

Chapter 15

An Approach for Providing LGBTI+ Education and Bridging the Language Gap: Integrating ESoPC into EFL Teacher Training

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural education is acquiring great importance in today's education; among its considered elements, it is also starting to address gender/sexual identity as a way to counterattack prejudices and intolerant attitudes towards LGTBI+ people. However, it is still necessary to reconsider how to deal with these concepts from teacher training in an effective way so as to prepare these professionals to develop their work in an inclusive way. Teachers of English as a Foreign Language are ideal for addressing such concepts as the area allows relationships with several dimensions of life (e.g., literature, art, television). These teachers have to face the necessity to include LGTBI+ in their teaching practice, and to fight the language gap caused by social and economic disparities. This chapter revises how including the ESoPC approach in English teacher training helps integrate LGTBI+ issues to educate future generations in respect towards gender/sexual diversity and bridge the language gap.

AN INTRODUCTION TO SEXUAL IDENTITY AND GENDER IN EDUCATION

Education constitutes a great tool for self-creation and self-discovery as it provides students of all educational stages with opportunities to face social and cultural issues as well as to reflect on their own personal identities. In this light, it is true that the first years of an individual's life are decisive for their future development as it is when areas like language and cognition, as well as the physical, social and

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sexual aspects of the person, experience their very first formation. Against what is commonly thought, the sexual component of personal identity is conceived as a fundamental aspect for the integral development of the child since the first years as it influences significantly their potential healthy personality that will be reflected in their potential responsible sexual behavior. Bearing this in mind, and as Araujo (2015) points out, initial education plays a central role as in the acquisition of sexual identity as it is during this stage when its basis is settled.

Sexual identity goes hand in hand with *gender*, a relatively new construct with multiple definitions that agree on its “cultural constructedness” (Riley, & Pearce, 2018). According to the New Oxford Dictionary of English, “gender” can be understood as the state of being male or female which is normally used with reference to sociocultural differences rather than biological (Pearsall, 2001), a “performative” concept as the American philosopher and gender theorist Butler indicates (1990, p. xv). As social and cultural beings, it seems clear the relation between sexual identity and gender. However, when it comes to research on education, and despite the fact that the conclusions have not always been the most satisfactory, gender has occupied a remarkable position for the two last decades (Blossfeld, Skopek, Triventi, & Buchholz, 2015; Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008; Dillabough, & Arnot, 2000). It must be highlighted, however, that the diversity of sexual identities has not been addressed in depth yet.

Although sexual diversity is usually present at schools, it is commonly misunderstood. Meyer highlights some of the myths and misconceptions about sexual and gender diversity:

- When talking about sexual or gender diversity, it really just means teaching about homosexuality.
- Learning about gender and sexuality isn’t for education professional and youth workers – particularly those in elementary education.
- Teaching about gender and sexual diversity is controversial and should be avoided in schools.
- Some religions teach that homosexuality is wrong, so schools shouldn’t talk about sexual diversity as it may violate some students’ religious or cultural beliefs. (2010, p. 3)

At this respect, Britzman (2005, p. 65) claims that sexuality should not be understood as an isolated topic, but as the conditions for the adventure of creating ideas, theorizing the questions of love and the loss of love, and advising the great issues linked to our sexuality.

Moving back to what has been firstly discussed about the potential of education for students’ self-creation and self-discovery, as well as its role regarding social and cultural issues, intercultural education (IE) arises. IE is acquiring more and more importance in our current globalized society, as linguistic, cultural, ethnic and racial diversity –among others– are to be celebrated as elements that enrich our world. Cushner offers a simple definition of what this type of education is about, explaining that it “recognizes that a genuine understanding of cultural differences and similarities is necessary in order to build a foundation for working collaboratively with other” and that “a pluralistic society can be an opportunity for majority and minority groups to learn from and with one another” (1998, p. 4). In this sense, gender and sexual identity (and diversity) need to be addressed in the classroom if intercultural understanding really wants to be achieved. Moreover, it is also a way to fight back social prejudices and hateful and intolerant attitudes towards the LGBTI+ community.

As Nelson affirms, “even when school rhetoric promotes diversity, and even when students express strong interest in talking about sexual diversity, it can be challenging to create queer discursive spaces in which the silencing discourses of heteronormativity can be countered” (2006, p. 5) This is closely related to Foucault (1990, p. 44) approach, who stated that it is recurrent the belief that humanity is the

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