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Frameworks for Understanding LGBTQ-inclusive Environments

Tolerance/ Visibility	Anti-homophobia	Anti-heterosexism/ anti-heteronormativity	Queer
A tolerance/visibility framework is one in which the existence of gay or lesbian people/culture/content is acknowledged. Methods might include brief acknowledgement of a gay or lesbian author's or historical figure's sexual identity or of prominent gay/lesbian political or historical events, the inclusion of books with gay or lesbian characters in the classroom library, and reprimanding students for overtly anti-gay expressions. The motivation for these methods may include a desire to let gay, lesbian, or questioning students (or students with gay or lesbian parents) see themselves represented in the classroom, if not the curriculum. It may be seen as the "safest" framework for teachers who fear controversy.	An anti-homophobia framework implies a social justice approach, with the explicit goal of reducing homophobia. Methods might include prohibiting overtly homophobic language, teaching literature that has an overtly anti-homophobic message, teaching about the ways LGBTQ people have been discriminated against, or conducting lessons intended to convey an understanding about the impact homophobia has on LGBTQ students. This framework generally assumes LGBTQ students are experiencing social and personal struggles about their sexual identity, and also assumes that straight students (and many LGBTQ students themselves) are homophobic. It encourages empathy and tolerance, if not acceptance, of LGBTQ people.	An anti-heterosexism framework also implies social justice commitments, but here the emphasis is on disrupting the assumption that heterosexuality is the only "normal" sexual identity (whereas an anti-homophobia framework emphasizes teaching that LGBTQ people should be treated well, regardless of whether one sees them as "normal"). Students are taught to deconstruct the homophobia and heterosexism that exist in society—as seen in the classroom, in literature, in culture, in history and politics, and so forth. It seeks to convey an understanding (and critique) of the ways our society privileges heterosexuality and renders LGBTQ identities inferior or invisible. Methods might include teaching numerous books with LGBTQ content; comprehensively including gay/lesbian history; calling students' attention to authors' and characters' sexual identities, even when they are straight; and encouraging students to recognize the heterosexism that exists around us—and to see LGBTQ identities as normal, not different.	A queer framework also rejects the notion that heterosexuality is "normal." It calls attention to homophobia and heterosexism, but rather than assert that LGBTQ identities ought to be seen and treated equally with heterosexual identity, it suggests we examine that whole framework (in which sexual identity is seen as fixed, and where LGBTQ people ought to strive to be viewed and treated the same as straight people). The content might be similar to anti-heterosexism's, but the emphasis would be on troubling the implications and assumptions embedded in the content. Methods might include teaching queer theory and asking students to apply a queer lens to their reading of text and the world, and challenging homophobia and heterosexism not only on the grounds that they are hurtful and unjust, but also because they are based on heteronormative understandings of sexual identity. A queer framework troubles the very idea of "normal." The goal shifts away from encouraging understanding and tolerance of LGBTQ people and toward developing a critical lens that enables students to more deeply understand and accept *all* complexity—in literature, history, their lives, the world. This is also a goal for the educator, as possessing a queer lens inevitably results in instruction that is more queer-inclusive.

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I would like to simply call these *principles of critical literacy*, as the impulses and imperatives of queer theory/pedagogy and critical theory/literacy are the same. However, because critical theorists have yet to fully acknowledge and take up the imperatives of queer theory/pedagogy, it seems crucial to call specific attention to queer issues and frameworks. Here, then, I mean for the term *queer literacy pedagogy* to invoke both queer pedagogy and critical literacy.

Principles for a Queer Literacy Pedagogy

1. Employ "queer" as a verb
   - Constantly challenge – or queer—assumptions about what is normal. Support students' critical literacy skills in a way that develops and sharpens a queer lens for reading and writing the world.

2. Employ both social justice education and queer pedagogy
   - Demonstrate a commitment to working for change, to end homophobia and heterosexism, but at the same time, work to disrupt the very foundations upon which it is built – to, as curriculum theorists Brent Davis and Dennis Sumara put it, interrupt heteronormativity.

3. Build a strong queer-relevant knowledge base
   - For teachers that means, for example, working to be knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues, politics, history. In particular, for elementary school and secondary English teachers, be familiar with and read a lot of queer children's and YA lit.

4. Work against the representation model
   - Do not speak and teach as though any LGBTQ content is representative of a singular experience or static sexual identity. Be clear that stories, for example, are useful for understanding the range of possibilities of human experience, not that they represent a singular experience or identity.

5. Create conditions for safe, honest exploration and self-reflection
   - This includes making the space to support homophobic students in potential transformation, for example, rather than simply shaming or silencing them.

6. Maintain high expectations
   - Be prepared for, but don't *expect*, homophobia. Work from the assumption that young people are capable of mature discussion, complex insight, and real transformation.

7. Expect and respond to changing dynamics
   - Kids grow and adapt and change far more rapidly than we. Understand that one class, one student, may grow and change far more rapidly than we may anticipate.

8. Advance transformation
   - View education as at once about intellectual, academic, social, and individual growth, and teach in an effort to advance transformation in all of those areas. Position literacy as a tool for this transformation.