



LGBT+ EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

A collaborative investigation into teachers' perceptions of why, how and when LGBT+ content could be taught in primary schools.



Glossary

LGBT+ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, plus other associated categories such as queer, questioning, intersex and asexual.

RSHE Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education

PSHE Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education

Introduction

Awareness and acceptance of the LGBT+ community has greatly increased over the past few years, and consequently, the usage of the term LGBT+ has also increased. Similarly to the LGBT+ community growing and developing, the primary National Curriculum in England has also grown and developed since it was introduced in 1989 (Craig and Wyse, 2018, p.258; Stulberg, 2018, p.12). Despite these changes, it is still not compulsory for LGBT+ content to be taught in primary schools. Because of this, there is inconsistency in what is being taught regarding LGBT+ content, with different schools having varying opinions on what is sensitive and age appropriate, and what is not, causing the matter of an LGBT+ inclusive curriculum to be a controversial topic (DfE, 2019, p.15; Glazzard and Stones, 2020, p.2).

After exploring the research related to LGBT+ education in primary schools, three areas were identified where there was a gap in research, which shaped the aims of the research project: What are teachers' perspectives of the appropriate age for children to be taught LGBT+ content?; Are teachers confident in teaching LGBT+ content to their class?; If LGBT+ content is taught in a primary school, what are the teachers' perspectives on the most effective strategies used?

Method

To explore why, how and when LGBT+ content could be taught in primary schools, a mixed method research approach was used, combining quantitative research and qualitative research, so that numerical data and spoken and written responses could be collected. After the current literature was studied, a pilot study was conducted to enable changes to be made. Following this, sixty-two questionnaires were completed by primary school teachers in England, and then three follow up interviews were conducted to explore topics further. Through triangulating the quantitative and qualitative data with the literature review, the findings were more valid and reliable, and a wide range of data and perspectives were collected. Research was carried out in an ethical and reliable way, following guidance from BERA (2018) and the University of Northampton (2018).

What are teachers' perspectives of the appropriate age for children to be taught LGBT+ content?

Current literature highlighted that guidance is not clear on when LGBT+ content should be taught to primary-aged school children, therefore opinions and practice differ greatly between schools (DfE, 2019, p.15; Jones, 2021). Firstly, the questionnaire identified that 66% of schools currently teach LGBT+ content, 16% do not teach LGBT+ content, and the remaining 18% of teachers were unsure of whether LGBT+ content was taught in their school. When asked their perspective of when LGBT+ content should first be taught, and the data collected found that almost three-quarters of teachers believe that LGBT+ content should first be taught from Reception or Year 1. Interview candidates expressed that it was important for LGBT+ content to be taught at some point during primary school, with interviewee A voicing the term "as early as possible", as there are pupils who either identify as LGBT+ themselves, or who have parents or family members who are LGBT+. Even if pupils do not have connections themselves to the LGBT+ community, interviewee B expressed that LGBT+ people do exist in the world, therefore, it is important that children understand the diverse people in society.



Next Steps

Overall, findings of the study demonstrated that although guidance is not clear, the mention of LGBT+ content within the RSHE curriculum is causing schools to consider how to become more LGBT+ inclusive, but that teachers require greater support in doing this effectively. The next steps of this project will involve investigating the specific resources, schemes and training that are available for staff to help increase their subject knowledge and confidence. This will lead to developing guidance that can be used to inform ITT students and ITT school-based mentors to support the delivery of LGBT+ content in partnership primary schools.

Are teachers confident in teaching LGBT+ content to their class?



Within the literature review, it was discovered that there are various barriers to teaching LGBT+ content in primary schools, and these can have an impact on teachers' confidence in delivering LGBT+ education (Barnes and Carlile, 2018, p.33; Jones, 2021). The questionnaire findings found that only 29% of participants were not confident teaching LGBT+ content to their class, however, 45% of participants provided comments on factors that cause them to feel a lack of confidence in teaching LGBT+ content, indicating that almost half of participants still feel the need to increase their confidence. The most common reasons for this lack of confidence were fearing opposition from parents and carers, being unsure what is age-appropriate, not having adequate subject knowledge, especially of the correct terminology, and having a lack of training and resources. Lack of training continued to be a common theme within interviews, as participants commented that they required more support in delivering LGBT+ content and that training was needed to ensure that all staff knew what to teach and how to teach it.

What are teachers' perspectives on the most effective strategies used to teach LGBT+ content?

Schools currently do not have clear guidance on how to deliver the RSHE curriculum, therefore there is an uncertainty within schools on what an LGBT+ inclusive education should look like and there is great variety in the practice currently taking place (DfE, 2019, p.8; Glazzard and Stones, 2020, p.2). Out of the fifty-eight questionnaires analysed, the schools of thirty-seven participants currently teach LGBT+ content. When asked about their perspectives on the most effective strategies to use to deliver LGBT+ content, the two most popular strategies were teaching within PSHE or RSHE and having class discussions or circle time. This was because a PSHE scheme ensures that teaching is age appropriate, and it is planned and resourced for the teacher using correct subject content and terminology, and it creates a safe place for discussion to take place. Another strategy that teachers felt was effective was the use of literature with LGBT+ characters and themes as they are engaging and memorable for children, they normalise LGBT+ topics, and they provide a link to learning. Participants expressed that embedding LGBT+ content across the curriculum, such as through using LGBT+ role models in all subjects, encourages inclusivity and acceptance to become part of the school ethos and culture, and this usualises LGBT+ matters and causes it to be part of natural school life.



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