

Chapter 14

Instructional Design, Educational Technology, and LGBTQ Students: Which One of These Things Doesn't Belong?

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ABSTRACT

As diversity and social justice have become more important in education, educators are beginning to realize that their lessons, both real and virtual, need to be more inclusive. More specifically, this chapter addresses the culture, learning, and relationship with technology of a specific subset of students: individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) or who have LGBTQ parents, guardians, friends, and/or family. Suggestions for educators on inclusive strategies when integrating technology into lessons through digital activities and various educational technology tools, as well as inclusive instructional design suggestions, are included. As for the question addressed in the title, none is the answer because all three of these things belong together in all forms of education, in all types of schools, and by all types of educators.

INTRODUCTION

If you, like the authors, grew up watching Sesame Street® (www.sesamestreet.org), you may be familiar with a reoccurring song:

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One of these things is not like the others,

One of these things doesn't belong,

Can you tell which thing is not like the others,

By the time I finish this song?

This song was even voted by Billboard as #12 in the top twelve Sesame Street® songs (Semigran, 2016), so you may remember how a collection of items would appear on the television screen as the song was playing. The purpose of the exercise was to determine a grouping for like items to figure out which item was not part of the grouping (i.e., three different kinds of shoes and one boot or three different kinds of red balloons and one blue balloon (Note – both examples currently appear on YouTube, search the first line of the song if you would like to see them)). This is a typical pre-school exercise with a cute, memorable song that you subsequently find yourself singing.

You may be wondering why you should determine which of these things, instructional design, educational technology, and LGBTQ students, does not belong. Many people would group instructional design and educational technology together since they are commonly used teaching tools. However, would consideration of the students be excluded from teaching strategies? Should teachers consider specific types of students as they are designing lessons and/or incorporating technology in education?

Without realizing it, many people, educators included, discriminate against this subset of students. Just by saying “Good morning, boys and girls” a teacher may have marginalized any student who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, and/or queer/questioning (LGBTQ). Although educators are usually supportive and try to make their classrooms safe spaces, this subset of students can be isolated and marginalized by educators who are not aware that their words and/or actions apply only to heterosexual students who identify with their biological gender and societal norms of either male or female. This type of discrimination is actually common at the very earliest of ages, as little girls are given dolls and tea sets while little boys are given footballs and toy trucks. This type of social construction has been handed down traditionally from generation to generation without considering individual differences. What about the boy who likes to dress up and play with dolls? What about the girl who plays with trucks and loves sports? Because of the traditional social construction of genders, these children are treated differently to the point that they may begin to feel that they are not normal, and/or something is wrong with them.

More recently, some schools are trying to be more inclusive by including locker rooms and bathrooms that are not gender specific. Moreover, classrooms, both real and virtual, are supposed to be inclusive areas where students are free to learn. How can an educator include LGBTQ students? Just being aware that there are students who do not fit into the binary gender system or that there are students who are not heterosexual or that some students have two mothers or two fathers is half the journey to inclusion, but there is more that can be done to be fully inclusive.

This chapter contains information about the LGBTQ culture and learning to help educators recognize and prevent any exclusionary or marginalizing behaviors that they may be perpetuating in their lessons. Although there are many strategies and considerations for welcoming LGBTQ students and students whose parents, family, or guardians are LGBTQ, this topic is comprehensive and cannot be covered in a single paper. Consequently, this chapter covers a very specific piece of education, instructional design, including the addition of technology. Every lesson in a classroom needs to be inclusive, even the virtual

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