledge silently. This is why I write here. It’s part of my effort to encourage all of us privileged heterosexuals to deepen our sensitivities toward the struggles of our fellow gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender citizens whether they are students or colleagues, to speak out against discriminating acts or words, and to be aware of and examine our assumptions. We are, after all, one family. Each of us is special, but no one among us deserves privilege, power, or advantage because he or she is heterosexual.

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It’s Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in School

The video *It’s Elementary* makes a powerful case for integrating gay and lesbian themes into the curriculum beginning in the early primary grades.

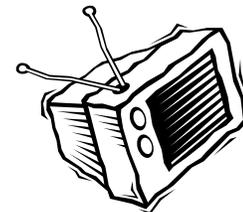
Teachers in the video select activities according to students’ grade levels, including workshops, speakers, stories about nontraditional families, and discussions. They use mapping, brainstorming, and free writing to encourage students to express their knowledge of, and to expose their misconceptions about, gays and lesbians. Some schools in the video promote schoolwide events like gay pride week or a photo exhibit of gay and lesbian families. Many students are forthright with their questions and seem open to new information.

The straight teachers in the video accept responsibility to initiate discussions about gays and lesbians in their classrooms, realizing that it is often dangerous for gay and lesbian teachers to spotlight these issues because they could lose their jobs if they are “outed.”

A group of ABE teachers watched the video at the ALRI in late October and shared ideas of their own in a discussion facilitated by Alice Levine. One teacher described a curriculum unit she developed around a “teachable moment.” After hearing comments among students about the Gay Pride March, the teacher built lessons around these comments by researching the history of Gay Pride and placing it in the context of other movements for civil rights in the US.

Some teachers suggested that they might show this video to their students, most of whom are parents. By discussing these issues with parents, parents are better equipped to discuss them with their children. Specific ideas for adapting the film included showing a clip of a classroom discussion and showing the complete film to adult educators as a staff development activity to see if there are applications to their teaching.

ABE teachers in Boston can borrow this video from the ALRI. Call Sandra Darling at (617) 782-8956. Teachers outside of Greater Boston should call their SABES Resource Centers.



Under Siege

Review of *The Last Closet: The Real Lives of Lesbian and Gay Teachers* by Rita M. Kissen

Review by Jeri Bayer

You've told your family (gulp!). Your friends and neighbors. Your doctor knows, and your plumber. But at your workplace you're silent. You debate with yourself a dozen times a day: do I or don't I? The consequences could be devastating, no matter which you choose. You love what you do but

tone or specific tale, however, the message is clear: the challenge of every gay, lesbian, and bisexual teacher is to find a way to integrate "gay" and educator" into "one coherent identity," often against intimidating odds.

Kissen conveys the complexity and struggle of gay educators with

tively large number of gay teachers choose to work in this field because in many ways ABE appears to be a place where one need not compromise one's self, one's work, or one's safety. However, there are, other, different challenges that confront the ABE teacher, which can prove perplexing and painful. Kissen would have done well to have documented those, too.

Criticism aside, Kissen's book is a gift to teachers, gay and straight, and ultimately, to the students served. For every gay, lesbian, or bisexual teacher, there is at least one gay, lesbian, or bisexual student whose learning experience and eventual success is deeply influenced by the validation he or she receives. A teacher who is out and confident in the classroom and supported within the school or program is key to enabling anyone to strive toward his or her full potential. Everyone in the learning community needs to participate in opening the last closet.

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The Last Closet is published by Heinemann Publishing, 1996.

For every gay, lesbian, or bisexual teacher there is at least one gay, lesbian, or bisexual student whose learning experience and eventual success is deeply influenced by the validation he or she receives.

you're scared to be yourself while doing it. If you let yourself out you may not be able to do what you love to do. You're a teacher, see, and not only could your livelihood be on the line but your capacity to pursue what may be as much a part of you as your sexual orientation. If teaching is a calling, if it gives sustenance and meaning to your days, then your life is at risk.

Dramatic? Yes. Exaggerated? No. In fact, it is this basic scenario that Rita M. Kissen describes again and again in her book, *The Last Closet: The Real Lives of Lesbian and Gay Teachers*. With each protagonist Kissen introduces, the details vary, of course. They originate in many different towns and cities nationwide and while some of their stories are inspiring, some are horrifying, and some are a measure of both. Whatever the

clarity and compassion. She not only reports on their experiences but effectively synthesizes and orders them into five discrete, though congruous sections. The headings of these include "The Center of Myself," "Hiding," and "From Survival to Empowerment." Only one, "Horror Stories" seems misstated, given that horror is an element inherent to the other sections as well. A more appropriate title might be something like "Under Siege" since it is in these pages that the reader learns of some of the repercussions teachers have endured for making the decision to be out.

Like many books dealing with issues in education, *The Last Closet* only examines the experience of teachers in the K-12 system. The omission of adult basic education is understandable in some contexts but in this one it is inappropriate. A rela-

**Challenging
Homophobia Online
Workshop**
<www.netwiz.nel/~fiadhchu/CH/ch_pre.html>

Great for staff development.

Telling Their Stories

A Review of *One Teacher in 10* by Kevin Jennings

Review by Cathy Coleman



One Teacher in 10 is an inspiring collection of stories written by gay and lesbian educators about their experiences as a teacher and sometimes as a student as well. Written by Kevin Jennings, founder of GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network), the book does a wonderful job of pulling together stories that inspire and challenge.

These stories, which come from teachers as close as Dedham, Massachusetts, and as far away as Sydney, Australia, challenge readers to confront what they have been taught about “the most well-fortified closets in our communities,” that of gay teachers.

No Sugar Coating

Though the book is divided into four sections: “Memories,” “Journeys,” “Struggles,” and “Victories,” each contains elements of the journey, the struggle, and the victory. I was pleased to see that the stories contained in *One Teacher in 10* are not sugar-coated. They tell the real stories of real teachers and students struggling to be authentic in their teaching and sometimes jeopardizing their careers in the process.

Kevin Jennings’ own story clearly illustrates the silencing effect of homophobia in the classroom: “At Mt. Tabor High School, the only person who seemed to get called ‘faggot’ more than Mr. Korn was a sophomore named Kevin Jennings. I was taunted daily in hallways, in the locker room, in classes before the teacher called the roll, even during class. Whenever I volunteered to answer a question or write on the board, a slightly audible murmur from my classmates would arise... ‘faggot.’ I would learn not to raise my hand.”

Kevin’s story comes full circle as he later struggles as a teacher with how best to support all of his students, including and especially ones who happen to be gay or lesbian. The story of Pat McCart, a high school principal from Saint Paul, Minnesota, illustrates an internal struggle of a woman who recognizes that “by not being publicly identified as a lesbian, I was maintaining my comfort at the expense of the young—the very group I had spent my adult life working with.”

Courage

Hope, an English teacher from Traer, Iowa, creates lies about her life to get a teaching job, hiding the fact that she is a lesbian. She goes on to teach a class in which she requires students to “read whatever they liked as long as it reflected the population of this country.” Hope has students reading works by or about people of color, Jews, women, and gay and lesbians as well as white heterosexual men. I read this story, somewhat awed by this woman’s courage to persist in this policy in spite of the opposition of the other teachers and administration. When someone outs Hope, she decides to leave her teaching career at the high school level. She ends up teaching college and says, at the end of her story, “I miss teaching high school the way amputees are said to miss a limb, a ghostly ache that accompanies me some days. But the quiet lie doesn’t thunder through my dreams anymore.”

The only criticism I have of *One Teacher in 10* is that it does not

include stories of those of us in adult education. To his credit, Mr. Jennings attempts to be inclusive geographically, racially, ethnically, and in terms of gender and grade level. I believe that the stories in the collection, though not written by adult educators, still have much value to us in adult education.

It is in the telling of the story, the breaking of the silence, that we can begin to hear the sounds of freedom. In Kevin Jennings’ words, “As long as we remain silent and allow our enemies to define us, we will never be free. Only through telling our stories can we shatter the myths and expose the lies that allow bigots to portray us as a threatening ‘other.’” Gay and lesbian teachers help all of us as a community of learners when they share the truth of who they are. As gay and lesbian teachers win our freedom, we help to free our students, our colleagues, and our communities of the burden of bigotry.”

The book has much to tell us all—gay or straight—about how difficult and yet how vital it is to maintain the courage of our convictions, to quietly and confidently be ourselves, to challenge in whatever ways we can the oppression of silence that threatens to rob us of some of our best teachers—simply because they are different.

Cathy Coleman is a Staff Development Specialist at the SABES Central Resource Center where she focuses on using video in teacher research. She can be reached at World Education at (617) 482-9485.

***Bright Ideas will soon change its look and name.
Watch for future issues!***

What Page Are We On?

by Martha Merson

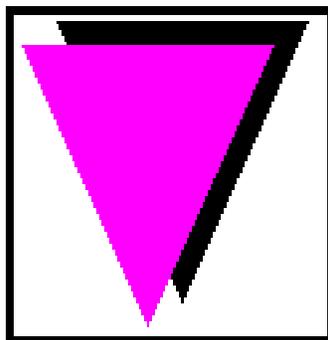
On the porch during a break in a full-staff meeting, the smokers talked and puffed. Other times, the lesbians, staff of color, the travelers, the meat eaters, the Penn graduates would congregate, and common experiences would yield conversation, analysis, story swaps. When I moved to Massachusetts, I missed the conversations among lesbian staff at my Philadelphia program. There never seemed to be an opportunity or the critical mass in Massachusetts gatherings. I would talk with one person in the car on the way to Worcester, with another during an overnight. Spurred on by a visit to the Highlander Center, which trains community activists, I increasingly wanted to do something for what I defined as my own community. Even though I have a social circle that includes gay and lesbian friends, I wanted a sense of gay and lesbian community to be part of my professional life too. It turns out, I wasn't alone.

Some History

In 1994 Marta Mangan and Josette Henschel presented at Network on the Safe Schools project. Safe Schools is an amazing initiative. Its purpose is to make sure that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) youth can attend school without suffering harassment. Mangan and Henschel had attended the Safe Schools training and offered adult educators the information on how to keep their programs safe zones for GLBT students. The room was packed with a mix of staff. It's my opinion that the huge turnout was not because safety for GLBT students is one big problem that ABE staff encounter, but because this was the only venue not only in the Network conference but in any formal gathering of ABE staff for gay and lesbian educators to get together and talk about the

place of sexual orientation in our work lives.

In 1995, I joined Marta and Josette in a Network workshop. In spite of a late slot in the day, we had a



good turnout of people who responded to the title: "It's a Heterosexist World Out There." Shortly after Network, Alice Levine called me to bring my attention to a chapter in a Longman book for ESOL students titled, *Our Own Stories*. The chapter titled, "I Want to Hold Your Hand," contained references to homosexuality that Alice and I found negative. (Editor's note: for more information about the Longman struggle, see *All Write News* July/August 1996 Vol. XII, No.7) This was the perfect catalyst for a group meeting. I compiled a mailing list of everyone I could think of. I kept the outside discreet, kept the list conservative (didn't mail to everyone I "suspected"), and hoped nothing embarrassing would happen. The first gathering was a potluck with a chance to talk about our status—out or not—in the classroom and the values that guided those decisions. In addition, we formed a subcommittee to draft a letter to Longman outlining our problems with the chapter and our recommendations.

We agreed to meet monthly and we established goals: we brainstormed how to connect with Safe Schools and gay and lesbians of color groups; we wanted to have materials that would

help us introduce g/l/bi issues in the classroom; we wanted access to training and we wanted to encourage straight staff to include g/l/bi issues in their curricula. Later we added benefits for domestic partners to the wish list.

When the whole group met to review the recommendations to Longman publishers, the group finally got its name. Due to some Microsoft Word glitch, every page of the letter was numbered page 4. As we were referring to various points, whoever was lost would ask what page. It was frustrating, inevitable and laughable that every time the answer was the same: Page 4. This became the group's name: The Page 4 Coalition.

Page 4 Continues

We met regularly and watched videos like "It's Elementary," and developed our response to Longman. We also made suggestions for workshops, which were brought back to the ALRI. Each year, the ALRI has done at least one region-wide workshop that explicitly addresses gay and lesbian issues. Rheua Stakely did a workshop including two women from the G/L/Bi Speakers Bureau (now called Speak Out). In 1998 Ann Goglia did a workshop on storytelling to counter prejudice. In February 1999, Amy Battisti-Ashé and Charissa Ahlstrom did a workshop on expanding definitions of family.

Judy Przybek took over facilitation of the Page 4 group for 1997-98. Judy and I surveyed programs, interviewed teachers who had gotten benefits for their domestic partners, published in the *All Write News*, and designed a workshop for Network on benefits for part-timers and gay/lesbian families. We gave some visibility to the benefits issue, but as much as people want better benefits,

Continued on page 20

Glossary for Straight Readers

Edited by Stefanie Mattfeld and Deborah Schwartz



The following glossary is intended as a point of reference for straight readers who may be confused about some of the terms used in the articles in this issue. It is important to remember that the appropriate way of talking about oppressed groups of people changes over time in various contexts. Name changes reflect changes in the gay and lesbian community, within which there is no consensus about how some of these terms should be applied. The important thing is to be aware of how these terms are used and to make informed decisions about which terms you are selecting. Some terms are appropriate only within the gay and lesbian community and straight people should be aware of this. It's important, though, not to become paralyzed around talking about these issues because you aren't sure which term is the most "correct."

This list was compiled from a variety of sources, especially drawing from the fact sheet produced by the Friends Project in Seattle, Washington, edited by Maggi Rohde.
<www.msu.edu/~alliance/gayfaq.htm>.

1. Ally: Any person or institution who understands how doing anti-homophobic work benefits them and their people, and then goes ahead and does that work. Being an ally is more active than being a friend.

2. Bisexuality: Sexual attraction to and/or behavior with both sexes.

3. Coming out: The act of defining oneself as gay or lesbian. There are significant moments and incidents of "coming out" — to family, religious community, neighbors, colleagues. Coming out also represents the daily, ongoing need to not be made invisible in a heterosexist society.

4. Dyke: Many lesbians self-identify as dyke. This is not a word all lesbians feel comfortable with. It is still a loaded term that is used in a derogatory way by homophobic people.

5. Fluid: A term suggesting that sexuality and gender are social constructs and that it is natural to feel a certain "fluidity" in sexual attraction and identity. Fluid refers to accepting the continuum of sexual orientation from gay to straight with every nuance in between.

6. Gay: Traditionally, the term gay has referred to men. It has come to include lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, transsexuals, etc. The word came from the Gay Liberation movement.

7. GLBT: A shortcut for including gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people.

8. Heterosexuality: Sexual attraction to and/or behavior with the other sex.

9. Heterosexism: Believing heterosexual lifestyle is superior to other lifestyles; promoting heterosexual lifestyle.

10. Homosexuality: Sexual attraction and/or behavior with the same sex.

Continued on next page



11. Homophobia: The fear, intolerance, mistreatment, and oppression of homosexuality, bisexuality, lesbian women, gay men. It often used to express the mistreatment and oppression of gay people by individuals and/or institutions.

12. Lesbian: Gay woman. Most lesbians prefer the term lesbian because it gives gay women an identity independent from men. There is a growing diversity of lesbian lifestyle and culture. Many lesbians self-identify as dykes.



13. Outed: (As in “They ‘outed’ her at the meeting.”) When someone tells other people that another person is gay.

14. Partner: A term used to describe a sweetie, loved one, wife/husband, comrade-in-life, within the gay community. It is also a term straight people consciously use for their lovers/spouses as an act against heterosexism.

15. Questioning: Being open to defining one’s sexual orientation.

16. Queer: A term, loved by some gay people, hated by others, that reflects inclusion of gay, straight, transexual, transgender, bisexual, and questioning people. Outside of the gay/lesbian community, queer is a derogatory term used by homophobic people.

17. Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation is the term people use to define what gender they are sexually attracted to. A person who has a sexual attraction to members of the opposite gender is called heterosexual (or straight), while someone who has a sexual attraction to members of the same gender is a homosexual person. Sexual orientation is a continuum, not a set of absolutely different categories. It is not known what determines a person’s sexual orientation.

18. Transgender: This has become a catchword for transvestites, transexuals, female and male impersonators, drag queens, those without a specific gender label.

19. Transexual: Changing to another gender: surgically, chemically, and/or aesthetically.



Teaching Ideas

- √ Hand out words on index cards to students; see how they would define the terms; then discuss definitions.
- √ For the term “homophobia”: Have students list examples of homophobia, from name calling to violence against gays and lesbians.
- √ For the term “heterosexism”: To expand upon this term, ask students to list ways people “tell” them they are straight, even without explicitly saying it. (Naming their partners as “husband” or “wife,” for example.)

Stefanie Mattfeld teaches writing at Springfield College and mentors ESOL teachers-in-training at Simmons College. Deborah Schwartz teaches at the Boston Secure Treatment Unit of the Judge Connolly Baker Youth Center in Roslindale. She’s not yet out to her students (but give her six months)! She can be reached at(617)288-9100 x219.

Myths and Facts...Myths and Facts...

Edited by Stefanie Mattfeld and Deborah Schwartz

There are many myths and distortions used both to legitimize and to promote homophobia, and many of them are sources for the bigotry we may find students and others expressing. Because we are striving for safety in the classroom, we can use these myths and facts to help examine and dispel stereotypes and prejudices. We hope that this abbreviated list of myths and facts will be a useful tool with which to address common and destructive misinformation when you hear it, and to share with students and teachers. There are several more extensive myth and fact lists available online and through local resources. Please see the citations below for references.

Myth: Lesbians and gays are mentally ill; homosexuality is a sickness.

Fact: The National Institute for Mental Health found no greater incidence of mental illness among lesbians and gays than among heterosexuals. In many countries, homosexuality is considered normal and socially acceptable. This was the case in Ancient Greece and Rome, in many Native American cultures (where lesbians and gay men are influential tribal and religious leaders), and many present-day societies, such as The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Thailand. It might be more accurate to see homophobia, open hostility toward gays and lesbians, and hate crimes as the real sicknesses.

Myth: Homosexuals are more likely to be child molesters.

Fact: Pedophilia, sexual attraction to children, should never be confused with homosexuality. Many studies have documented that the overwhelming majority (some say 90%) of child molesters are heterosexual men against young girls. The overwhelming majority of homosexuals have no interest in preadolescent children.

Myth: Gays and lesbian teachers will try to convert their students to the gay lifestyle.

Fact: Homosexual “conversion/seduction” is no more common than is heterosexual seduction. Most gay teachers live with the fear that they will be fired if they are “found out.” Most, if not all, gays have no desire to “convert” students. Their support for younger gays may be misconstrued.

Myth: All lesbians are “masculine” and all gay men are “effeminate.”

Fact: While some lesbians appear masculine and some gay men effeminate, lesbian and gay appearances are as varied as straight appearances. This stereotype may lead some teachers to think they have no lesbians or gays in their classes.

Myth: Homosexuality is not “natural”—that is, it does not exist in nature.

Fact: Any animal, including a human, is capable of responding to homosexual stimuli. Research suggests that homosexuality is almost universal among all animals and is especially frequent among highly developed species. There has been evidence of homosexuality in all human cultures throughout history.

Myth: There are no gay and lesbian students in my classes; immigrant students have told me that there are no lesbians and gays in their countries.

Fact: Some immigrant students come from countries where homosexuality is a law punishable by imprisonment or death. This might account for some students’ silence in their home countries and in the US.

Myth: Homosexuals are predominately white males.

Fact: The homosexual community is completely diverse, consisting of males and females, African-Americans, whites, Asians, Hispanics, Indians, etc. Homosexuality exists worldwide.

Myth: People can choose to be homosexual or straight.

Fact: A complex set of factors combines to determine whether a person will develop a heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual orientation. It is generally accepted that there is some sort of predisposition or genetic relationship involved, but not everyone agrees with this analysis.

Myths and Facts...Myths and Facts...

Myth: Lesbians, gays, and bisexuals can change their orientation if they want to.

Fact: Studies have indicated that attempts to change one's sexual orientation are usually unsuccessful and often lead to increased depression and suicide. Statistics show that the majority of lesbian, bisexual, and gay people do not see any reason to change. Some, however, have found that accepting their sexual orientation is difficult, given the prejudice that lesbians, bisexuals, and gay people have to deal with.

Myth: We don't know how many gays, lesbians, or bisexual people there are in the general population.

Fact: Although figures vary, studies have estimated that 10 percent of the population classify themselves as lesbian or gay for a significant portion of their lives. (See, for example, Robert T. Michael et al, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994). In a class of ten people, one of them is likely to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual (teacher or student). It is difficult to determine exact percentages, and the correct figure could be much higher, as many of those who are fearful of prejudice hide their sexual orientation.

Myth: Only gay and lesbians should initiate discussions about gay and lesbian issues.

Fact: It is often dangerous for gays and lesbians to bring up these issues because of discrimination or worse. Straight people can initiate discussions, point out heterosexism, and work against homophobia in a variety of ways. (For concrete ideas, see "Things We Can Do," page 19.)

Myth: All lesbian, gay, and bisexuals are protected under antidiscrimination laws in this country.

Fact: In a number of states it is legal to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Only 11 states in the United States explicitly protect lesbians and gays. Massachusetts is one.

Myth: AIDS is a homosexual disease.

Fact: No. AIDS is not a "homosexually-spread disease." Rather, it is a disease spread by unprotected, unsafe sexual behavior, both homosexual and heterosexual. (Sharing needles can also spread the virus.) Lesbians are the least at risk of infection with HIV, the virus associated with AIDS, of any population group.

Myth: Homosexuality is condemned by all religions.

Fact: Many of the world's religions do not condemn homosexuality at all. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, theologians and biblical scholars continue to differ on the Bible's six passages that have been used to condemn homosexual behavior. Other religious traditions, such as Native Americans, are fully accepting of homosexuality, and many denominations are reevaluating their views on homosexuality.

Notes:

•Anti-Gay Violence in 1994: National Trends, Analysis and Incident Summaries. Data collected by the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, March, 1995.

Teaching Idea

- √ Turn the myths and facts into a true/false questionnaire and hand it out to students to see what beliefs they hold about gays and lesbians. Each student can respond to the "quiz" privately, and the teacher can ask for voluntary answers from the class about each question.
- √ Each student can take the "quiz" privately, and the teacher can ask for voluntary answers from the class about each question. The teacher can then share the factual information with students as each question is examined and discussed.

Defining Families

By Charissa Ahlstrom

Adult educators need to write down and share their lessons that include gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (GLBT) issues. Published adult education materials that include GLBT people and concerns are incredibly scarce. This lack of resources is certainly true when discussing the topic of the family, which will be my focus for this article. Many workbooks and texts continue to use family trees and to define families as one mother, one father, and various children. Some texts helpfully expand this notion of family to include divorcees, extended, and single parent families. However, even these latter texts usually fail to use any gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT) terms. Therefore, it is important for those of us who want to clearly address sexual preference to document our lessons so we have some materials with which to work.

Why Address GLBT Issues in the Classroom?

First, there are gay, lesbian, and transgender students in our classes, whether teachers are aware of it or not. Although I believe curricular topics should arise from students, I urge teachers not to wait until they know a student is gay to begin affirming his or her identity in the classroom, nor to wait until the issues are raised by students themselves.

Background

I am a teacher and coordinator in the ESOL Department at Jamaica Plain Community Center's Adult Learning Program. I am a white woman in a lesbian relationship, raised middle class in New York City,

and currently working with a class of Latino, Haitian, and African adult learners. I assume all the work I do is affected by these elements. I teach a beginning level class and the following ideas will reflect my work with this particular group.



From *Love Makes a Family*, edited by Peggy Gillespie

I gathered the following activities from class sessions that addressed family issues over the course of a year. For the purposes of this article, I have selected those lessons that involved discussion of gay and lesbian families (not all the lessons did this) as well as activities that allowed participants to define “family” themselves. Each month our class focused on one primary theme in combination with specific grammar and life skills. For example, in April, 1998, we looked specifically at the topic of “family,” basic prepositions, alphabet review, and oral presentations.

I present this list as one example of how to include lesbian and gay family issues in the context of teaching ESOL. It is only within the last year that I have been out as a lesbian in class and intentionally included lesbian and gay issues in lessons. While it is relevant to the class

community in which I work, I have not yet effectively developed lessons around bisexuality or transgender issues. I am learning more each time how to be inclusive, and I hope this piece helps inspire a broader collection of lessons that reflect all families and that leave the shape and definition of “family” to the individual.

Many of the following activities developed from ideas shared from other teachers and some workshops over the last six years. These activities effectively include students who have step-families, large extended families, gay/lesbian families, and families where there might be different co-parenting or polygamous situations.

1. Define family: I asked students to write down a definition of family and then share the definitions—either aloud or on newspaper. Sometimes I added my own definition or used a dictionary definition. This process allowed the class to reflect on the meaning of family and compare how different individuals might include different circles of people in their definitions.

2. Family wheels: I asked students to draw a circle with their names in the middle. Then they drew lines from the circle and wrote the names of all family—immediate, extended and other—in circles at the end of each line. I encouraged students to write the name of the relationship on the line. I demonstrated my wheel first and had them create their wheels. This activity allowed students to add anyone to the circle without needing to fit their family into the traditional family tree format. In addition to excluding some participants, the tradi-

Continued on page 17

Defining Families

Continued from page 16

tional family tree structure can be very difficult for some students to understand. They can get too caught up in the format when the focus is sharing information about their family.

3. Family location charts: I had students fill out charts, listing names of relatives in Massachusetts, in other states, in their native country, and in other countries.

4. I encouraged students to write the name of the state, city, or country next to the name of the person: We went around and shared our charts. (For example, "Amina is my sister. She lives in the Sudan.") Students then came up and put dots on a world map, indicating the regions where they had family.

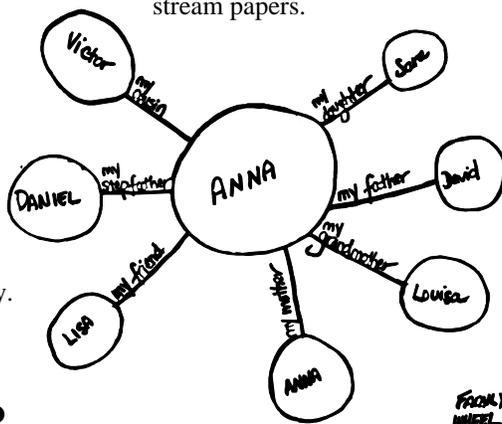
Integrating Gay and Lesbian Vocabulary into Language Exercises

1. Definitions: I gave out the following list of words related to family: widow, lesbian, adopted, divorced, pet, half-sister, step-father, great-grandmother.

We had already discussed some words briefly, but some were new. Students worked in pairs or groups of three and were given two or three words on a sheet of paper. They needed to write a definition of each word, while they could come up with answers as a group. Each individual was asked to do the actual writing of the definition using the dictionary. This gave students practice with dictionary skills.

2. Guessing the word: In this review activity I gave each person a word we had discussed before: step-mother, cousin, aunt, great-grandmother, gay, nephew, foster parents, brother-in-law. They needed to explain the word and the rest of us would guess what the word was.

3. Pictures of gay/lesbian families: Photos in particular can be helpful in visualizing real people if you have so far only discussed gay/lesbian families in the abstract. For example, some students had difficulties understanding me when I spoke about my partner and her daughter. I brought in my photos during our family photo-sharing days, which made my relationship clearer to students. One can find photos of GLBT folks and families in gay-friendly magazines and newspapers. Around gay pride day there might be some pictures in mainstream papers.



4. Family Literacy: One month, many students chose to read, practice, and present a children's book to the whole class. They could choose any book, but I brought in many choices that students could pick as well. One title, *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dads, Blue Dads*, by Johnny Valentine is gay-friendly, and in a light-hearted, and entertaining and subtle way, approaches serious themes of understanding different families.

Results and Responses

Introducing gay and lesbian issues to the classroom and being out was easier than I expected. Students did not attack or challenge my identity in a confrontational manner. I did not feel they disrespected me as a teacher. I do believe all these hypothetical responses are possible in some situations, but it has not yet been my experience. The fact that I am their teacher plays a role in their response. There is inherent social

power for someone in a teacher position that can prevent students from outwardly disrespecting the teacher. Two students, however, did communicate to a substitute teacher that gay and lesbian relationships were against their religion and they did not approve of them.

On the whole, the positive experiences encouraged me as a teacher to be out in the classroom and gave me a solid starting point for continuing to address GLBT issues in the future. I found that some learners were sincerely interested in asking questions about gay men and lesbians. These learners are now more informed about the gay community and had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss how GLBT people are treated in their communities. They have names to put on these "taboo" relationships and have been exposed to them in a way that validates the relationships within regular discussions about family. I urge adult educators—straight and gay—to introduce GLBT issues in the classroom. Sharing the results of these experiences, both positive and negative, will enable us to develop increasingly better strategies and curricula that are inclusive of all people and families.

Charissa Ahstrom teaches ESOL at the Adult Learning Program in Jamaica Plain. She welcomes questions and responses and can be reached at (617)635-5201.

This article was excerpted from Connections: A Journal of Adult Literacy, Vol. viii, Summer, 1999, published by the Adult Literacy Resource Institute.

Check out

<www.familydiv.org> for more information about *Love Makes a Family*, a traveling exhibit and book about families with lesbian and gay parents.

Computers, ESOL, and Inclusion

by Steve Quann and Diana Satin

How does a straight couple writing a book on computers and ESOL end up bringing gay and lesbian issues to the classroom? As ESOL instructors in community-based education programs, we recently finished writing a textbook for students. Though it covers the topic of word processing, it does so in a way that incorporates discussion. We included issues we thought would be of interest and concern to adult learners.

Change in Plans

To be honest, it wasn't part of the original plan to include same-sex issues in the book, but the idea came out in the process of writing. Each unit of the book contains a dialogue followed by discussion questions. As we began to develop the dialogues we found ourselves creating a story line in which a relationship develops between two straight students. We then decided it was important to include same-sex dating. We realized that teachers and students often find it difficult to bring up this issue, and there isn't much mention of gay or lesbian relationships in most ESOL books. Including a same-sex relationship would allow teachers to prepare for such a discussion. In addition, we felt that gay and lesbian students might feel more validation if this topic were brought up.

We created a first draft of a dialogue where a main character, talking to his friend, discloses that he is gay. We then developed discussion questions to follow. Since neither of us is gay, we recognized we would lack perspective on the topic, and asked Charissa Ahlstrom, a lesbian colleague, for comments on our first efforts. We found her comments invaluable, and as a result, altered this section of the book. For example, she noted:

"1. In discussion question 2, another alternative to the word 'homosexual' is simply 'gay/lesbian.' The plus about 'homosexual' in an ESOL class is that it might be more easily understood, as other languages might more likely use this term. The negative of using the term 'homosexual' is that the term emphasizes the sexual, rather than the relational aspect of the relationship (a regular struggle in the gay community to have people actually look at our relationship just like a straight relationship, rather than just our sexual activity). I even prefer the term 'same-sex' to 'homosexual' as it seems to be more clearly communicating gender rather than sexual activity."

Using the Feedback

As a result of the feedback, we reworked the section as follows. (Note: In a previous chapter, Chan and Igor began a discussion about the topic of dating someone from another culture, and they continue the discussion while working together in the school's computer lab.)

Chan: Hey, Igor, have you tried using the Page Up and Page Down keys when you edit?

Igor: No, I haven't.

Chan: Sometimes it's easier to move around in your document that way.

Igor: Thanks for the tip. I'll try it right now. ...I've got to get something typed before I go out with my partner.

Chan: Is this a date?

Igor: Yes, it is.

Chan: Do I know her?

Igor: Um, well...

Chan: Come on, you can tell me.

Igor: Well, I do have something to tell you. Actually, it's a guy.

Chan: Oh, really? Was that what you didn't have time to tell me before?

Igor: That's right. I have never dated

anyone outside my culture as you have, but believe me, I do know how families and friends can react to relationships that are different from their expectations.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are important elements of a healthy romantic relationship?
2. Can same-sex relationships contain the elements mentioned in question 1? Why or why not?
3. Why did Igor hesitate to tell Chan that he is gay?
4. What kinds of reactions have you noticed that people have when they find out friends or family members are in a gay or lesbian relationship?
5. Do you understand why people develop attitudes against groups of people with whom they don't have much experience? Where might they learn these attitudes?

Although much work still remains to be done, some textbooks have been making progress by including people of color in more prominent roles and creating characters in more balanced gender roles. However, there appears to be much less progress in terms of gay and lesbian representation in ESOL books. Perhaps it has been TV programs such as *Ellen* that helped us to become more conscious of finding small ways in which we can "normalize" gays and lesbians by bringing their characters into our classroom readings, activities, and discussions.

Diana Satin teaches ESOL at the Jamaica Plain Community Center's Adult Learning Program. She can be reached at (617) 635-5201. Steve Quann teaches ESL at Massasoit Community College and is Project Assistant for the Eastern LINCS Web site. He can be contacted at (617) 482-9485. You can e-mail them at stevendiana@eudoramail.com.

Things We Can Do

Edited by Stefanie Mattfeld and Deborah Schwartz



***T**here is a range of possible actions in dealing with issues of sexual orientation in the classroom and in combating homophobia. We all make different decisions depending on what we are comfortable with. You may decide that one of these actions is right for you, or you may want to take on more. Whatever choices you make, don't look to your gay and lesbian students to "come out" in the classroom or to do the teaching for you. This list was adapted and compiled from several sources, then edited. See footnotes for references.*

1. **Do not assume all of your students are straight (heterosexual).** Remember that in a classroom of ten students, the odds are that at least one is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.
2. **Don't force students to disclose anything they are not comfortable with.** For example, if you plan lessons that demand disclosure of personal or family information, you can always give an optional lesson that does not require students to reveal OR disclose their sexual orientation.
3. **Use inclusive language.** When speaking, writing policies, or when distributing memos, use language that is gender-neutral about behavior and relationships. For instance, invite people to bring their "spouses or partners" to an event.
4. **Openly use the words gay, lesbian, and bisexual in any context that you are teaching,** not just when you are specifically teaching to these issues. (See Resource section for **SpeakOut!**.)
5. **Provide classroom speakers who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender** in order to share their experiences, respond to students' questions, and to celebrate diversity.
6. **Institute an "antislur" policy from the first day of class** that includes a ban on homophobic remarks. Don't allow offensive humor directed at gays and lesbians or homophobic remarks in class.
7. **Challenge all homophobic remarks.** You can ask other students to respond to the comments, express your own discomfort with the comments, or begin a discussion and supply the class with information that helps dispel stereotypes and inaccurate information. Remember that being silent means you are, in a way, agreeing with the comment and sending a message to the rest of the class.
8. **Expose learners to positive historical and current role models** for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender communities. When discussing literature, history, social studies in class, point out that certain figures were/are gay or lesbian the same way you would mention their ethnic or racial background.
10. **Push for teacher in-services around gay, lesbian, or bisexual issues.** For example, set up a staff training about homophobia: how and why we should confront it as educators.
11. **Post resources for all students** about social services and include numbers for gay/lesbian hotlines.
12. **Join GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network.** (See Resource page for information.)
13. **Examine images of gays and lesbians in the media**—especially in feature films and television. Look at stereotypes as well as positive images of gays and lesbians. Some films with gay-positive characters include *The Wedding Banquet*, and *Bent*.

Notes:

1. "Dealing with Sexual Orientation in the Classroom." Karen Snelbecker and Tom Meyer. Originally published in TESOL Matters, Aug/Sept 1996; reprinted in full in the *Change Agent*, February 1999, Issue 8. Available from Marie Horchler at World Education, 617-482-9485.
2. "Supporting the Invisible Minority." John D. Anderson. *Educational Leadership*, April 1997, 70.
3. The Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Speakers Bureau. (now called **Speak Out!**). Handout. See reference on page 26.
4. The TA's guide for Overcoming Homophobia in the Classroom. <<http://youth.org/loco/PERSONProject/Resources/organizing Tactics/TA>.

What Page ...

Continued from page 11

there is a sense of resignation surrounding this issue. Turnout for meetings that year was smaller. It seemed that we just didn't have the critical mass of people who wanted to spend a free evening with work colleagues talking about curriculum. Our multiple roles felt like an insurmountable obstacle. Given that the group included administrators, counselors, and all levels of teachers, these conversations stayed broad.

Eventually, we left the sharing group and workshop formats to have a purely social event. This was the first of periodic game nights which included partners, friends, and other family members. The laughter and camaraderie have been wonderful. Yet I have a small nagging worry is that these events aren't really about the field or about g/l/bi activism.

In the spring of 1998, I attended an event sponsored by Facing History and Ourselves. This was to have as much impact on me as the visit to Highlander. The preview for the coming exhibit, "Choosing to Participate," included speakers and video. The keynote speaker who had heroically pulled an Asian-American man from a crowd of angry rioters made a huge impression on me. He said that acts of heroism in life or death situations are not what "choosing to participate is ideally about." Risking life or death for either victim or ally is not the goal. Rather, building communities where people know each other and can work as allies to prevent potentially violent situations is the goal. Gathering socially, knowing each other, and having a mailing list, don't smack of the glory of organizing. It doesn't look sensational, but in the case of gay/lesbian, and bisexual ABE staff, it situates us so that we can respond if necessary. We have the support of many behind us if a situation at a program feels difficult or unsafe. And now we have a brief history too.

Martha Merson is the ABE Specialist at the Adult Literacy Resource Institute. She can be reached at (617) 782-8956.

Lifestyles and Literature

by Tomas Napoleon

As a gay educator working at both North Shore Community Action Programs, Inc. (NSCAP) and the Peabody P.R.E.P Center, I believe in the power of identifying and addressing gay and lesbian topics in literature. Teaching gay and lesbian topics in the ABE classroom is a serious moral and cultural undertaking that plays a role in defining the quality of both personal and community living in a pluralistic society. ABE teachers are aware of the power of literature to foster and celebrate feelings of community and to shape and understand personal experience. Readers who see alternative lifestyles represented in literature refine their sympathies and become more humanistic.

Giovanni's Room

For example, in the book *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin, the two main characters in the book are gay. The quality of their lives is characterized by the ethical choices they make. Because of their dishonesty to each other, communication between the men breaks down and they become alienated from each other. This book can become a catalyst for examining standards of behavior that shape personal experience. Teachers who use such books, however, must become educated about matters of gay culture, including mannerisms, interaction styles, embedded meanings, and taboo words and actions. This would involve immersing themselves in gay and lesbian topics in literature so they can be aware of them as they teach books with gay and lesbian characters to students.

In today's multicultural ABE classrooms, there are many ways to refocus and extend teaching and learning for all—including gay and lesbian students. We can do this by:

Asking who is and who is not represented in our ABE classrooms, in curriculum, in language use, and in social relations, and then working toward more inclusive representation;

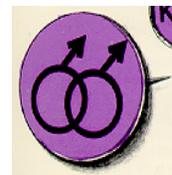
Cooperatively studying with our gay and lesbian students, as with all of our students, the real-life substance of their lives—their problems, their language, and their thought, and constructing active, creative ways to make these realities the knowledge base from which other learning evolves;

Critically considering how literature can present multiple perspectives, lenses and voices, including those of lesbian and gay students;

Thinking about how our ABE classrooms encourage or discourage critique. Are all students—gay, lesbian, and straight—and teachers encouraged to question and think critically rather than to passively accept information, policies, and practices as givens?

By following the above suggestions, ABE administrators and educators can work with gay colleagues and students in the development of a pedagogy that promotes civic responsibility and encourages positive action for change in our ABE classrooms and in a pluralistic society.

Tomas Napoleon, Citizenship Director at Northshore Community Action Programs, is an ESOL teacher at Peabody P.R.E.P Center. He holds an MA in English, an Ed.M. in Educational Administration, and a C.A.G.S in Modern Greek. He can be reached at (978) 531-0767 X102



No Fuss...

Continued from page 4

the back cover's description. They agreed with their teacher: she's like me, she's smart and she can't read; or she's good with her hands but she can't read; or she's good with people but she can't read. It was more difficult in this class when students found out Lori "specializes in women." A student verbalized her negative feeling about homosexuality when she got to this line. I said, "Does that change how you feel about Lori?" She said, "A little." I was surprised and pleased that even though her personal views were strong, she could still maintain some openness toward the character.

Matter of Fact

In talking with the author, Lucy Jane Bledsoe, we agreed that audiences respond positively to Lori in part because she is matter-of-fact in her identity. She is not questioning or in crisis. The entire narrative treats Lori's lesbianism in a matter-of-fact way. Particularly in the first chapter, no other characters judge or question Lori's identity. The reader is led to accept the character as a whole and to treat the subject with the same matter-of-fact attitude. I followed the book's lead and steered clear of questions that would put learners on the spot.

For example, questions like "What do you think? What are synonyms for ___? Have you ever?" when referring to a text with lesbian or gay characters are potentially very loaded questions that can create tense situations in class, often putting students on the spot in ways that are not intended. Many times it is difficult, especially for young adults, but often for older adults as well, to express curiosity or sympathy for lesbian and gay issues without getting labeled. Letting the topic be just part of the landscape enabled students to read on and to learn about the feelings, perspectives, and world of a lesbian character with little risk.

Teaching Ideas

My protocol for using *Working Parts* includes:

- Forming predictions based on front cover graphics.
- Careful reading of the back cover.
- Dividing the class into pairs. Each pair lists five facts they know are true about the book or character and five questions.
- Compiling those lists on the board.
- Reading aloud the first seven paragraphs
- Referring back and answering questions that were generated.
- Discussing the senses Bledsoe includes in her description of the library.
- Allowing time for silent reading of the first chapter.
- Listening to reactions at certain points.
- Distributing choices (from the list below) and GED questions.
- Students choose and work with someone else who makes the same choice. All of the choices encourage students to reread. Each choice draws on one of Gardner's intelligences.

Student Choices

1. Make up 10 questions to ask the author.
2. Design a flyer to announce a reading by Lucy Bledsoe. What would you put on it?
3. Act out a part of the first chapter with a partner. You can use words or just act it out.
4. Make a drawing or model of the library and how it's set up.
5. Go through the first chapter as if you are turning the book into a movie. What background music would you use with the different scenes? Be prepared to explain why.
6. Make a cartoon of the beginning, middle, and end of the chapter.
7. Write your own description of a place using all the senses.

GED Questions

1. Which is not true of Lori?
 - a) Lori is smart.
 - b) Lori has had boyfriends

- c) Lori thinks learning to read is harder than kissing.
- d) Lori has no dreams because she can't read.
- e) Lori is afraid of books.

2. Which adjectives best describe Lori's behavior with her tutor, Deidre?
 - a) Obnoxious and silly
 - b) Rude and uncivil
 - c) Angry and hostile
 - d) Nervous and crazy
 - e) Bored and flirtatious
3. Which is true about the setting for the first scene of *Working Parts*?
 - a) It is early fall.
 - b) The building is a college library.
 - c) The book takes place in New York.
 - d) The setting changes between a library and a school.
 - e) It is the early 20th century.
4. Fix the sentence to make the underlined word make sense.
 - a) She can get by because she charismas well.
 - b) I made pact with her that neither of us would say any thing.
 - c) Their dislike mutual makes everyone around them uncomfortable.

Martha Merson is the ABE Specialist at the Adult Literacy Resource Institute/Greater Boston SABES Resource Center in Boston. She can be reached at (617)782-8956.



Statewide ABE Initiatives: What's Up?

An ABE Certification Process for Massachusetts

Contact: MaryJayne Fay at DOE (781)338-3854, ext 3854 or Carey Reid at SABES (617)482-9485
e-mail: mjfay@doe.mass.edu; creid@worlded.com

DOE and SABES are designing a certification process for adult basic education practitioners that combines existing DOE procedures and newly designed procedures so the true nature of the adult basic education field is respected. The new DOE recertification requirements and recent legislation have combined to reinvigorate efforts to establish an ABE certification for the Commonwealth. A statewide Certification Advisory Committee, composed of a wide range of stakeholders, has been convened to advise this new system. The Committee reviews draft documents produced by a Certification Workgroup, composed of staff from SABES, ACLS, and the DOE Certification Office. These groups have agreed upon a draft "practitioners' competencies list" and several ways to align ABE certification requirements with the DOE system for K-12 certification. In the months ahead, they will focus on ways to indicate and to acquire proficiency, including granting credit for prior learning and experience.

Health Education (Comprehensive Health Education Initiative)

Contact: Marie Narvaez at DOE: (781)338-3847 e-mail: Mnarvaez@doe.mass.edu

This year, the health initiative is focusing on institutionalization of health content and partnerships as a permanent part of the agency's core ABE Instructional services. For FY2000, the ABE HealthTA Team, which functions through the SABES Regional Centers, will work closely with ABE health-funded programs as they build on this initiative. The statewide health TA Leaders are Marcia Hohn (978-738-7301) and Elizabeth Morrish (617-482-9485). The Health and Literacy Liaison (HILLS) Team will work closely with the ABE health-funded programs as well as provide outreach to nonfunded ABE programs on the integration of health content across the curriculum. *Programs interested in continuing or beginning to provide health education can include a delivery plan in the next open and competitive RFP. Call one of the above contact people for more information about how to get started.*

Family Literacy: the Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium

Contact: Kathy Rodriguez at DOE: (781)338-3846 e-mail: Krodriquez@doe.mass.edu

The mission of the Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium (MFLC) is to forge effective partnerships among state and community organizations and others to expand and strengthen family literacy. In November, 1999, the MFLC cosponsored a few major efforts: the proclamation of Massachusetts Family Literacy Month as declared by Governor Celluci, a Family Literacy Month mailing of materials and information, and the "Leading the Way with Family Literacy" conference.

Curriculum Frameworks

Contact: Robert Foreman or Jessica Spohn at DOE: (781) 338-3803 or 3815

e-mail: Rforeman@doe.mass.edu; Jspohn@doe.mass.edu

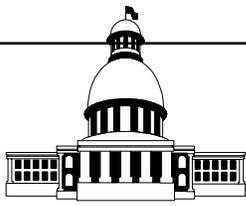
The English Language Arts, English to Speakers of Other Languages, and Science and Technology frameworks have been revised and were distributed to programs in early November. New contractors have been hired to revise the History and Social Science framework, and the Health framework will be revised this fall. ACLS awarded 22 grants to Local Education Authority (LEA) providers of ABE programs to assess how one or more of the curriculum frameworks currently in development can strengthen curricula and assessment used in the provider's program. ACLS has recently release a competitive RFP for community-based organizations and non-profit organizations that provide ABE services.

Workplace Education

Contact: Olivia Steele or Andrea Perrault at DOE: (781)338-3858 or 3852

e-mail: Osteel@doe.mass.edu; Aperrault@doe.mass.edu

Workplace Education grants provide assistance to businesses and unions through partnerships with education providers to meet changing skills demands and to increase English and literacy abilities of employees. Workplace partnerships around the state are doing great work and running solid planning and evaluation teams. Four partnerships around the state are in their third and final year of DOE funding; some are in their second year. There are four new FY 2000 Workplace Education Instructional Grants awarded based on a successful planning process. For specifics on these partnerships, contact Olivia or Andrea at the above number. There will be another RFP process for workplace education grants. As always, ACLS will publicize the information to all ABE programs as soon as it becomes available.



State of the State

An Interview with Bob Bickerton

About Gay and Lesbian Issues in Adult Basic Education

In 1989, the US Department of Health and Human Services commissioned a study that revealed a higher number of gay and lesbian youth commit suicide than straight youth. Activists around the country responded to the results of the study, and those in Massachusetts advocated with then Governor Weld to address the findings. Weld established a commission on gay and lesbian youth, which led to some specific actions. First, the state law in Massachusetts that says no students shall be discriminated against and excluded from access to public school services (Chapter 76, section 5) was amended to include sexual orientation, affording greater legal protection to gay and lesbian students. To help public schools implement the newly amended law, the Safe Schools project was started in the K-12 system. The project has expanded and offers a variety of components extending beyond legal compliance. For example, Safe Schools offers trainings for students, faculty, and staff on violence and suicide prevention for gay and lesbian youth and helps start support groups for parents of gay and lesbian youth. It also provides grant money to develop gay/straight alliances, to develop mentoring programs, and to disseminate information on exemplary practices.

Bright Ideas thought it would be interesting to talk to Bob Bickerton, Director of ACLS, to see how adult education services might learn from their K-12 counterparts in this area.

Interview by Lenore Balliro

LB: What kinds of policies are in place to protect gay and lesbian students and teachers in adult education?

BB: DOE uses explicit antidiscrimination language that includes reference to sexual orientation. In all its language—hiring, grants, etc., when we put out RFPs, programs must sign a statement of assurances that includes assurances of nondiscrimination. (The “Statement of Assurances” signed by every program includes an assurance of affirmative action/nondiscrimination with respect to race, color, creed, national origin, or sex.) But the “thou shalt’s” alone aren’t enough to affect real change. The real action is in the classroom, with trainings, materials development, curriculum. ACLS can support these efforts through SABES minigrants, for example. We recognize the need to create safe and inclusive environments for students, and this includes sensitivity to dialogues, exchanges, materials. The NE Social Action Theater has a skit that deals with gay bashing. I think this is a good way to bring issues into the classroom. We need to create or find materials where

gays and lesbians can see themselves and that support an open and safe environment.

LB: What if it were brought to ACLS’s attention that teachers in a program were overtly homophobic and created a hostile environment for their gay or lesbian students? How would this be addressed?

BB: It depends on how it was brought to our attention. If we receive a formal complaint, our office would work with “Program Quality Assurance” (the unit with lead responsibility for complaints) to investigate and determine if there was a violation of law or regulation. If the charge(s) of such discrimination were substantiated, we would direct the program to remedy this situation. Depending on the severity of the situation, this remedy could range from clarifying how the program will ensure nondiscriminatory practices in the future to actions that could alter or terminate grant support for the program—and many possible responses in between. If we receive a complaint that’s anonymous or from someone

who doesn’t want to submit a formal complaint (we do encourage that complaints be submitted in writing), we would bring it to the program’s attention. We would engage them in a dialogue to ensure everyone understands this important legal requirement and our expectation that it be proactively implemented. In either case, our goal would be to ensure that every student and staff member experience an open, safe, and respectful work and learning environment.

LB: I’ve been wondering how to send the message out to people in the field that ACLS supports inclusion and respect for all students.... for example, is there any mention in the indicators of program quality or in the frameworks, in the context of diversity, that explicitly mentions inclusiveness of gays and lesbians in our programs?

BB: Neither the Indicators nor the ABE Curriculum Frameworks include specific references or examples that highlight the importance of creating an open and safe environment for gay

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State of the State

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and lesbian students and staff. Your question highlights an opportunity for us to be more proactive in getting this message out and we will do so in future revisions to these and other appropriate documents.

LB: Are there domestic partnership benefits through the Department of Education for same-sex partners?

BB: Massachusetts state government does not provide domestic partnership benefits.

LB: K-12 is doing really good things in this area. How might we learn from their efforts? Adult education is a different environment—do you think it presents different challenges?

BB: First, a higher percentage of gay and lesbian youth drop out of school than their nongay and lesbian peers. Hence, I believe we can safely assume that there is a higher rate of gays and lesbians among our adult students.

I believe we have more opportunities to address prejudices like homophobia and racism in the adult education classroom—after all, even those who object to exposing impressionable children to these issues should have no such concerns when it comes to adult students.

On other hand, we may be challenged by the fact that adults are not as overt with their biases and prejudices as kids are—with the result that “teachable moments” may not be as obvious.

Adult education classrooms are not only a microcosm of the community, they become a community unto

themselves. As adult educators, we have an opportunity to foster a community that represents the best of who we are and who we can become. I strongly encourage our colleagues to find those “teachable moments” and use them to establish a stimulating, open, and safe environment for all students.

Bob Bickerton is the Director of Adult and Community Learning Services in the Massachusetts Department of Education. He can be reached at (781)338-3850.

For information about the Safe Schools Project through the Massachusetts Department of Education in K-12, contact Eric Pliner at (781) 338-6313.

Are We Imposing?

Continued from page 6

“uncomfortable” to bring up sensitive, controversial issues in class. Sometimes it is. But isn’t a great deal of learning uncomfortable? We can celebrate, sing, dance, eat with our students, but learning involves changing behavior, examining preconceived notions about how the world works. Bringing up tough issues like homophobia might make students, and ourselves, squirm. Sometimes squirming is good. On the other hand, teachers who have addressed difficult subjects in the class are often surprised that students aren’t as uncomfortable as we think.

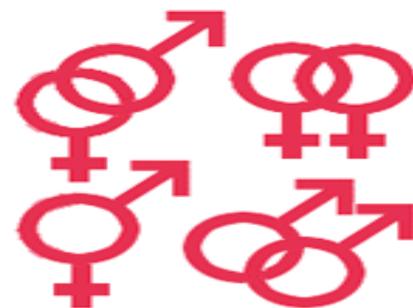
Third, teachers often express

the fear that they don’t know enough about certain issues, or they don’t know enough about how to address certain issues (like racism or homophobia) in class. I agree that we need some education to do this work effectively. But if we waited until we knew everything about everything, we’d never teach. We can request staff development trainings. We can convene study circles. We can read, explore, research on our own. We can examine our own perceptions and feelings. We have to become learners with our students as we explore these issues. We will make mistakes and learn from them.

One of the most valuable bits of advice for teachers who want to begin dealing with the “tough issues” in

class came from an anti-racism training a few years ago at the ALRI, sponsored by Judy Hofer and Tracy Tsugawa. When some of us brought up our concerns about “saying or doing the wrong thing” when addressing sensitive issues in class, Tracy said: “You just have to get over yourselves!” This kick in the pants can free us from the paralysis that sets in when we’re afraid to make mistakes. We ask our students to take risks all the time; maybe we can take more of them as well.

Lenore Balliro is the editor of Bright Ideas.



**Check out these additional articles on
<www.SABES.org>:**

“On Being an Ally”

“Questions for Exploring Sexual Orientation”

“A Little Story about Teaching in Chinatown”

Go to Publications, then Bright Ideas and click on the article of your choice.

Calendar

January 2000

21-22

MATSOL Spring Conference: *Setting Our Course*

Location: UMass Boston

Contact: Carol Allen, c/oBU/CELOP, 890 Commonwealth Ave., Boston 02215

24-26

National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), 9th Annual

Family Literacy Conference: *New Challenges in the New Century*

Location: Orlando, FL

Contact: NCFL, (502)584-1133

Web: www.famlit.org/conference/conf2000.html

March 2000

5-8

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE), Annual Conference

COABE 2000: *Class in Chicago* Location: Chicago, IL

Contact: COABE/AAACE, (202)429-5131

Web: www.albany.edu/aaace/conferences

14-18

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL),

34th Annual Convention: *ESOL 2000: Navigating the New Millennium*

Location: Vancouver, BC

Contact: TESOL, (703)836-0074

Web: www.tesol.edu/conv/index.html

16-18

Penn State University, Second Eastern Regional Adult Education

Research Conference: *From Generation to Consolidation: Building*

Upon the Best of Theory and Practice

Location: State College, PA

Contact: Katie Earley, (814)863-5100

Web: www.outreach.psu.edu/C&I/EasternAdultEducation

April 30-May 5

International Reading Association (IRA), 45th Annual Convention:

Reading the New World Location: Indianapolis, IN

Contact: IRA, (302)731-1600

Web: www.reading.org/conferences/convention/2000Conv/conv_2000.html

Ongoing:

SABES Southeast sponsors an ongoing teacher-sharing group on diversity issues in the classroom. SEED, Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity meets monthly from September to May. Call SABES Southeast at (508)678-2811, x2278 to get dates and times.

Bright Ideas is a quarterly newsletter that provides a place to share innovative practices, new resources, and information within the field of adult basic education. It is published by SABES, the System for Adult Basic Education Support, and funded by Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS), Massachusetts Department of Education. **Bright Ideas will change its name and look this spring.**

Opinions expressed in *Bright Ideas* are those of the authors and not necessarily the opinions of SABES or its funders.

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Subscriptions are free to Massachusetts ABE practitioners. All others may subscribe for an annual fee of \$8.00. To subscribe, contact David Gontaruk, *Bright Ideas*, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210. Make checks payable to World Education.

Submissions are welcome. If you have an idea for an article or wish to submit a letter to the editor, call Lenore Balliro at (617)482-9485. We do reserve the right to decline publication.

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Cathy Coleman, Tricia Donovan, David Gontaruk, Alice Levine, Stefanie Mattfeld, Tomas Napoleon, Deborah Schwartz

Resources

Organizations

GALE (Gay and Lesbian Educators): Support and networking. Write to: PO Box 930, Amherst, MA 01004.

GLSEN ,The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

GLSEN is one of the nation's leading voices for equality and safety in the educational system.

National office: 121 West 27th St., New York, 10001. (212) 727-0135

Boston office: 132 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116. (617) 451-1119

Boston e-mail: janeoconno@aol.com

Stonewall Center: Lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender educational resource center at UMass, Amherst (413) 545-482. e-mail: stonewal@stuaf.umass.edu. Web: <www.umass.edu/stonewall>.

Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination: Information and complaint filing for discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodation. Springfield: (413) 739-2145.

Web: <www.umass.edu/legal/mcadrgs.html>

Boston: <www.state.ma.us/mcad>

SpeakOut! (formerly the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Speakers Bureau) 29 Stanhope Street, Boston, MA 02116. (617)450-9776. Offers speaking engagements on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues to encourage dialogue and understanding. Sliding scale for honorarium. Also train people as speakers.

PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays): (978) 562-4176

Call for regional PFLAG offices around the state. Web: <www.ma.altranet.com/~gbpflag>

Hotlines and Information Lines

Gay and Lesbian Telephone Hotlines

Boston: (617) 267-2535

Springfield: (413) 731-5403

Everywoman's Center Hotline: (413) 545-0883

Journals, Magazines, Newsletters

Radical Teacher. Published: triannually by the Institute for Critical Education, Inc.
Subscription Address: PO Box 102, Kendall Square Post Office, Cambridge MA 01242.
Lesbian/Gay/Queer studies. Issue #45 is available as a back issue for \$1.00 per copy.

Connections: A Journal of Adult Literacy. Published by the Adult Literacy Resource Institute. Fall 1999 issue is entitled *Taking Risks*. Available free to Massachusetts ABE practitioners. Contact Steve Reuys at (617) 782-8956.

Rethinking Schools. 1001 E. Keefe Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53212.
Phone: (800) 669-4192; Web: <webrs@execpc.com>
See article "Out Front" in Vol.13, #2, article by Annie Johnston.

Teaching Tolerance magazine. Each issue includes topics on issues like race relations, homophobia, religious diversity, anti-Semitism, and building classroom community. Free to teachers. Send request on program letterhead to *Teaching Tolerance*, 400 Washington Ave, Montgomery, AL 36104.

The Change Agent. February 1999, Issue 8. "Working Across Differences." Call Marie Horchler at World Education (617) 482-9485.

Videos

Both My Moms' Names Are Judy. Lesbian and Gay Parents Association, 519 Castro Street, Box 52, San Francisco, CA 94114-2577, (415) 522-8773. "Powerful short video shows school children who have gay or lesbian parents talking about their experiences at school. Shows how gay and lesbian family issues are relevant to school settings. Anti-homophobia workshop guide for educators and administrators; includes list of books with gay and lesbian characters appropriate for young children." Available from the ALRI library: (617) 782-8956.

It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School. Director: Debra Chasnoff. "Revelatory documentary depicts ways in which primary and secondary schools educate their students about gay/lesbian issues despite political/parental pressures. This educational must-see presents potentially incendiary material with grace and professionalism." (Reel.com) Runtime: 78 minutes. Available through ALRI library: 617-782-8956.

Stolen Moments. "Giving voice to stories that have been scattered or buried, rendering a shadowy history visible, *Stolen Moments* is a tribute to the past—and to the future—of lesbians in society. Available for borrowing from the Central Resource Center of SABES. Call Lou Wollrab at (617) 482-9485

Books, Booklets

Gay/Straight Alliances: A Student Guide. Published by the Massachusetts Department of Education. Call Eric Pliner at (781) 338-6313

Understanding Homosexuality, Changing Schools: A Text for Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators. Arthur Lipkin. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999.

Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Education: A Bibliography. Tracy Phariss. GLSEN/Colorado, PO Box 280346, Lakewood, CO 80228, 1999.

Love Makes A Family. "Combines interviews and photographs to document the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents and their children. It allows all of the family members to speak candidly about their lives, their relationships, and the ways in which they have dealt with the pressures of homophobia."

Articles

"Sexual Identities in ESL: Queer Theory and Classroom Inquiry." Cynthia Nelson. *TESOL Quarterly*, Autumn 1999, Vol 33, No. 3.

"Touching in Public: The Story of an Unsatisfactory Dialogue with a Publisher." Martha Merson. *All Write News*, July/Aug. 1996, Vol. XII, No. 7.

"Touching in Public: The Dialogue Continues." Martha Merson. *All Write News*, Sept/Oct 1996. Vol. XIII, No. 1.

"What Do We Say When We Hear 'Faggot?'" Lenore Gordon. Reprinted in *Rethinking Schools*. Vol. 6, No. 4, p 4.

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www.netwiz.net/~fiadhchu/CH/ch_pre.html

Challenging Homophobia Online Workshop. Practical, interactive, valuable.

www.glaad.org/glaad/glaad.html

GLAAD online: Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. GLAAD's mission is to promote fair and accurate representation of gay people in the media. Website offers articles, eyes on the media, alerts, and more.

www.glsen.org

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educators Network. "GLSEN believes that we can end homophobia in this generation by working with students, educators, and parents at all levels of education."

www.glsenboston.org is the local chapter. Check this site for upcoming events.

www.glenla.org/GUIDE/guide.html

Read about and order "The Inclusive Curriculum: the Silent Majority Comes to the Classroom" on this Web site.

www.gayzoo.com/

This search engine offers several topic areas, including arts/entertainment, health/medicine, students/youth, news/media, and more. You can also enter your own topic to search.

www.msu.edu/~alliance/gayfaq.htm<http://www.msu.edu/~alliance/gayfaq.htm>

Frequently asked questions about sexual orientation.

www.familydiv.org

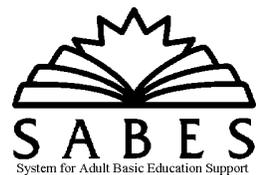
Photo text exhibit site for "Love Makes a Family," a look at families with lesbian and gay parents.



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