Rationale: Considering past experience with other topics of diversity in our society and the success that discussing these issues within the classroom has had, it is my belief that integrating LGBTQ themes into our classrooms is essential to increase positive awareness of the LGBTQ community and to advocate for and encourage diversity.

Past

Looking back through history it becomes quite apparent that the purpose and the aims of education have been debated for millennia. Socrates, one of the most quoted and oldest known educators in history, tells us that education is not about filling students up with all of the expected answers, but instead should be geared towards inspiring and motivating students to constantly analyze and question. To analyze the historical context of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Questioning (LGBTQ) is not an easy task but two clear examples come to mind.

Although there is some controversy on the issue, most current literature will maintain that, in Socrates’ time, male homosexual relationships were celebrated and a significant part of the classical Greek culture (Hindley, 1991). One could stand to reason that if male homosexual relationships were accepted as part of the classical Greek culture that lesbian relationships would have been as well. Nonetheless, as is quite clear from the variance of mores in our own society here on the west coast of Canada, assumptions, although they may seem to follow the norm, are never safe or reliable.
The second context that comes to mind for me when discussing LGBTQ representation in our world history is that of the Two-Spirited person found in several First Nations cultures. The Two-Spirited person, who was historically respected and revered, housed characteristics of both the male and female spirit and so was able to identify with both genders and give varying perspectives. Until the colonization of North America and the subsequent attempts to assimilate the First Nations peoples and to destroy their unique cultures, the Two-Spirited person was seen as a teacher and a mediator, an integral part of these cultures’ way of life. It cannot be stressed enough that the supplanting of these traditional beliefs with European religious and societal views destroyed this history and inflicted permanent damage on Two-Spirited people and their tribes (Smith, 1999).

**Present**

More recently, the issue of diversity has come to the forefront of our education system and topics such as racism, multiculturalism and sexism have, for the most part, been invited into our classrooms. Doing so has proved to open up a safe space and enabled a positive dialogue around these topics. Due to this, many people, regardless of being members of these groups or not, have been liberated of the damage that racism, xenophobia, and sexism have caused in the past. Nevertheless, the battle for the freedom of all human spirits is not yet over and there are still many people within the aforementioned groups who, to this day, are forced to deal with everything from negative stereotypes to personal harm every day. In addition to these groups who have fought long and hard for equality there is
another group, which has come to the forefront of our society relatively recently. The LGBTQ community has only begun their journey towards not only acceptance, but also celebration.

The LGBTQ communities in our society have long dealt with issues of discrimination and marginalization. They have been spurned, among other things, because of others’ religious beliefs, as well as a fear of the unknown. Increasing positive awareness of the community as a whole, as well as the individuals within it, is essential in order to reverse the negative awareness that currently exists in our society. Beth Reis (2000) in her article Why Must The Public Schools Teach About Sexual Orientation, tell us that “...schools are actually one of the most unsafe places for openly gay and gender role non-conforming youth....” It is my belief that this is partially due to the fact that teachers are not making it okay for children to talk about LGBTQ topics. Children need leaders and, especially when discussing topics that are outside of their normal realm of safety, they need to know it is okay to ask questions and to share what they know in a respectful and positive manner. Just as teachers have done in the past with other “touchy” topics such as racism and sexism, it is our responsibility to make our classrooms a safe environment for all of our students to talk about LGBTQ issues.

Statistics provide us with the horrifying realities of what happens when LGBTQ children, or those assumed to be LGBTQ, are not provided with a safe place to explore their identity. The Centre for Suicide Prevention (http://www.suicideinfo.ca/) lists sexual orientation as one of the main risk factors for suicide and the McCreary Centre Society in their study “Being Out. Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual and Transgender Youth in BC: An Adolescent Health Survey” (1999) relates “82% of the participants said other students at school sometimes or often make homophobic remarks.” It is imperative that these statistics, along with a multitude of others such as increased homelessness, abuse and exposure to violence, be reversed. It is unacceptable that any human being be at risk for this, or any other, type of harm.

**Future (my reflection)**

In Jerry W. Webster’s (2001) article “Effects of Ninth Graders' Culture-Specific Schemata on Responses to Multicultural Literature” it was found that “...culture and multiculturalism were already very important and integral parts of the participants’ lives.” It stands to reason that sexual orientation is also a “very important and integral part” of the life of every adolescent in our school system and as such, just as culture and multiculturalism are explored in a safe, inclusive and open environment within our schools, so should it be for LGBTQ themes.

While completing this research, it has become clear to me that, although our schools and the teachers within them have taken big steps forward in how they approach sexual orientation and LGBTQ themes, there is still much work to be done. “Something More to Tell You: Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Young People’s Experiences of Secondary Schooling,” a comparative study by Viv Ellis and Sue High (2004) demonstrates that, compared to a similar 1984 study, LGBTQ themes have become much more commonplace in British classrooms. Nevertheless, this same study reports that, in spite of the fact that LGBTQ themes are mentioned more, LGBTQ
students do not find the context or the content of these mentions to be helpful. As teachers, it is our responsibility to find ways to integrate LGBTQ themes into our classrooms in meaningful ways in order to increase positive awareness of the LGBTQ community and to advocate for and encourage diversity.

It is my proposal that the English classroom, among others, is the perfect place for this integration. Throughout history, literature has provided many opportunities for discussion, as well as an avenue to challenge current thinking or beliefs. By bringing to light and including both LGBTQ authors and LGBTQ themes, English teachers have the ability to show all students that LGBTQ themes are not only an essential part of the curriculum, but also a critical part of the school community.

Like all students, LGBTQ children need a society that celebrates who they are and that sees them as an integral part of their culture. As one step towards the goal of ridding our society of oppression, integrating LGBTQ themes into our curriculum at school is necessary in order to let our LGBTQ students know that they are part of our classroom and that they, like all students, can expect to have their voice and their story heard in a safe and caring environment.
References


Reis, Beth. (2000). Why Must The Public Schools Teach About Sexual Orientation? In GALE BC (Eds.), *Challenging Homophobia in Schools* (pp. 1-6). Vancouver, British Columbia: GALE


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Quadrant Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Imagery (draw pictures)</td>
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<td>Powerful Words Spoken (direct quotes)</td>
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## Cause and Effect

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<th>Summarize an Event From the Novel</th>
<th>What Were the Effects of this Event?</th>
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**Character In-Role Write**

Respond to the action of the story from the point of view of one of the characters in your story (use “I”).

Demonstrate personal understanding of the story, with lots of details and references to the story.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Meaningful Quote</th>
<th>My Reaction/Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Powerful Quote</td>
<td>What Can I Infer From This?</td>
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<td>What do you KNOW?</td>
<td>What do you WONDER?</td>
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Personal Response

Respond to the story from your own point of view. What is your personal reaction to what has just happened? Why? Do you have any connections (Text to Self, Text to Text, Text to World) with the story? Do you have any questions you would like to ask the author or characters?
**Take Action**

In the inspirational book written by The Freedom Writers and Erin Gruwell a Freedom Writer argues that people should "rock the boat" and "speak out" when they witness an injustice.

Have you observed an unjust action or behavior and if so, describe the situation.

What did you do?

If you could go back in time and revisit that moment, would you handle it differently?

Why, do you believe, is it sometimes difficult for people to speak out or act against wrongdoing?

http://www.freedomwritersfoundation.org/site/c.kqiXL2PFJtH/b.2260043/k.9790/Writing_Discussion_Prompts.htm
Toast For Change

In the inspirational book written by The Freedom Writers and Erin Gruwell the Freedom Writers made a "Toast for Change" in which they freed themselves from the stereotypes and labels they felt had been placed on them because of their races, their ages, their family backgrounds, and their education and gave themselves a second chance to prove themselves.

What are the dangers of stereotypes?

What can people do to break free from stereotypes?

Why is this important?

What is YOUR toast for change with regard the themes found in this book? Create an action plan for how you intend to make your change become a reality!

*

http://www.freedomwritersfoundation.org/site/c.kqIXL2PFjtH/b.2260043/k.9790/Writing_Discussion_Prompts.htm
Character's Name:  
How we are connected: 

Character Name: