



Adult Education and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Communities

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 1995) 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.

Ahlstrom, C. "Putting Lesbian and Gay Families in the Picture." In *Taking Risks. Connections: A Journal of Adult Literacy*, vol. 8, edited by M. Merson and S. Reuys, pp. 18-22. Boston, MA: Adult Literacy Resource Institute, Summer 1999. (ED 434 249)

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.

Besner, H. F., and Spungin, C. I. *Training for Professionals Who Work with Gays and Lesbians in Educational and Workplace Settings*. Bristol, PA: Accelerated Development, 1998.

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.

Brooks, A. K., and Edwards, K. "Narratives of Women's Sexual Identity Development: A Collaborative Inquiry with Implications for Rewriting Transformative Learning Theory." In *38th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, compiled by R. Nolan and H. Chelesvig. Stillwater: Oklahoma State University, 1997a. (ED 409 460) <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1997/97brooks.html>

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

Brooks, A. K., and Edwards, K. "Rewriting the Boundaries of Social Discourse: Collaborative Inquiry into Women's Sexual Identity Development." In *Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries: Research in the Education of Adults, 27th Annual SCUTREA Conference Proceedings*, edited by Paul Armstrong. London: Birkbeck College, 1997b. (ED 409 438) <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000208.htm>

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 knowledges and the collective documentation of these knowledges within the context of a collaborative inquiry group.

Brooks, A., and Edwards, K. "For Adults Only: Queer Theory Meets the Self and Identity in Adult Education." In *40th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, compiled by A. Rose. De Kalb: Northern Illinois University, 1999. (ED 431 901) <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1999/99brooks.htm>

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.

Dolan, E. M.; Stum, M. S.; and Rupured, M. "Addressing the Economic Security Issues Facing Same-Sex Couples." *Advancing the Consumer Interest* 11, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1999): 23-29.

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.

Edwards, K., and Brooks, A. K. "The Development of Sexual Identity." *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* no. 84 (Winter 1999): 49-57.

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.

Edwards, K.; Grace, A.; Henson, B.; Henson, W.; Hill, R. J.; and Taylor, E. "Tabooed Terrain: Reflections on Conducting Adult Education Research in Lesbian/Gay/Queer Arenas." In *39th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, compiled by J. C. Kimmel. San Antonio, TX: University of the Incarnate Word, 1998. (ED 426 247)

Symposium includes an introduction by Hill; "Reflections on Queer Life Narratives as a Research Paradigm: Possibilities and Risks" (Grace); "Border Crossing in Sexual Identity Research: A Straight Male Perspective" (Taylor); "Scholars' Sexual Stories" (Edwards); and "Hidden from View: Reflections of Lesbian Practitioners on Abandonment and Inclusion" (Henson, Henson).

"Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Issues in Adult Education." *Bright Ideas* 9, no. 3, Winter 2000. Boston, MA: System for Adult Basic Education Support, 2000. <http://www.sabes.org/resources/brightideas/vol9/bi93.htm>

Articles include "Is Your Program Safe?"; "What Is It Like to Be Different? Being Gay in an Adult Education Class"; "Are We Imposing? Is It Too Uncomfortable? Do We Know Enough?"; "Confessions and Insights of a 'Self-Outed' Heterosexual"; "Glossary for Straight Readers"; "Defining Families"; "Things We Can Do"; and "Questions for Exploring Sexual Orientation."

Hassett, M. "What It's Like to Be Different: Part II." *Field Notes* 10, no. 1, Summer 2000. Boston, MA: System for Adult Basic Education Support, 2000. <http://www.sabes.org/resources/fieldnotes/vol10/f01diff.htm>

An adult educator describes using the article in *Bright Ideas*, Winter 2000 (about a gay adult student who withdrew from a class) as a way to address both the specific issue of homophobia and the more general issue of prejudice.

Hill, R. J. "Gay Discourse in Adult Education: A Critical Review." *Adult Education Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (1995): 142-158.

Explores the emancipatory and oppressive roles adult education plays in the gay community. Demonstrates how mainstream adult education reproduces heterocentric assumptions, social relations, and beliefs, disenfranchising gay discourse.

Hill, R. J. "Learning to Transgress: A Sociohistorical Conspectus of the American Gay Lifeworld as a Site of Struggle and Resistance." *Studies in the Education of Adults* 28, no. 2 (October 1996): 253-279.

Fugitive knowledge constructed outside the dominant discourse by gay and lesbian people is distributed through networking and is the basis for learning to transgress in social contexts. Popular adult education is essential to the process of knowledge construction and dissemination.

Medhurst, A. "Teaching Queerly: Politics, Pedagogy, and Identity in Lesbian and Gay Studies." In *Teaching Culture. The Long Revolution in Cultural Studies*, edited by N. Aldred and M. Ryle, pp. 95-106. Leicester, England: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 1999. (ED 439 261)

Presents a rationale for lesbian and gay studies and discusses issues about teacher and student sexual identity that affect the classroom.

Nelson, C. "Sexual Identities in ESL: Queer Theory and Classroom Inquiry." *TESOL Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 371-391.

Addresses the question of sexuality in English-as-a-second-language classrooms. Introduces some of the key concepts of queer theory and suggests implications for teaching.

Resides, D. "Learning and New Voices: Lesbian Development and the Implications for Adult Education." In *37th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, edited by H. Reno and M. Witte, pp. 264-269. Tampa: University of South Florida, 1996. (ED 419 087)

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.

Sanlo, R. L., ed. *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998.

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.

Schweers, C. W. "Resources and Ideas for Working with Gay/Lesbian Themes in the ESL Classroom." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Orlando, FL, March 11-15, 1997. (ED 411 690)

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.

Sessions, K. B. "Living Outside the Circle: The Politics of HIV/AIDS Education and the Disenfranchisement of HIV-Negative Gay Men." In *40th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, compiled by A. Rose. De Kalb: Northern Illinois University, 1999. (ED 431 901) <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1999/99sessions.htm>

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 should be handled and how they actually are handled.

Tisdell, E. J., and Taylor, E. W. "Out of the Closet: Lesbian and Gay Adult Educators and Sexual Orientation Issues in the University Learning Environment." In *36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings*, compiled by P. Collette, B. Einsiedel, and S. Hobden. Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1995. (ED 385 781)

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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