

“Don’t Say Gay” Policies in Schools: A Choose Your Own Equitable Adventure

The teacher hands each student a coloring page with an outline of parents, one dad and one mom.

The teacher says, “Okay, Kindergarten class, welcome to Art! Our first project is for you to finish our family portrait coloring page! Color in your mom and dad and then add yourself and any other family members! We’ll hang these up in the hallway for the whole school to see your beautiful families.”

Student, Mya, says, “What if I don’t have a mom? I have two dads.”

Teacher Response One

“Class, on second thought, I have a better idea: we are all going to draw a picture of someone special to us-- someone special in our family.”

1

Teacher Response 2:

“Let me give you a blank piece of paper so you can draw your own family.”

Teacher walks away wondering how to avoid hanging up Mya’s family portrait so she doesn’t experience backlash.

2

Teacher Response 3:

“Thank you, Mya, for reminding me that families look lots of different ways!”

This teacher has anticipated the diverse possibilities of families and provides a variety of outlines for students to sketch their family, highlighting various marginalized groups as her examples.

3

Teacher Response One:

“Class, on second thought, I have a better idea: we are all going to draw a picture of someone special to us-- someone special in our family.”

1

Intent

- Allow parents to determine when/how to introduce LGBTQIA+ topics to their children.
- Adhere to the curriculum and pacing mandated by the school/district, which does not include any mention of sexual orientation or gender identity in first-grade materials (Jones & Franklin, 2022).

Impact:

- Violate Title IX students’ rights to express their families’ composition and structure.
- Impede the mental and physical health of students who are a part of the LGTBQIA+ community (Jones & Franklin, 2022).
- Affect students’ academic performance by alienating students’ senses of belonging (Parker, 2021).

Critical Reflection toward Inclusive Curriculum:

How does Title IX help schools be more inclusive regarding academic curricula?

Teacher Response 2:

“Let me give you a blank piece of paper so you can draw your own family.”

Teacher walks away wondering how to avoid hanging up Mya’s family portrait so she doesn’t experience backlash.

2

Intent

- Make everyone feel equal or typical.
- Provide options for students who need it while still adhering to state law.

Impact:

- Avoid developing strategies for teachers to handle assumptions of heterosexuality (Guanci & Blackburn, 2022).
- Impact school/social/family relationships by assimilating to what's typical (Parker, 2021).
- Stigmatize LGBTQIA+ students by limiting or negating positive portraits of homosexuality.

Critical Reflection toward Inclusive Curriculum:
How can educators protect LGBTQIA+ youth from victimization?

Teacher Response 3:

“Thank you, Mya, for reminding me that families look lots of different ways!”

This teacher has anticipated the diverse possibilities of families and provides a variety of outlines for students to sketch their family, highlighting various marginalized groups as her examples.

3

Toward Creating an Inclusive Curriculum for ALL Students

- Actively create a safe and affirming space for students to present their LGBTQIA+ families and their perspectives.
- Protect students who may be harassed or bullied for their sexual orientation or gender identity by critically examining current school policies (Guanci & Blackburn, 2022).
- Provide equal educational opportunities for extra curriculars like GSAs.

Intent

- Recognize and acknowledge the family differences among students.
- Model the various representations of families to create an inclusive classroom.

Impact:

- Provide a safe space for students of all identities and families to share out and feel a part of the community.
- Center the lived experiences of students so they can be their full authentic selves.

- Create awareness of potentially harmful language used to bully and harass LGBTQIA+ students.
- Intervene when LGBTQIA+ students are being bullied or harassed (Chrisman & Blackburn, 2021).
- Report incidents of discrimination and harassment (GLSEN, 2021).
- Use inclusive language and avoid categorizing students by gender (Broughton et al., 2021).
- Provide resources on LGBTQIA+ curricula and support professional development for teachers and administrators (GLSEN, 2018).

Meet the Authors

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