Discussing Sexual identities with pre-service primary school english-language teachers from a spanish context

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This article is based on a discussion with seven voluntary Spanish pre-service primary school English-language teachers on queer issues. The focus group followed a questionnaire on their knowledge and understanding of sexual identity issues in education. The facilitated discussion enabled the participants to be better prepared on the subject. At first, the researchers guided the discussion based on the main results from the questionnaire and then worked as facilitators for the focus group, prompting critical thinking. Through pedagogical suggestions, the participants discussed possible applications of queer theory in primary education in order to counter homophobia and heterosexism. The results of the discussion highlight the absence of queer issues in English-language teaching in primary education in Spain and the need for teacher training programmes, as requested by the participants. In this article, sexual identities are related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersexual (LGBTI) as well as heterosexual people. It is the first study realised in Spain to use group discussion on these topics.

Keywords: Pre-service primary school teachers, English as a foreign language, queer theory, homophobia, heteronormativity, LGBTI

Introduction

This article is inspired by queer theory and is based on a focus group consisting of seven Spanish pre-service primary school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. This qualitative research study is based on an MA dissertation presented by Barozzi (2010) at the Faculty of Education of the University of Granada, in Andalusia, Spain.

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We are both English-language teachers and teacher trainers, hence the interest in this subject area.

In this article, 'queer' is mainly used as an umbrella term to include all LGBTI[1] people (Jagose, 1996), and all those who feel marginalised as a result of their sexual/ gender identity and orientation. We understand that 'queer', as in queer theory, is a fluid term which does not constitute a particular fixed social identity. However, we also believe that 'queer' is a problematic term *per se*, and this is unavoidable. In this article, the term 'queer people' includes 'gender queer' individuals who do not recognise themselves as 'she' or 'he' ('*ze*'?); pansexuals who are attracted to, and interested in all kinds of people whether they define themselves as having a fixed sexual identity or not, as well as asexual individuals. Our only slight objection to using 'queer' for LGBTI is that it might render some identities 'invisible', particularly lesbians, trans[2] and intersexual people; however, this is not our intention in this article.

Sexism, which, in our view, should be termed *gender category oppression* (Rands, 2009), is systematically associated with heterosexism, which is the belief that heterosexuality is the only possible *natural* sexual identity, whereas all the other identities are considered inferior and deviant. Heteronormativity, with its social norms and rules, perpetuates heterosexism; however, unlike homophobia,[3] which is intentional in nature, heteronormativity is often subconsciously reproduced in everyday interactions, texts, images and discourses. The exclusion of any LGBTI individual from school textbooks is an example of heterosexism, which can also be noticed in the vast majority of adverts, films and television programmes, which are mostly directed to straight people. We believe that heterosexism and heteronormativity are more dangerous than homophobia, because they often go unnoticed, but do promote homophobia and exclusion. In addition, cissexism, which considers trans people as inferior to cissexual/cisgender people, is not often perceived in education. Cissexuals/cisgenders, unlike trans people, feel comfortable with their own biological and subconscious sex as well as their gender (Serano, 2007).

Sexual identity issues are not normally treated in the Spanish national educational system, especially at primary school level and in private Catholic schools. Nonetheless, they may be addressed in public (state-run) education through cross-curricular themes in any subject in the last two years of primary school, but generally only the area of sexual reproduction is discussed. Thus, it would be relatively safe to admit that heteronormativity and homophobia permeate the Spanish educational system.

Sexual orientation, personal identity and individual differences in education are protected by the Spanish Constitution (1978) and educational legislation (2006). Since 2005, same-sex couples have had the same rights to marriage as heterosexual couples, including child adoption; trans people can change their gender and name following a two-year period of psychological and medical attention and without

having to go through sex re-assignment surgery. Unfortunately, psychologists and physicians all over the world still consider transgenderism (and transexuality) a mental disorder (and a dysphoria), as has been the case for homosexuality in the recent past. The only country in the world, to date, that allows people to change their name and gender without going through medical, psychological and legal attention is Argentina (since 2012). Currently, a similar legislative proposal is being debated in different regions in Spain, including Andalusia. Despite the progressive legislation in Spain, EFL publishers (from Britain) are wary of depicting homosexual family units or queer individuals in English-language textbooks for Spanish primary education, because children are deemed to be 'asexual' and too young and naïve to 'understand' the issues involved (Herdt & Boxer, 1993). Yet primary school pupils are perfectly capable of critical thought when exposed to a whole range of other social issues (Sears, 1999).

The main objective of this article is to explore seven Spanish pre-service primary school EFL teachers' knowledge of, and attitudes towards queer issues in primary education. We also wish to find out what queer pedagogical suggestions participants might propose concerning their own teaching practice.

Previous research studies

Some Spanish, European and wider international research on teachers' and students' understandings of queer issues has been conducted mostly at secondary school level (Bickmore, 1999; Page & Liston, 2002; Gallardo & Escolano, 2009; Pichardo, 2007; Gualdi, Martelli, Wilhelm, Biedron, Graglia, & Pietrantoni, 2008). The main results of these studies suggest that homophobia is still a serious problem in secondary school education in Europe. An important queer pedagogical intervention is the 'GLEE Project' (Bedford, 2009), which provided training courses in Europe that empowered in-service secondary as well as primary school teachers to help create safe and affirmative schools for LGBT students and staff. It did not deal with EFL, but with a range of different subject areas.

As for other international studies, the closest to our research are those undertaken by Nelson (1993, 1999, 2003, 2009) in Australia and in the United States, although they deal with English as a Second Language (ESL) and adults. One study in education which is worth mentioning and which deals with gay, lesbian and bisexual people and citizenship in South African Life Orientation Textbooks is that of Potgieter & Reygan (2012); others which are related to diversity in education are Le Roux and Mdunge (2009) as well as Pillay and McLellan (2010). Another international study which deals with queer issues and foreign-language teaching is that undertaken in Australia by De Vincenti, Giovanangeli and Ward (2007). There are other international studies on queer issues in education, also at primary school level, namely Kissen (2002), Jones and Hillier (2012), Moita-Lopes (2006), and O'Móchain (2006).[4] However, it is important to emphasise that none of these studies deals with a direct discussion

with pre-service EFL teachers at primary school level; therefore, this current study is an attempt to close the gap.

Queer issues at primary school level

In terms of queer issues and primary school education, parts of our society strongly object to discuss these topics with children, because they are viewed as asexual beings who are "too young and too innocent to comprehend or think critically about what they consider to be 'adult issues', such as difference, power, 'race', and sexuality" (Robinson & Jones, 2006: 7). Colleary (1999) argues that teachers should integrate sexual identity issues into their primary school curricula, as this would offer possible queer pupils, as well as all the others, a further opportunity to participate in their school community, "thus increasing their own sense of self-worth and achievement and significantly decreasing their chances for isolation, academic failure, or suicide" (Colleary, 1999: 153).

The documentary *It's elementary: Talking about gay issues in schools* (Chasnoff & Cohen, 1996/2006), filmed in six U.S. elementary and middle schools, "provides evidence that many young children know a lot more about homosexuality and gender questions than adults would predict" (Bickmore, 1999: 15). The movie clearly shows that primary school children possess knowledge that is incomplete, partly inaccurate and/or negative, and partly neutral (Bickmore, 1999). The documentary is a milestone in the development of didactic discourse in primary and secondary teacher training on sexual identity issues. As the film shows, children can learn about queer issues from what their teachers say and from what they leave out, in other words from both teachers' knowledge and ignorance.

Queer issues in EFL education

English-language teaching has become one of the most important school subjects worldwide; nowadays, English is considered the *lingua franca* that enables billions of people to communicate. Nevertheless, apart from heterosexuality, sexual identities are consistently omitted in EFL and ESL education (Thornbury, 1999; Nelson, 2009).

During her research studies, Nelson (1999, 2003) discovered that some of her ESL colleagues believed that sexual identities had nothing to do with the teaching and learning of a second language. However, issues pertaining to sexual identities, exclusively heterosexual, are often present in ESL/EFL education. Yet opportunities for queer discussions are often present, and inevitably there will be students and teachers who are queer. Moreover, learning a foreign language means learning a new culture in which all social identities should be represented; yet sexual identities are avoided explicitly in EFL/ESL teaching materials. To demonstrate this, we analysed some EFL textbooks for state-run primary schools in Spain and noticed how

heteronormativity is present in nearly every unit of the textbooks examined (e.g. Blair & Cadwallader, 2009; Evans & Gray, 2003; Papiol & Toth, 2009).

Countering homophobia and heterosexism and their impact on the 'e/quality' of educational experiences is a pillar within the field of teacher training that directly applies to English Language Teaching (ELT) when incorporating non-homophobic and non-heterosexist issues in the curriculum (Ferfolja, 2007; Robinson, 2005; Szalacha, 2004; Halberstam, 2008; Stiegler, 2008; Hermann-Wilmarth & Bills, 2010).

Nelson (1999, 2009) as well as Guijarro and Ruiz-Cecilia (2011) stress the importance of a 'learner-centred' language education and recognise that teachers' and learners' social identities are an important aspect of everyday interactions in the context of families, schools, communities, leisure activities and workplaces. The focus on the social aspects coincides with the view that knowledge is not discovered, but socially constructed (Foucault, 1978) and that learning is a social practice.

Through queer theory, students and teachers can learn what purpose identities serve, how they work and even discover some contradictions related to them (Nelson, 2009). Problematising all sexual identities (including heterosexuals) may be more inclusive than simply legitimising subordinate sexual identities, because it offers more possibilities to learn about, and deal with different experiences and perspectives (Nelson, 2003). By doing so, heterosexual students would also be interested in discussing sexual identities, since heterosexuality would be included in the discussion. Furthermore, problematising all sexual identities can avoid the separation between 'us' (heterosexual people) and 'them' (queer people), which tends to isolate subordinate identities and make them 'invisible' and 'problematic' in education.

Queer students should feel safe and comfortable in their class and, like all heterosexual teachers and students, they should have opportunities to express themselves authentically, spontaneously and confidentially. Similarly, queer teachers should be able to work in a comfortable environment in which they can talk freely about their gender identity, if they so wish.

Nelson (1993: 148) believes that "it is our responsibility to give *all* of our students a good education". According to Nelson's experience, a typical ESL teacher's attitude is to believe that only queer people can address queer issues. As a matter of fact, it could be more difficult for LGBTI teachers to discuss queer issues, because they might be afraid of being addressed as queer and receive aggressive or negative responses such as rejection.

Moreover, queer theory makes it possible to examine the linguistic and cultural patterns in which sexual identities are performed (Butler, 1990), communicated and formed; teachers and learners can go beyond simply discussing socially constructed people as either tolerated or tolerant (Nelson, 1999). Cynthia Nelson believes that aiming for tolerance presupposes intolerance, and inclusion can serve to reinforce a

minority status. This aspect was discussed during the focus group, and participants understood the *danger* of using the word 'tolerance' towards people ('them') who are considered subordinate, because it might serve to further isolate minority groups.

In Spain, Guijarro-Ojeda (2006) offers some queer didactic examples for EFL education. Nelson (2009: 26) reminds us that queer studies in ESL/EFL teaching are part of a "nascent area and have yet to engage with international contexts and globalised research as much as one would expect".

Methodology

Participants

The participant cohort for the focus group consisted of four men and three women, all Spanish nationals, aged between 21 and 31 who took part in this study voluntarily and who participated together. Six men and four women answered the questionnaire, previously sent to them by email, but only seven of them could attend the group discussion (the four men and three women mentioned earlier). The participants were selected at the Faculty of Education of the University of Granada where they had been studying. This is one of the leading universities in the country and is ranked first in the field of pedagogy, according to national statistics.

The ten initial candidates who were contacted had some interest in the subject and accepted to participate in this research study. From the data obtained from the questionnaire, two men were identified as heterosexual, two as bisexual and another as gay. One woman considered herself bisexual, another did not recognise herself as totally heterosexual, and the other two expressed that they were heterosexual. In the discussion, we only mentioned that half of the cohort did not consider themselves purely heterosexual. Their sexual identities were not disclosed, despite the fact that the only gay participant talked freely about his sexuality and another man talked about his bisexuality. One bisexual woman contacted us after the discussion and told us that she felt uneasy during the focus group as she did not feel comfortable to disclose her sexual identity in front of the other participants.

Instruments and method

After reviewing the literature on this topic and based on our own experience as gender experts and EFL teacher trainers, some key topics were devised to elicit information from the participants for the group discussion. These topics were chosen after analysing the questionnaires, which served to prompt critical thinking. In the questionnaire, queer issues were addressed and the participants had to answer a series of questions related to their knowledge and understanding of these issues. Apart from the initial personal questions, participants had to answer questions related to queer terminology, followed by other questions dealing with sexual identity issues and primary school education, whether it is important to discuss sexual identity

issues with children and how they would do it. The final questions were related to sexual identity issues and EFL and whether these matters were relevant to their study and profession.

The questionnaire, written in English, was positively evaluated by external experts in the area of qualitative research in education and foreign-language teaching. Since queer terminology and issues were new to most of the participants, we decided to organise a discussion in order to clarify some of the topics and answers given in the questionnaire and to further analyse the data we collected from the questionnaire in order to validate our results and findings. The facilitated discussion was partly controlled by the researchers who elicited some of the answers and challenged the participants to deconstruct their ideas and opinions.

We sent the on-line questionnaire and, after a deep analysis of the participants' answers, the focus group took place two months later. It was the first time that a filmed discussion on sexual identities with pre-service primary school EFL teachers was used as a research method in Spain. For the purpose of this article, we shall only concentrate on the most relevant topics discussed in the focus group. The group discussion was held in Spanish. In this article, we have translated some of the most important contributions made by the participants.

Our work is based on a naturalistic inquiry approach, in which the participants' voices are central; however, due to restrictions of length for an article, a detailed analysis was not possible. The two-hour discussion was filmed and recorded on two DVDs.

Results and discussion

Four out of seven participants were surprised to hear that only half of them considered themselves to be exclusively heterosexual (from the data of the questionnaire). All the participants understood the hegemonic influence of heterosexuality in our culture. The term 'queer' appeared to be problematic; five participants did not really understand its meaning as in queer theory. However, all the participants understood it as an umbrella term for LGBTI people. Only one participant knew the meaning of 'intersexual'. Another participant objected that sexual identities always existed in history, which we briefly debated and concluded that identities, as we currently understand them, are social constructions that change in time and space (Butler, 1990; Nelson, 2009). Sex and sexuality were often confused, so we asked the group whether some people could consider themselves gay or straight without having had any previous sexual contact. They all mentioned that this was possible; this partly clarified the fact that sexuality is not exclusively related to sexual acts.

In the questionnaire, six out of ten participants did not know the terms 'heterosexism' and 'heteronormativity'. During the group discussion, these terms were analysed in depth and each participant offered some examples of heterosexism and

heteronormativity from their life experience. Ultimately, the participants understood the terms, particularly because of their strict relation to sexism. Homophobia was also understood as discrimination towards, and rejection of LGBTI people.

It was confirmed during the focus group that heterosexuality was not generally recognised as problematic, was mostly taken for granted, and never discussed in terms of power relations. In the questionnaire, the participants were asked to describe a heterosexual person. However, none of the participants answered this question. Similarly, in the questionnaire, six out of ten participants ignored the description of lesbians and trans people, thus reinforcing the assumption that lesbians, trans and intersexual people are still invisible in education. During the focus group, four participants admitted that they found it difficult to describe heterosexuality, because it is considered 'normal'. They all seemed surprised to hear that it was, in fact, unnoticed in the questionnaire. Discussing the hegemonic role of heterosexuality is fundamental for queer theory, since talking only about LGBTI people is first of all exclusive and, secondly, it might not consider the power relations surrounding sexual identities (Foucault, 1978).

We then discussed one particular question in the survey, namely "What caused your 'heterosexuality'?". Four participants admitted being surprised by this question; they observed that normally people ask what caused one's homosexuality, but heterosexuality is never problematised. They all appreciated the question, because it helped five of them understand that their heterosexuality was, in fact, imposed on them since birth. The only gay participant stated: "my 'heterosexuality' was caused by education and the Catholic religion".

Six participants argued that, like the terms 'men' and 'women', sexual identities are social constructions. One participant admitted that he was given social roles; therefore, sexual identities were recognised as social constructs, although he added that there is also a natural component (our orientation). Another participant, stating that the "family decides the roles when we are born: girls with pink and boys with blue, etc.", was underlying the presence of heteronormativity and fixed gender roles given to boys and girls. One participant added: "[T]hese fixed roles are reinforced at primary school". Another participant considered homosexuality as 'normal'. However, the other participants recognised that it is not considered normal in our society.

The participants were then asked what they meant by 'normal' as in a 'normal family'. One participant mentioned: "[T]he term 'normal' reflects the values imposed by the Catholic Church". For two other participants, 'normal' meant what is most common. We stressed that often the most common things are not considered 'normal' *per se,* but they are made to be the norm. In fact, another participant added: "[I]t is a case of hierarchy in which heterosexuality is considered superior"; this denotes critical thinking. At this stage, participants took the floor and five of them believed that sexual identities are viewed distinctively according to one's culture; this could create conflicts in the classroom, due to students' differing cultural

origins. It is important to recognise that conflicts can also emerge in an EFL class, and teachers must be prepared to face them. Nelson (2009) reminds us that homophobic statements should be used as pedagogical opportunities. For example, if a child comes from a culture in which homosexuality is considered a sin, as in most religions, and a crime, as in many countries of the world, we can listen to what s/he has to say and compare his/her knowledge with the rest of the class. This could easily be achieved in an ESL class.

One participant argued that "sexual identities should not be discussed at primary school as primary school pupils are not aware of sexual identities and are not interested in the subject". Another participant strongly disagreed with this statement, suggesting that teachers should be prepared to clarify any doubts pupils may have and deal with sexualities by using their knowledge or lack thereof.

As for parents' reactions to discussing sexual identities at primary school, six out of ten participants admitted, in the questionnaire, that they were afraid of their parents' reactions if they decided to discuss sexual identities in their class, whereas four out of seven participants added that they were concerned about losing their job, because of their parents' reactions. However, the other three participants in the facilitated discussion argued that discrimination towards LGBTI people should be addressed at primary school, like any other social injustice, and that it should be part of the explicit curriculum. One participant stated that "it would be vital to talk to parents about the importance for their children to learn different sexualities". In the discussion, six participants compared homophobia with racism and considered that both should be treated at school, although three participants opined that discussing homophobia could be more difficult and problematic. One participant stated:

> *Talking about racism does not affect Spanish parents as their children are and will be Spanish, but discussing homosexuality could be a problem as some parents might think that their children could 'turn gay'.*

At this stage, we mentioned a research study carried out in Spain (Pichardo, 2007), in which parents were contacted beforehand and told about the activities and surveys on sexuality issues that researchers wanted to use with secondary school students. The majority of the parents were in favour of such activities, as they admitted not being able to discuss these issues with their children. All the participants were surprised by this finding.

As for queer pedagogical situations, one participant in the questionnaire mentioned his training period in a primary school:

> *During my school practice, children asked me whether I had a girlfriend. I told them that I had a boyfriend. Then, they told me that I didn't look gay. I used this to make them aware of sexual identities, because they really appreciated and admired me.*

This participant used a very good queer pedagogical example. Pupils, like most adults, assume that we are all - or that we are supposed to be – heterosexual. However, the

participant broke this imposed social rule by stating that he had a boyfriend. In the discussion, the same participant mentioned that pupils were surprised by his answer, but that they also seemed to know who could be gay and who was probably not, according to general social norms. Another participant pointed out that "children should be asked to describe what a gay person is for them". This is a perfect queer pedagogical opportunity and children should also be asked what a straight person is for them.

One participant, who was teaching in a Catholic school, had filled in the questionnaire, but could not attend the focus group. In the questionnaire, she admitted that she would avoid any reference to queer issues in her classroom. In the discussion, six participants in a similar situation identified with her fear of losing their job. Yet one participant admitted:

> *I would discuss sexuality issues even if I worked in a Catholic school, as part of human rights and multiculturalism, and I would try to convince the parents and the school director about the importance to include sexual identity issues in the classroom just like any other social injustice.*

Participants were then asked how EFL textbooks could be used in a pedagogical way, pointing out that queer identities are never present, at least not in Spain. Four of the participants considered inclusion (but how?). We prompted that children should think critically as to why queer identities are not present and discuss it with the entire class rather than trying to include queer individuals, which could be problematic; five participants agreed.

Six participants argued that EFL textbooks could be 'queerly' used by asking the pupils if they knew of other forms of family units and, therefore, discuss what is missing in the textbooks and create a general debate on the issue. The majority of the primary school children are bound to know some queer people in their families or parents' friends or from the television (Chesnoff & Cohen, 1996).

The sample group was asked to provide some examples of queer didactic activities that could be applied to their English class at primary school. The following are the most salient examples: in group work, girls and boys can work together, thus avoiding typical roles for boys and girls (role plays); in a reading activity, girls can read parts supposed to be for boys and vice versa; use of songs, films and documentaries (probably those with clear queer content or gender ambiguous with gender variant minors); exploit queer and non-queer children's literature; talk about different family units; talk about queer issues when discussing homophobia, or use traditional tales but change the gender roles.

It must be stated that the participants were highly motivated and wanted to learn more about pedagogical implications underlying the fact that they had never received any kind of training on how to deal with queer didactic strategies.

We also wanted to find out why, for more than half of the survey's cohort, children were described as asexual entities. One participant mentioned that "children are seen as asexual because they do not like sex and do not seem to possess any knowledge of sexuality"; this would appear to be a common remark. However, most children know that being homosexual is considered inferior and deviant (Chesnoff & Cohen, 1996) and they have also learnt the binary system (boy/girl, heterosexual/homosexual, and so forth) and tend to follow it as a general norm. After a short debate on the issue, five participants agreed that primary school children possess some knowledge of sexual identity issues and are sexed beings; thus they should not be considered 'asexual'.

In discussing other possible activities which primary school teachers should adopt and which could be relevant to anyone, one participant argued that "sexual minorities are a minority in number and thus they are given less space and importance". We answered that this is possible; however, in terms of quantity, this is counterproductive. It is likely that women outnumber men in the world; yet they are a social minority. Hence, it is not acceptable to think that LGBTI people should receive a different (inferior) treatment simply because they are not heterosexual and they are fewer in number.

Towards the end of the discussion, we talked about some pedagogical implications offered by Nelson (1999, 2009) in which, for example, two women holding hands and two men holding hands in the street were discussed. Five participants admitted that, in our society (Western, Spanish), two women holding hands in the street could be lesbians, but they are more likely considered to be friends or family members. This kind of activity is highly motivating, because pupils are encouraged to think about different answers for the same situation and this can be applied to multiculturalism. All participants agreed that two men holding hands in the street in Spain would be a gay couple, whereas, for example, in a Muslim country, they could be brothers, friends or relatives. The participants enjoyed these examples and considered them constructive for their pupils. They could also recognise the connection between the social aspect of the activity and the study of English grammar: the use of modal verbs as in "they *could* be friends, they *might* be sisters, they *must* be lovers, etc." (Nelson, 1999: 371).

At the end of the discussion, all the participants emphasised their lack of preparation and training in how to deal with queer issues. Since they all admitted that discussing queer issues with primary school pupils is very important and relevant for their job, they were concerned about not having sufficient skills and knowledge that could negatively influence their working career. One participant made this very revealing statement: "There is a lack of information, we filled in many questionnaires, many questions, but we do not receive any information". What this participant meant is that queer issues are never approached and that pre-service teachers have to deal with sexual identity dilemmas which often arise at primary school level. All seven participants admitted that multiculturalism and racism were discussed in their

teacher training period at university. However, there was no or hardly any discussion on sexual identities. We commented that these findings were similar to the research carried out at the University of Málaga (Gallardo & Escolano, 2009) in which both university students and professors requested professional training on how to deal with sexual identity issues in education.

Conclusions

The discussion with the seven Spanish pre-service English-language teachers was constructive; they showed a high level of awareness of the consequences of homophobic bullying on the young victims and were keen on finding solutions to this educational and social problem. They also recognised the absence of queer-friendly materials in their EFL teaching and learning experience and hoped for a more progressive and open-minded legislation in education.

During the discussion, the participants' responses revealed a commitment and willingness to become professional, sensitive, understanding and empathetic primary school teachers. Pedagogy should involve rigorous critique of our society, why and how we have different identities, and not merely attempt to include, for example, subordinate sexual identities without discussing what made them seem inferior.

The most important result emerging from the discussion is their lack of training on queer issues and the demand for it. These findings have led us to develop a new research project based on a training course on sexual identity issues for pre-service English-language teachers at the University of Granada in Spain.

Notes

1. We would prefer to use the acronym with small letters: lgbti, as the capital letters stand out almost aggressively in a text. However, lgbti in small letters is not generally employed in English. In addition, HIV/AIDS should be written as hiv/aids, especially because the capital letters reinforce the negative social stigma.

2. We use the more inclusive term 'trans' in this article to include both transgender and transsexual people.

3. We would prefer to use either the term 'homotransphobia' or 'queerphobia', as they are more inclusive than 'homophobia'. Nonetheless, these terms are not generally employed in English. 'Homophobia' can be institutionally, culturally and individually expressed. There is also 'internalised homophobia', which affects LGBTI people who reject their own sexual identity.

4. There are international educational projects for LGBTI people, namely 'Gala South Africa' (http://www.gala.co.za/), 'Belongto' in Ireland (http://www.belongto.org/), Aibai in China (http://www.chinacsrmap.org/Org_Show_EN.asp?ID=1587), and 'Stonewell' (http://www.stonewall.org.uk/) in Britain.

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