Adult educators concerned with inclusiveness and social justice are addressing issues related to students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered (GLBT). Although research in mainstream adult education and published adult education materials that include GLBT issues and concerns are scarce, more resources have appeared in the last few years. To include the voices of the diverse GLBT communities, adult educators are turning to such techniques as autobiography, popular education, and transformative learning. Adult educators must address several issues, including whether they must be homosexual to teach about it; whether they should affirm GLBT identities in the classroom before or when students raise the issue; how non-GLBT researchers approach the study of these communities; and whether GLBT teachers should come out to their students. [This publication provides annotations of 19 resources that provide more information on GLBT in general and on questioning existing dominant practices and developing a space in which GLBT students can speak from their own experience if they choose.] (YLB)
Adult Education and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Communities
Trends and Issues Alert No. 21

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Adult educators concerned with inclusiveness and social justice are addressing issues related to students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered (GLBT). Although there is scant research in mainstream adult education literature (Hill 1993) and "published adult education materials that include GLBT issues and concerns" are scarce (Ahlstrom 1999, p. 18), more resources have appeared in the last few years.

Adult developmental theories have been criticized for inadequately representing sexual orientation; new development theories that account for these perspectives are emerging (Edwards and Brooks 1999; Resides 1996). However, research that now has broadened to include ethnicity, gender, age, and class still neglects sexual orientation (Medhurst 1999). Just as ethnic minorities cannot be considered monolithic groups, there is great diversity in GLBT communities and no unified homosexual identity exists (Brooks and Edwards 1999; Sessions 1999). To include the voices of these communities, adult educators are turning to such techniques as autobiography, popular education, and transformative learning (Brooks and Edwards 1997a, b; Edwards et al. 1998; Hill 1995, 1996).

In adult basic education and English-as-a-second-language programs, values of diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusiveness are often celebrated, yet GLBT persons remain invisible. For example, Ahlstrom (1999) and Dolan, Stum, and Rupured (1999) observe that adult literacy and consumer education materials dealing with family concerns presume heterosexuality. Though not overt, this heterosexism creates a learning environment that excludes or is hostile to students who are not heterosexual.

Adult educators must address a number of issues: Do teachers have to be homosexual to teach about it? (Medhurst 1999); should they affirm GLBT identities in the classroom before or whether students raise the issue? (Ahlstrom 1999); how do non-GLBT researchers approach the study of these communities? (Edwards et al. 1998); and should GLBT teachers come out to their students? ("Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Issues in Adult Education" 2000; Medhurst 1999). Edwards and Brooks (1999) and Hill (1995) assert that, if adult education values social justice and inclusiveness, the field must question existing dominant practices and develop a space in which GLBT students can speak from their own experience if they choose. The following resources provide more information.


Describes English-as-a-second-language class activities that reflect awareness of the diversity of family structures and the issues and concerns of lesbian and gay families.


Provides a model for training college professors and instructors who are responsible for preparing educators and business professionals for occupations that place them in contact with young gays and lesbians. Contains an extensive menu of practical activities.


Proposes revision of transformative learning theory to allow for the integration of the individual with the sociocultural and to enable the understanding of the relationship between individuals and social change.


Addresses the process of narration within collaborative inquiry groups as a method of cultural change. Builds a theory of cultural change as occurring through the uncovering of silenced and subjugated knowledge and the collective documentation of these knowledge within the context of a collaborative inquiry group.


Brings the perspective of queer theory to the field of adult education as a way of examining critically the notions of self, identity, and sexuality as they have been taken for granted within the field. Explores the relevance of queer theory for adult educators.


Provides educators and researchers with an awareness of the financial security issues faced by same-sex couples and offers suggestions for incorporating the discussion of these ideas into existing curricula and research.


Examines traditional sexual orientation theories, cultural understandings of sexuality, and the emergence of queer theory. Discusses how sexual identity can open new learning pathways for adults.

Incorporating the unique life experiences of lesbians adds value to the research base of the field. This type of research is necessary to give voice to diverse groups in theory building and to reveal the myths presented in adult education literature.


The book's 42 chapters discuss such topics as career planning and advising; health issues on campus; GLBT issues in athletics; administration and policy; student leadership and organizations; and technology and the Lavender Web.


Activities that could be incorporated into a communicative approach to language teaching include conversational activities (word association, discussion of students' points of view, role-playing, discussion of radio and television programs on the topic, and conversations with gays and lesbians), relevant readings as a basis for class activities (conversation, vocabulary development, writing, grammar review) and reading practice, films on homosexuality and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, and writing exercises.


The purpose of this qualitative study was to use the lens of political planning theory to explore the relationship between how HIV-negative gay men think HIV/AIDS prevention efforts be should handled and how they actually are handled.


This qualitative study examined how "out" lesbian and gay faculty members deal with sexual orientation in the classroom and how they perceive their own sexual orientation and the effect on the learning environment in adult higher education contexts.

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