

Searching for Common Ground: Two Teachers Discuss their Support for and Concerns about the Inclusion of LGBTQ Issues in English Methods Courses

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The genesis of this article grew out of our shared experiences working with pre-service English teachers and our differing perspectives regarding the benefits and challenges of including the study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) topics in our methods courses. When we first discussed the possibility of a point-counterpoint article, we were somewhat nervous about the prospect. But we also wondered if sharing our discussion of a topic not yet fully agreed upon by all would benefit others. As we thought further, we decided that maybe two teachers could publically share a conversation—perhaps not to change minds but to model civil discourse and mutually agreed upon allowance for difference of opinion without disregard for another’s personhood. We agree with the organizers of comedian Jon Stewart’s Rally to Restore Sanity who write that “shouting is annoying, counterproductive, and terrible for your throat . . . [and] that the loudest voices shouldn’t be the only ones that get heard” (“Rally to Restore Sanity”). With those ideas in mind, so begins our civil conversation about the inclusion of LGBTQ topics in classrooms and the ethical implications of that decision.

Background and Rationale for the Inclusion of LGBTQ Issues

In 2007, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) resolved that all teacher preparation programs should include the study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues, so that all teachers are equipped “to prepare their own students for citizenship in a diverse society” (National, 2007). Further, NCTE argues that “effective teacher preparation programs help teachers understand and meet their professional responsibilities, even when their personal beliefs seem in conflict with concepts of social justice” as teachers will surely “find LGBT students, as well as children of LGBT families, in their classrooms” (National,

2007).

More recently, NCTE passed the resolution on social justice in literacy education, which seeks to disrupt “inequitable hierarchies of power and privilege” and to “support efforts by educators to teach about social injustice and discrimination in all its forms with regard to differences in race, ethnicity, culture, gender, gender expression, age, appearance, ability, national origin, language, spiritual belief, sexual orientation, socioeconomic circumstance, and environment” (National, 2010).

Finally, the National Education Association (NEA) supports the study of LGBT issues and explicitly “call[s] on all schools and education employees to take some step to help our nation’s LGBT students and to address LGBT issues, a topic that is inextricably linked to the broader themes of inclusion, respect, equal opportunity, health, safety and student success” (Kim, 2009, p. 58).

Introducing new teachers to expectations within the professional community is one role of teacher educators. Because I (Katie) believe the recommendations from NCTE and NEA are worthy of attention in methods courses (and, admittedly, they do indeed conform to my own personal values), I purposefully include the study of LGBTQ issues in my curriculum. Since 2007, my second year as a teacher educator, I have devoted at least one three-hour class meeting during my undergraduate English methods course to the study and discussion of LGBTQ issues and LGBTQ-themed young adult literature (YAL) as a means of encouraging middle/secondary students and (future) teachers to appreciate difference in terms of sexual orientation and gender variance. Currently, I read aloud excerpts from YAL with LGBTQ content (see Table 1) to raise questions and provoke thoughtful discussion. These purposefully selected excerpts allow me to introduce pre-service teachers to a variety of texts, authors, experiences, and perspectives within a single class period, something I would not be able to accomplish if I assigned a single common YA text. I also use materials from the Safe Space training I attended in my first year of university teaching (e.g., *The Closet Game*, which interrogates heteronormativity by asking participants to examine the many ways that heterosexuals “flaunt” their sexual orientation, as well as potential consequences for doing so in a hypothetical heterophobic society). And finally, I engage students in performance tasks throughout the semester in which they must brainstorm responses to anti-LGBT language and enact those responses during in-class simulations.

Most of my students, all pre-service English teachers, have been willing to listen, pose questions, and share their perspectives during their readings and study of LGBT issues in secondary education. But some are not willing. Sometimes I am confronted with stances that cause me to spend much time reflecting on how

I might better lead a discussion on LGBT issues. On several occasions when I am contemplating how I might have better handled a particular classroom situation, I have discussed options with Carol, a mentor/colleague who began preparing future teachers in 1990 and who taught at the secondary level for 14 years prior to becoming a teacher educator. Together, we consider how I might better facilitate discussions when my students resist the study of these issues in English methods courses and, by extension, secondary English classrooms.

I lean toward a more liberal perspective and Carol toward a more conservative, and in our conversations we have questioned a variety of topics from our two perspectives. We have also questioned how much we should reveal about our personal beliefs in our methods classes and, by extension, how much those beliefs should affect the content we teach. These questions are complicated for us because we are accountable to two worlds: higher education and, because we train future teachers, middle/secondary schools. We realize that what is expected—even promoted—in one can cause problems in the other. So, when we consider an issue from our various perspectives, we often think about our responses in light of the audiences to whom we are responsible. We don't seek closure. Instead, we crave honest expression of points different from our own because we, along with Carbone (2010) ask, "How can we appreciate complex issues and make informed judgments regarding them if we only know one side, or if our understanding is based on 30-second sound bites?" (p. 63). In this article, we share several of our conversations that allowed us to reveal our thoughts, experiences, and insights, while maintaining respect for one another's perspectives—and at the same time, pushing each of us back into our personal perspectives to reevaluate our stance.

Setting the Scene

What follows are vignettes that represent the types of challenges I (Katie) have encountered as I bring these issues and texts into the classroom. After each vignette, Carol and I comment, pose questions, and make suggestions so that we might reflect on whether I go beyond sharing facts (e.g., statistics regarding the marginalization faced by LGBT students, published documents articulating the stance NCTE and NEA have taken on LGBT issues) into the realm of allowing my personal beliefs to silence or indoctrinate.

In preparation for the class meeting on sexual orientation and gender variance, I ask my students to read several articles (see Table 2). They read an article summarizing my research on teacher perspectives on YAL with LGBT content; NCTE's 2007 Resolution on Strengthening Teacher Knowledge of LGBT issues; an article on welcoming gay/lesbian students into the classroom; one on anti-LG-

BT bullying; and one on the power of YAL to inform our perspectives. I begin my class meeting with a short video I created to review the purposes for the class and the readings they have completed in preparation (a link to the video is available in Table 2). The class meeting itself is a mixture of read alouds from LGBTQ-themed YAL, discussion, activities (e.g., The Closet Game), and direct teaching of LGBTQ concepts and issues. As would be expected, students respond with varying degrees of receptivity.

In her work as a teacher educator who initiates inquiry related to gender, sexuality, homophobia, and heterosexism in her teaching, Clark (2010) has identified three stances embodied by her pre-service teachers: neutral, anti, and ally positions. Students take up a *neutral position* when they identify their own privileges but do not analyze "the implications or consequences of unearned privilege" and do not suggest actions they will take in their teaching in response to this awareness (p. 47). *Anti positions* are characterized by an awareness of personal privilege and an articulation of "a desire to work against racism, heterosexism, and homophobia," but these responses "are framed individually" (p. 47). Finally, students who take up an *ally position* articulated "a need to respond to systems of oppression and to make their students aware of these systems" (p. 47). In addition, Copenhaver-Johnson (2010) describes her work with a *resistant* student who, during one class meeting on "teaching against homophobia and heterosexism" refused to "look up, participate in small-group talk, or watch the video" (pp. 23-24). Like Clark and Copenhaver-Johnson's students, my students take various stances toward LGBT issues; the following vignettes focus on my experiences with students who resist the curriculum and my teaching of it.

Vignette #1¹: Before the class meeting, I receive an e-mail from Dan² that goes something like this: "Professor, I respect and admire you for standing up for your beliefs and teaching us about LGBTQ literature, but I don't think the study of LGBTQ issues is worthy of so much time in our English methods course. As adults, we can make up our own minds about social issues and whether or not they fit into our teaching."

Katie: In my response to Dan, I thank him for sharing his views and acknowledge my appreciation that as a future teacher he is thinking about how much time should be devoted to topics in our curriculum. But I also note that NCTE supports my decision to include the study of LGBTQ issues in our class; my methods class is the only required course in the program in which LGBTQ issues are formally addressed—and we spend just one class period discussing them in depth. I

1. All vignettes are based on teaching experiences but are not accurate depictions of specific events/people.

2. All student names are pseudonyms.

do agree with Dan that adults can make up their minds about social issues. As a future teacher, however, he has an obligation to ensure that none of his students feel marginalized or devalued. The learning activities and readings I plan in my class are an attempt to help everyone recognize that LGBTQ students are disproportionately marginalized in our schools and that it's our job to be aware of and rectify this, even if this seems in conflict with one's personal beliefs.

Carol: Katie, I share your concern about marginalization. Indeed, my desire is that every student in every classroom feel accepted, valued, and included; but deliberately focusing on specific socially defined categories as points of discussion and instruction expects that teachers will choose literature so that various identities are represented. Those choices have the potential to create situations in which other identities are excluded; consciously including literature that focuses on a particular identity may unknowingly create gaps so that we offer a nod of approval for one group while marginalizing another. Are we, in our honest attempts to include all students in our classes, actually creating new groups of students who are excluded? Perhaps we are not, but we need to be aware that we could.

Katie: Our curriculum design will always reveal our perspectives based on what we choose to include and what we choose to omit. I certainly wouldn't advocate that teachers select a text with LGBT content solely for that reason, nor that teachers discuss the text as if it were "the LGBT text" with no other content or literary features worthy of study. Instead, my hope is that English teachers will include texts that represent a range of experiences and voices in their curriculums. For example, several semesters ago, one of my English methods students designed a unit of study around the central theme of "love." When we met to discuss her instructional design, I noticed that all of the literature she had selected for this unit depicted heterosexual romantic love. I pointed this out to her, and then we proceeded to brainstorm other types of loving relationships that she might be able to include in her curriculum (e.g., love between family members, love between friends—regardless of sexual orientation—and, yes, romantic love between gay, lesbian, and bisexual couples). It's not so much about selecting texts based on sexual orientation/gender expression of their characters or authors; it's more about asking (pre-service) teachers to reflect on their text selections to determine if there are possibilities for representing a broader range of experiences and perspectives.

Vignette #2: *As class begins, William, who is usually chipper and participatory, is instead sullen and withdrawn. He refuses to make eye contact with me or his classmates during the read-alouds and subsequent discussions. In order to connect with William, I break the class into small groups for a learning activity and sit down beside him, asking, "Is everything okay?" William responds that he doesn't feel com-*

fortable sharing his perspective during the class discussion, "My religion has taught me that the LGBT lifestyle is not acceptable, and I don't plan to teach content related to LGBT issues or do anything to make it seem like I support that lifestyle." I ask William how his future students might feel if they don't see themselves or part of their identity revealed in class texts or ideas or even contributions in history and in literary works (e.g., Langston Hughes³, Virginia Woolf⁴, Tennessee Williams⁵, Audre Lord⁶). William responds that he would make sure other parts of his students' identities are represented in the literature instead and then asks why we don't make more of an effort to help all people who feel marginalized: "I've been overweight all my life; people make judgments about me, and I just have to deal with it."

Katie: My personal beliefs and NCTE and NEA support the teaching of LGBTQ issues in K-12 schools and teacher education programs. But how do I do this in my own teacher preparation program without silencing or disparaging my students' religious/personal beliefs regarding sexual orientation and gender variance? I want my classroom to be a space where all perspectives are understood and valued. In William's case, I can accept his discomfort teaching LGBTQ content, but I am concerned about his claim that he doesn't want his actions or words to show support for LGBTQ identities because I wonder what that will look like in his classroom. Will he turn a blind eye when students (or colleagues) use anti-LGBT language, or will he specifically address those slurs while advocating for the safety and inclusion of all his students? That he specifically mentions that he "just [has] to deal with" judgments about his weight leads me to think that he will expect the same from students who are teased or stereotyped for any number of reasons, including perceived LGBT status. My hope, however, is that William would take an *anti position* in which he addresses anti-LGBT language, just as he would address any hurtful or derogatory language in his classroom.

Carol: Like you, I want each student—William, who has issues related to weight; lesbian, Christian, and pagan students; prom queens and chess players—to feel free to express reasoned, kindly-stated viewpoints. Teachers must work to provide a place for that kind of teacher and student talk, yet, from time to time, I sense that one student or another is unable to speak freely. Certainly, as I orchestrate classes, I sometimes fail to recognize when I or a student has said something that makes another student shut down. That lack is what I must be aware of and must guard against. Still, I know that occasionally a class discussion or my teaching will produce a misstep. What I need at that point is knowledge sufficient to

3 <http://lgbthistorymonth.com/langston-hughes?tab=biography>

4 <http://lgbthistorymonth.com/virginia-woolf?tab=biography>

5 <http://lgbthistorymonth.com/tennessee-williams?tab=biography>

6 <http://lgbthistorymonth.com/audre-lorde?tab=biography>

modify instruction and discussion so those who feel excluded can find their way back to the heart of the class. I need to be equipped so that when the tenor of the class becomes exclusive and contentious, I have the knowledge and spirit to redirect unhealthy situations while teaching my students how to explore differences without judgment, how to accept differences without changing personal beliefs, how to evaluate personal beliefs toward revision when appropriate, and how to hold beliefs that do not need revision.

I've heard some in the academy imply that a student like William, who has strong religious convictions, is simply not educated; he has not sufficiently explored the belief system imposed by his parents or by some religion. The implication is that he needs to be retaught and once that process occurs, he will drop the religious baggage and come into the fold of the enlightened. That kind of thinking infers the kind of judgment we strive to avoid—this sense that if another does not agree with my perspective, that person is wrong and deserves my condemnation. I wonder why William isn't allowed as much room for his beliefs—stated or lived gracefully—as someone whose beliefs are at odds with William's? As much as our profession hopes English teachers will make a place for LGBT literature, some, like this student, perhaps, hope others will come to understand and be tolerant of their views. They hope that people will accept them as they are and not work to "fix" them any more than they might work to "fix" the gay student. The AAUP's Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students protects students' freedom of expression, noting that students are "free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion" while remaining accountable for course content (AAUP, 1967). This statement seems to provide room for our varying perspectives and anticipates a classroom atmosphere that allows each to reveal his heart and expect understanding—not censure—when his convictions are revealed.

Katie: Carol, you make a great point regarding the tendency in higher education to view more conservative perspectives as "unenlightened." In fact, Rocheleau and Speck (2007) argue that "[d]enying that conservatives have sincere interests in inquiry cuts off the possibility of dialogue with them" and "[t]o the extent that educators carry this attitude into their classes, equal opportunity for all students is undermined" (p. 131). This reminds me that I need to reflect on my own biases and assumptions and look for ways to find common ground with pre-service teachers who are uncomfortable thinking about ways to make their classrooms and curriculums more inclusive of all students and identities (e.g., help them brainstorm and articulate steps they *do* feel comfortable taking to ensure a safe and democratic classroom). But I think this is also a two-way street. Re-

gardless of their beliefs, pre-service teachers should demonstrate a willingness to consider alternative viewpoints, particularly when those viewpoints aren't just my personal beliefs (e.g., that all students see themselves reflected in the curriculum) but are also supported by NCTE and NEA.

Carol: True, but we must ask ourselves what our ultimate goal is. Is it to advance an NCTE/NEA guideline, or is it larger; is our charge to demonstrate reasoned discussion and acceptance of those with whom we disagree? I believe NCTE and NEA are urging us toward the latter, but the unintended results we are discussing should challenge us to question and carefully monitor whether mandates are moving us toward improved relationships. If at any point we begin to suspect otherwise, we must work to right the process.

Vignette #3: Like William, Brenda also discloses that she would "never teach anything with LGBT content" but that she would "love the person, hate the sin." She goes on to reveal that she has "several gay/lesbian friends" with whom she has positive relationships, even though she does not "embrace their lifestyle."

Katie: Here's where I just feel downright confused about my role. If I've got teacher candidates who have articulated their "love the person, hate the sin" stance and I assume that that translates into a teaching style that ignores identities of people (students!) who don't fit the heteronormative standard, what is my responsibility when it comes time to complete reference forms and letters of recommendation when they go on the job market? Many reference forms ask some form of the question, *Would you want this person working with your child?* Granted, I do not have children, but if I did, I would not support a teacher who openly opposes LGBT identities—or one who fails to act in the face of homophobia—working with my child, even if my child were straight. But especially if my child were gay or genderqueer. How can you truly "love the person," if you "hate" some aspect of his/her identity? Won't that disdain come through unconsciously in your actions and inaction, in what you say and fail to say?

Carol: The student who says she loves the person but not the sin has a perspective that is grounded in biblical doctrine and plays out in a Christian's conviction to be involved in a prison ministry, for example, when a convicted criminal is in need of aid. It's the perspective that allows a person to forgive when deeply wronged; and it's the stance that allows each of us to continue to love ourselves despite countless wrongdoings. And, while I understand the idea that loving a person while hating a sin may seem closed-minded, mean spirited, and bigoted to those outside that philosophical belief system, especially when faced with a person whose idea of sin differs from our own or from what's socially accepted as sin, we live in complicated times. We live in a time when there is no accepted definition of "truth." Aristotle spent his days searching for a definition of truth and for ways

to transmit that definition to the masses, but of late we've come to believe that the definition of truth resides in the heart of the individual. And, that "truth" brings us to the dilemma we face when it's time to write letters of recommendation—or create syllabi for classes. It brings us to the complex discussion of whose truth gets first billing: Is it the truth as NCTE/NEA define it? Is it the truth as an individual education professor defines it? Is it the truth defined by any number of other stakeholders? A combination of all?

We may find ourselves asking whether we will recommend a gay student who rolls his eyes when his religious colleague says he loves a person but not that person's sin, or whether we will recommend the religious student who states a clear and reasoned concern about selecting LGBT literature for use in his imaginary secondary English classrooms while being respectful of those who uphold systems and beliefs he does not. In fact, if all other things were equal, I could more easily recommend the second student than the first. Not because of sexual orientation but because one student respectfully disagrees and the other does not. And, in that statement—reasoned as I may feel it is—I allow my personal beliefs to guide my professional choices.

Katie: I particularly appreciate your acknowledgement that closed-mindedness can rear its head at any point on the liberal-conservative spectrum and that we need to encourage all of our students to be willing to listen respectfully and carefully to perspectives with which they disagree. I am still concerned about students like Brenda and Dan, who seem unwilling to even consider alternate viewpoints and the myriad reasons for including the study of LGBT issues in our curriculums. In fact, the introduction to the Common Core Standards for English language arts argues that "literate individuals" should demonstrate the capacity to "actively seek to understand other perspectives and cultures . . . communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds . . . [and] vicariously inhabit words and have experiences much different than [sic] their own" through literature (p. 7). If this is an expectation for K-12 students, shouldn't it also be an expectation for their teachers?

Carol: Absolutely, but I sense that the guiding issue is whether I can create an atmosphere that will allow each of us in the classroom community to feel included and safe when discussions venture into areas that one or another of us defines as controversial or too personal. The question for me is whether I am teaching and modeling how to create reasoned arguments and then how to engage in civil discourse. Another point of thought for me is how to help students disagree gracefully. Our world is filled with belief systems. In my classroom I am required to model how change in perspectives can happen, but I must also model how to respectfully

allow others the freedom to have systems different from mine. When I fail in that arena, the results can be devastating as you point out, Katie.

Katie: While writing early drafts of this article, we witnessed the resignation of an Arkansas school board vice president who posted anti-LGBT slurs and hate speech on his Facebook page (CNN Wire Staff, 2010). We have also read about and mourned the deaths of five gay teens who committed suicide within a span of three weeks after enduring bullying and harassment in various forms (Hubbard, 2010). More recently, we have read that gay and straight teens are more likely to attempt suicide in "politically conservative areas where schools don't have programs supporting gay rights" (Tanner, 2011). From my perspective, there is a big difference between pre-service teachers who are uncertain about their roles in supporting the identities of all their students (e.g., they wonder if/how it's possible to integrate their personal/religious beliefs with best practice) and pre-service teachers who flat out state that it's not their responsibility to address homophobia and heterosexism in their classrooms and curriculums. And I'm much less likely to support the latter's entrance into the profession.

Carol: I agree with your overall point, Katie, but I would broaden the perspective to the general from the specific so that I would propose this: pre-service teachers should be guided to support their students' rights to difference while being taught how to disagree respectfully. That stance supports the ELA principles we are required to teach regarding thoughtfully constructed, reasoned arguments and careful consideration of multiple perspectives. I think my concern is in defining which groups are supported consciously. When we make that decision, we move back into the place where some are highlighted and others are negated, and I suspect that point is the one around which more discussion should take place.

When I began work on this piece, I looked up "abstinence" on the NCTE website and found sixteen references on the day I did a search, including a report of a student project on AIDS that urged students to abstain from sex and another that referenced a community program that promotes abstinence. No sample lessons were presented. No young adult literature was listed as possible classroom texts. No scholarly material was offered in support of creating a classroom curriculum that would support students who abstain from sex until marriage. As I expanded the search, I found hundreds of references on LGBT issues but only a handful that related to weight issues like your student William faces. After some thought on the difference in emphasis on the NCTE website, I found myself questioning whether, by naming one element of human sexuality with scant reference to other decisions about sexuality—or to other serious issues our students face, like weight/body image, I wondered if NCTE has created a barrier to genuine conversation among groups of English teachers—a bias of sorts that excludes in

an attempt to include.

Katie: It does seem logical that conversations about sexual orientation might also lead to conversations about sex. After all, our sexual orientations determine whom we're attracted to. While the decision to be sexually active or abstain crosses all sexual orientations and gender identities, your comment did make me reflect on the depictions of abstinence in my moderately extensive reading of YAL with LGBT content. In doing a quick inventory of 40 titles on my shelf, more than half depict young people who abstain from sex. And in several, sexual activity is not even a major plot point; rather, the narrative focuses more on the protagonist's identity as a member or ally of the LGBT community. As Cart and Jenkins (2006) point out in their review of YAL with LGBT content from 1969 to 2004, "... there is more to life than sex; more to human identity than one's preference in sexual partners" (p. 166), and YAL is beginning to treat sexual orientation and gender expression as facets of people's identity, rather than a defining characteristic.

I think, by naming the study of LGBT issues in its 2007 resolution, NCTE is attempting to shed light on sexual orientations and gender identities that teachers otherwise might not consider. Since heterosexuality is so often assumed (e.g., telling a teenage girl that she'll be breaking boys' hearts one day), perhaps the resolution's call to action will help us refrain from always making that assumption. It seems that if we take up a heteronormative stance in our conversations and actions, we're implicitly telling our students that heterosexual identity is the only acceptable identity. Or when in our words and actions we communicate that students should present themselves according to their biological gender (e.g., boys should look/act/dress like boys; girls should look/act/dress like girls), we're implicitly telling our genderqueer students that they don't fit into our community. In her study of high school masculinity and sexuality, C.J. Pascoe (2007) argues that integrating LGBT issues into our curricula "will indicate to both GLBT and non-normatively gendered students as well as straight and normatively gendered students that school authorities don't tolerate gender- and sexuality-based harassment or violence" (p. 169). This seems like a worthy goal to me, the creation of a safer, more inclusive school community as we attempt to include texts, issues, and conversations that represent a range of identities and experiences.

Reflecting on the Conversation and Looking Ahead

Clearly we have not reached a consensus in our conversation. That was neither the point nor our intention. We have, however, wondered about our ethical roles as teacher educators, posed questions and shared our perspectives in a civil manner, and thoughtfully considered one another's viewpoint. As we think about

our work with pre-service teachers, and acknowledge the fact that our personal beliefs will always affect what and how we teach, we have come up with goals both for ourselves and our students. Our hope is that we and our pre-service English teachers will . . .

1. **consider the perspectives** of all students, not just heterosexual and gender normative students *and* not just liberal students.
2. **develop empathy** for all students – without ignoring or disparaging any facet of their identities, including sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, or religious beliefs and personal commitments,
3. **consider possibilities** for helping *all* students, including LGBT students and religious/conservative students, to see themselves in the curriculum, through the teaching of young adult and canonical literature (and/or advocating for its inclusion in the classroom library and media center) and disclosure of various facets of identity (e.g., religious/political persuasions, sexual orientation, gender identity) of the authors under study, and
4. **develop strategies** to help students increase their ability to develop reasoned perspectives that are responsibly delivered and received.

Furthermore, we intend to discuss openly with our pre-service teachers the professional and ethical dilemma we face as we navigate professional expectations that may challenge our personal belief systems. As a result, we hope to challenge them to find ways to stay true to their convictions while creating a classroom environment that will allow each student to find himself in the curriculum. And finally, we plan to continually challenge ourselves and our professional organizations to consider whether statements that advance the cause of one group have unintended outcomes that exclude and silence other groups.

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Table 1: Recommended YAL with LGBTQ Content

| Book | Awards/Honors ¹ |
|--|---|
| Felin, M. S. (2007). <i>Touching snow.</i> New York: Atheneum. | |
| Frost, H. (2003). <i>Keesha's house.</i> U.S.A.: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. | |
| Hyde, C. R. (2010). <i>Jumpstart the world.</i> New York: Alfred A. Knopf. | 2011 Lambda Literary Award Finalist |
| Konigsberg, B. (2008). <i>Out of the pocket.</i> New York: Dutton. | 2009 Lambda Literary Award Winner |
| Levithan, D. <i>Love is the higher law.</i> (2009). New York: Alfred A. Knopf. | 2010 ALA Rainbow Book List |
| Peck, D. (2009). <i>Sprout.</i> New York: Bloomsbury. | 2010 Lambda Literary Award Winner 2010 ALA Rainbow Book List |
| Peters, J. A. (2004). <i>Luna.</i> New York: Little, Brown, and Co. | |
| Plum-Ucci, C. (2002). <i>What happened to Lani Garver?</i> Orlando: Harcourt. | |
| Sanchez, A. (2007). <i>The God box.</i> New York: Simon Pulse. | |
| Sanchez, A. (2004). <i>So hard to say.</i> New York: Simon Pulse. | 2005 Lambda Literary Award Winner |
| Shimko, B. (2007). <i>Letters in the attic.</i> Chicago: Academy Chicago. (originally published in 2002) | 2003 Lambda Literary Award Winner |
| Tamaki, M. & Tamaki, J. (2008). <i>Skim.</i> Toronto: Groundwood. | 2009 ALA Rainbow Starred Book |
| Watts, J. (2001). <i>Finding H.F.</i> New York: Alyson Books. | 2002 Lambda Literary Award Winner |
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Struggling Writers and Struggling Writing Teachers: What Teachers Can Do to Make a Difference

Carolyn L. Carlson

Writing is “the currency of the new workplace and the global economy” (National Writing Project, 2011, p.1). However, writing can be difficult for students to master and equally difficult for teachers to teach. This combination results in students who struggle with writing and teachers who struggle to teach it. Even with the most research-based reading strategies and instructional practices used in the classroom, it is difficult for teachers to teach writing to students if the teachers are not writers themselves and do not have a firm grasp of the writing process. In a time where effective writing instruction is needed, teachers must be equipped to teach writing skills to their students (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2007). This requires that teachers develop their writing skills as well. When these skills are developed, teachers’ voices grow “stronger with understanding and credibility” (DeFauw, 2011, p. 374).

To improve their writing skills and ultimately, their instruction of writing skills to their students, teachers can participate in a variety of activities that ask teachers to write, observe, and reflect. These activities include reflecting on the writing process, composing pieces in a variety of genres using the steps in the writing process, observing a classroom implementing a writer’s workshop, interviewing a small group of student writers, participating in a professional organization that promotes the teaching of writing, and authoring a book. This combination of activities provides opportunities for teachers to mature as writers. These activities can be done individually or with a small group of colleagues; they do not require expensive materials; they do not have to be completed in a certain order or a designated amount of time. Further, each has been completed by numerous teachers who found the experiences valuable and enriching, resulting in more effective writing instruction in the classroom. The following describes the six activities and reveals comments from participating teachers.

Authors' Guide

Kansas English, published by the Kansas Association of Teachers of English, welcomes manuscripts contributing to understanding and scholarship in all areas of English/Language Arts, including curriculum design, pedagogy, classroom action research, and literature reviews.

This journal invites writers to focus on a broad range of topics: reading-writing connections, audience, motivation, engagement, collaboration, assessment, technology, critical thinking, discourse, rhetoric, multiculturalism, community-classroom connections, policy, and reflection. Nontraditional, creative pieces (such as personal narratives and poetry) are also encouraged.

All manuscripts should be typed (with text in Times New Roman 12-point font), double-spaced, numbered according to page, and conform to current MLA or APA guidelines. Save work as Word for Windows or RTF format. No identifying information should appear in the manuscript. Include a separate cover letter with your name, address, telephone number, email address, and school affiliation.

Submit one (1) copy of the manuscript and cover letter electronically to kansasenglish@gmail.com. Manuscripts submitted to *Kansas English* may be reviewed by both the editors of the journal and by outside reviewers. The Editor will share the reviews with the author and work with authors moving forward. We will acknowledge receipt of manuscripts by email.

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