Teachers Learning from Students on Queer Issues in ESL:  
Making the classroom a safe space for teachers and students

Key Terms

<table>
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<th>LGBT</th>
<th>Queer</th>
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<td>An acronym meaning lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender; shorthand for discussing a spectrum of marginalized sexual-identities.</td>
<td>A Reappropriated term that contains all marginalized sexual-identities. Additionally used to problematize and destabilize categorization.</td>
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The Problem: LGBT teachers & students feel unsafe in the classroom

If I come out as a lesbian in my classroom, I am not only giving up heterosexual privilege and authority, but I am inviting my students to apply to me all of the labels and stereotypes they have in their minds about what a lesbian is, what a lesbian looks like, what a lesbian does, and finally, to attribute anything I do that offends or frightens them to the fact of my being a lesbian.

- ESL teacher  
(Cummings, 2009)

Every day we have to make a sentence and in this sentence, everyone uses boyfriend if you are a woman and girlfriend if you are a boy, and I think if you say something like, “I broke up with my girlfriend,” I think maybe the other students or maybe the teacher are going to correct my English, “No, you are not going to break up with your girlfriend, you broke up with your boyfriend.” So I always made sentences in a heterosexual context…[or] I tried to avoid making those kind of sentences.

- ESL student Sayo  
(Kappra & Vandrick, 2006)

Even in San Francisco? Yes.

“Some queer students specifically choose the San Francisco Bay Area to study in because they know of the gay-friendly atmosphere there.”

“Interviews contradicted our expectations that the liberal, gay-friendly San Francisco Bay Area would provide a safe and comfortable atmosphere for queer ESL students…[who] sometimes found their ESL classrooms unwelcoming and even unsafe, at least unsafe for revealing their sexual identities.” (Kappra & Vandrick, 2006)
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References & Resources


