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Chapter 8

VOICE PRACTICES TO SUPPORT LGBTQIA+ EDUCATORS AND PUPILS

Alexandra Sewell, Max Davies, Jennifer Zwarthoed, Alexandra Baird, Klaudia Matasovska, Max Kirk, and Pippa Sterk

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Reflective activity

What can be done to empower LGBTQIA+ people to claim their voice in a wide range of educational contexts?

Testimony 3

Klaudia Matasovska

Prior to the start of my PhD studies

Prior to the start of my PhD studies at the Educational Department at Goldsmiths, I worked as a Behaviour Lead in a SEN school for the Blind. Prejudice is a learnt behaviour and one way for the stigma and fear to dissipate is to openly talk about inclusive education, including RSE. The other way to manage this issue is to train teachers on how to make LGBT RSE accessible to children and young people with SEND. I did feel there was some fear around this amongst my fellow SEN educators.

Therefore, a few years ago, I contacted a national LGBT charity to ask them to help my school run an LGBT Inclusion programme to introduce the concept of LGBT to our learners and also teach them and the staff about LGBT inclusion which was, at the time, a largely unusual thing for a SEN school to do. Once we started implementing this programme, we created Rainbow Clubs as part of this process which I used to run with other colleagues and it was a success. The students told us how much they appreciated having LGBT role models around them and the opportunity to speak openly about any LGBT+ concept. This experience enabled them to see that being themselves is more than ok. They engaged in writing poetry about having this 'rainbow' opportunity. They openly thanked us for not viewing them as 'childlike' or asexual with regards to disclosures concerning sexuality. They enjoyed having discussions about gender identities and used their chosen pronouns. They understood the importance of having uni-sex toilets and neutral-coloured uniforms in their school and they had an input into the school's policies with regards to LGBT inclusion. They would also liaison with the school's library staff about having access to 'braille' LGBT+ themed story books. There was no fear around any

subject. The sessions were inspired by what the students needed to talk about – not by what we wanted them to talk about.

Since then, I have had the opportunity to inform other SEN school leaders about effective ways in which their teaching staff can support children and young people who identify as LGBT+. I have also been asked to give an interview about this experience for Twinkle SEND Digest to inform the SEN educational community of the benefits of this type of inclusive approach. In my view, most children are open-minded and perceptive. I believe one of the best ways to support school children in

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their settings is to give them the message that everyone deserves to be valued. We should start with this message in early stages of schooling and having a truly inclusive curriculum is key in this process. Every young person deserves to see themselves, their family, and the full diversity of our world reflected in their curriculum, in the books they read, on worksheets and in posters on the walls. This experience has also inspired me to start my PhD studies. My PhD thesis is going to be about LGBT+ inclusion with regards to pupils with SEND, especially non-verbal or partially verbal students. This is a largely under-researched area. I am hoping my research will impact on SEN settings' ethos and curriculum in such a way that they will be fully inclusive and representative of young disabled LGBT+ students, including their identities.

Reflective commentary

Klaudia's reflections demonstrate that testimonial injustice can occur when individuals are not believed or given an equal voice because of multiple prejudices held by others against them. We can think of LGBTQIA+ individuals with SEND as potentially experiencing a double disadvantage in their perspective being recognised and validated as their SEND status can lead to staff members having "fear" about such discussions. Testimonial injustice is at risk of occurring as individuals' gender identities and sexual orientations are ignored or discounted due to a paternalistic prejudice that pupils with SEND can't accurately know themselves or possess sexual preference. Yet pupils were grateful that they were not viewed as "childlike or asexual" just because they were attending a special needs school.

Reflective activity

Having read Klaudia's testimony and the reflective commentary, consider the pupils in your school who are taught RSE. Are there any children who may be viewed paternalistically, their gender identity or sexual orientation discouraged or dismissed due to prejudices held by staff against any personal characteristics they possess? Take some time to explore why these prejudices exist in this context. You can also use the prompts in Figure 8.2. What is the potential first step towards supporting staff to overcome these prejudices and accept the voice of all LGBTQIA+ pupils?

