

Seeing the Rainbow: Teachers Talk About Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, and Two-Spirited Realities

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“I am convinced that schools are sites for homophobia and that schools, through their silence and inaction, allow homophobia that is not condoned in any other public place. I knew this as a student and I know this as a teacher.”

Brave words from a rural New Brunswick teacher, Peter Gorham, but painfully true words too. *Seeing the Rainbow: Teachers Talk About Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, and Two-Spirited Realities*, newly published by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, is an important resource written by teachers for teachers wishing to deal with the all too frequent and all too common occurrences of homophobia they witness in their classrooms and schools.

Following on the heels of and complementary to GALE BC’s *Challenging Homophobia: A Resource Handbook for Schools* and *Creating and Supporting a Gay / Straight Alliance* (both available through the BCTF’s Lessons Aids Department), *Seeing the Rainbow* is a welcome addition to the growing range of resources whose purpose is to support teachers in their anti-homophobia work.

Seeing the Rainbow consists of two main components: information and stories. Not sure what “two-spirited” means? What “transphobia” is? Don’t know the difference between “transgender” and “transsexual”? The “Definitions” section clarifies these terms and more, right at the outset, giving the reader essential information to be able to use the resource with confidence.

Numerous myths have developed and been promulgated over the years about BGLTT people. The section, “Myths and Facts About Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, and Two-Spirited People”, dispels the many myths that

have, for too long, been used to marginalize and persecute those who don’t fit neatly into the heterosexual norm.

For those who find historical information useful, the section, “Some Legal and Legislative Developments in Canada”, will provide an overview of past and current developments in courts and legislatures, both provincially and federally. I’m proud to say that British Columbia figures prominently in this section, testimony to the tireless efforts of people in this province to seek justice for and recognition of its BGLTT citizens.

Questions such as “Who gets included?” and “What counts as worthwhile knowledge?” help the reader focus on the topic of the next section, “Why Care?” These important questions form the basis for a rationale for dealing with homophobia in our classrooms and schools.

For those teachers who have moved beyond a recognition that homophobia is an issue that cannot be ignored in schools, the section, “What Can Teachers Do?” provides a wide variety of options for action, some less risky than others. However, the suggestions are practical and doable, providing the will is there.

The question of transgenderism (or gender dysphoria) is one which leaves many teachers feeling perplexed as to how to deal with it. “How To Support Transgender Youth” offers some constructive approaches teachers can take should they encounter transgender youth in their classrooms.

Moving from the individual teacher to the broader arena of the school, “What Can the School Do?” provides useful approaches that staff and administration can implement to

support BGLTT students. This section covers topics such as what to do when there is homophobic bullying, and what to do when a student comes out or is outed.

A selection of lesson plans suitable for levels ranging from primary to secondary offers the user practical suggestions for tackling homophobia issues in age-appropriate and sensitive ways. These are followed by a couple of surveys that individuals and schools can use to gather some baseline data on where things sit, prior to or following the implementation of an anti-homophobia regime.

The second half of the resource contains teachers' personal stories that are moving examples of the work being done and that needs to be done to create safe and supportive schools for BGLTT people. These stories, including two from British Columbia teachers, are at once uplifting and worrying. In "Small Steps Are a Start", a Saskatchewan elementary teacher, who is a lesbian, tentatively tackles homophobia by dealing with issues of sexism (often the root of homophobia), and chooses to remain anonymous because of continuing insecurity in disclosing her sexual orientation. In "Coming Out of the Classroom Closet", a teacher in Newfoundland recounts her coming-out process, ending her story with an encouraging invitation to other BGLTT teachers: "Open that closet door. Take a peek - it feels pretty good being out there". These and the other stories bring us face to face with the struggles and triumphs of dealing with homophobia in our classrooms and schools.

The "Resources" section contains information about some international, national, and provincial organizations that may provide assistance to teachers addressing BGLTT issues and realities.

In summary, *Seeing the Rainbow* will prove an invaluable addition to the resources currently available to assist teachers in their efforts to educate about and help combat a pervasive and troubling phenomenon that too often plagues our society.

Copies are available for \$15 from the Canadian Teachers' Federation and may be ordered online at www.ctf-fce.ca. ■

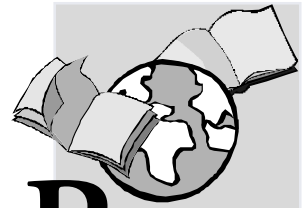
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and willful challenge to the technology. Even many of the computer enthusiasts do not use it in ways that transform the practice of teaching. Teachers have to meet complex, overlapping and sometimes contradictory objectives. Teach for cognitive development, but also for socialization, for the ability to work together as well as to work independently, to stimulate creativity while also preparing for the increasingly frequent standardized exams. And they have to keep a level of classroom authority to maintain a working classroom.

In naming his book, Cuban describes computers as being oversold, a case that is made convincingly. However, in the other half of the title he claims that they are underused. While he doesn't see computers as an educational panacea, he also isn't rejecting the use of information and communications technology in education. He sees a necessity for teachers and students to understand both the technology and the social practices that make it a powerful force in society. Cuban suggests a number of things that have to change if the potential is to be achieved.

The first change necessary is to respect teachers: "Policymakers and administrators must understand teachers' expertise and perspectives on classroom work and engage teachers fully in the deliberations, design, deployment, and implementation of technology plans." (p. 183) This must include a range of teachers, not just the techno-enthusiasts. Secondly, structural constraints must be reduced. This means providing large chunks of uninterrupted time for planning with other teachers and giving sustained attention to different forms of learning. Thirdly, professional development and technical support would have to be redesigned so they are responsive to the reality of the workplace constraints teachers face. If government officials and education administrators are serious about the effective use of the technology in schools, they would do well to listen to Cuban's advice, and not to the corporate sales agent with grand promises of the next teacher-proof techno solution. ■

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