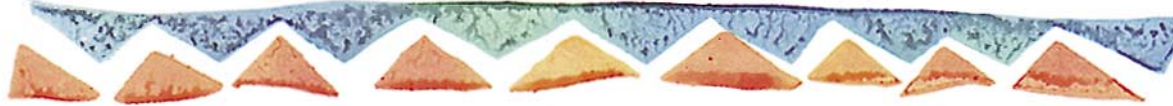


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a half termly bulletin for secondary teachers, focusing on topical global issues

Challenging homophobia in schools

'Everyone is an insider, there are no outsiders, whatever their beliefs, whatever their colour, gender or sexuality.' Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 25 February 2004

Homophobia is a hatred or fear of someone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). It's a local and global phenomenon that has to be challenged if all young people – regardless of their sexuality – are to feel included and valued in their school and community. Many people around the world are victimized because of their sexuality or gender identity. These minorities are often not tolerated in parts of North and South America, the Middle East, Africa and parts of Europe. They may be ostracized, assaulted, tortured, imprisoned or even killed for simply being who they are – this is sometimes sanctioned by the state (Amnesty International Report, 2000).

The British Government acknowledges that approximately 6% of people in Britain are LGBT. The new Civil Partnerships Act, which gives same-sex partners similar rights to heterosexual couples, raises the profile of the LGBT population, yet protests at the first civil ceremony demonstrate that homophobic attitudes can still prevail. In Britain, as in other parts of the world, homophobic bullying often occurs where homophobia is ignored. It blights the schools where it takes place and causes permanent damage to LGBT young people and adult members of the school community. They are often the subject of name-calling, rumours, ridicule, social isolation and physical assault. Young people who are not LGBT are also at the mercy of homophobic bullies – anyone who doesn't conform to narrow gender stereotypes can be a victim.

The daily trauma of school – getting in and out, which corridors to walk down, problem classes, where it's safe to be at break times – takes its toll. The effects of homophobic bullying mean that young people often underachieve with low exam results, high levels of truancy, drop-out, mental health problems, panic attacks, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide attempts. According to a DfES survey in 2002, 82% of secondary teachers said they were aware of verbal homophobic bullying and 26% were aware of physical homophobic bullying. Most schools have anti-bullying policies - yet only 6% specifically refer to homophobic bullying.

Respond to the challenge:

- tackle the language that gives licence to homophobic bullying – in many schools the word 'gay' is used in a derogatory context every day
- use non-stereotypical images throughout the school
- avoid using race and gender as the only examples of prejudice
- make sure pupils' welfare is the responsibility of all staff
- avoid generic language that assumes parents and staff have opposite sex partners or that pupils have 'traditional' families
- develop policies and practice that address homophobia.

LGBT people are... black, white, dual heritage, daughters, sons, aunts, mothers, sisters, brothers, fathers, uncles, friends, colleagues, workers, unwaged, students, teachers, customers, disabled, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, of all religions and none, old & young, women & men, from every political perspective.

www.schools-out.org.uk

'The worst thing about homophobia in my school is knowing that the teachers won't stop it. They pretend it isn't happening, some even join in. It's bad enough without teachers patronizing you by saying things like "It'll go away" or "We don't hear anyone saying anything."'

Year 9 boy

LGBT History Month aims to dispel the ignorance and stereotyping that lead to prejudice and homophobic bullying. www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk/schools/main.htm

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South Africa is the only African country where same-sex rights are constitutionally protected. Yet many people there still hold the view that homosexuality is unnatural, perverse, a sin, or an import from depraved Western culture. Most African leaders seem ignorant of the historical evidence that traces same-sexuality back to pre-colonial times. Before colonial missionaries arrived, there were a range of same-sex practices and relations that were fully accepted across many African cultures. Missionaries condemned those practices that did not fit in with their religious views. Guardian online 1.10.2005

'Challenging homophobia is part of our school ethos – we won't tolerate discrimination against anybody.'
primary schoolteacher

Events

2006 is the International Year of Deserts and Desertification

Desertification is a global sustainable development challenge. It's a major threat to humanity, compounded by both climate change and loss of biological diversity. The year also seeks to celebrate the unique ecosystem and cultural diversity of deserts worldwide. With the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the international community has a key tool to deliver the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that must be met by 2015. The MDGs are the most comprehensive and ambitious strategy ever put forward to combat global poverty. www.unccd.int/publicinfo/iyddlogo/menu.php

2006 is also....

- Year 2 of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014))
- Year 4 of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012)
- Year 6 of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010)
- Year 10 of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006)

January

1: One Day in Peace Initiated in 2000 to mark the start of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World and supported by the United Nations. www.oneday.net

19: Martin Luther King Day The third Monday in January celebrates the life and legacy of the American civil rights leader who championed justice and equality throughout society. www.thekingcenter.org/holiday

27: Holocaust Memorial Day Raises awareness and understanding of the Holocaust and its contemporary relevance to all of society. This year the theme is 'Survivors and Liberation'. www.hmd.org.uk/

28-4 Feb: National Storytelling Week Promotes the oldest art form in the world. It is the traditional medium of communication from generation to generation. www.sfs.org.uk/

February

1-28: LGBT History Month An opportunity for us all to learn more about the histories of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Britain and Northern Ireland. www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk/schools/main.htm

4: UNICEF Day for Change A national non-uniform day, and an opportunity for pupils to learn about other children overseas, whilst raising funds. This year the Day for Change focuses on Health and Immunisation in Niger and Madagascar. www.unicef.org.uk/fundraising/schools.asp

21: International Mother Language Day Proclaimed by UNESCO in November 1999, and observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. www.un.org/Depts/dhl/language/index.html

March

1-31: Women's History Month; 6-19: Fair Trade Fortnight; 8: International Women's Day

Resources

Online

- Implement the government guidance to help schools challenge homophobia. **Stand Up For Us** (DfES/Department of Health 2004) is for those who work in early years settings, primary, secondary and special schools, off-site units and Pupil Referral Units. www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/standupforus
- Take action with **Education for All**, a coalition of organisations, who work to ensure that our schools deal appropriately with homophobia and homophobic bullying. www.stonewall.org.uk/education_for_all/
- Look at the legislation. In 1988 Section 28 was intended to restrict debate on homosexuality, particularly in schools. It was repealed in 2003. For information on current legislation see: www.schools-out.org.uk/policy/tacklinghomophobia.htm

For students

Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence HarperCollins 1995 ISBN 0064405877

The Journey Out: a guide for and about lesbian, gay and bisexual teens Viking 1996 ISBN 0670858455

From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun Scholastic ISBN 0590458817

How It Feels to Have a Gay or Lesbian Parent: a book by kids for kids of all ages Harrington Park Press ISBN 1560234202

For teachers

Human Rights for All? a global view of lesbian and gay oppression and liberation RISC 1992 ISBN 1874709009

Don't Pick on Me: how to handle bullying Piccadilly Press 2005 ISBN 1853408026

RISC has a very wide selection of teaching resources for all ages and curriculum areas as well as a selection of artefacts for loan, please email us your name and address for further information.