

**THE ISSUE OF
HOMOSEXUALITY IN
THE EDUCATIONAL
ENVIRONMENT**

PREPARED ON BEHALF OF LESBIAN AND GAY YOUTH OF TORONTO FOR THE
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INTRODUCTION:

We are here as representatives of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth who are enrolled in, or have gone through the education system in Ontario. We would like to present an idea of what the current education system requires in order for it to become as positive an environment for the "forgotten 10 percent", as it presently is for the majority of students. After in-depth discussions with our membership, we have found that there are two main focuses that require immediate attention; The Physical Environment, and The Curriculum. Within both of these areas, there are two specific goals lacking; the ability to ensure student's safety, and the celebration of people's diverse sexuality.

PART ONE: THE CURRICULUM

by Mark Noel Cosgrove

In order to celebrate the diversity of all communities within the school system, we must address the issue of curriculum. All subjects need to include a balance of information which promotes historical accuracy, even where that history includes mention of homosexuality.

This is an issue of intellectual honesty which educators cannot fail to recognize. For example, to study Oscar Wilde without mention of his trial or imprisonment is a disservice to all students. If the sexual orientation of the artist has influenced their work, then that should be discussed so as to provide a context to further understand their work.

Within the teaching of history itself, mention is rarely made of major events in gay history eg: Stonewall (1969, New York City), which signified the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement. Historical persecution of homosexuals is another facet of human history which is largely ignored. We are not taught the significance of the pink triangle: a

symbol used to brand gay men in the same way that the Star of David was used to mark Jews in Nazi Germany.

There is also the larger issue of making our educational system a place of intellectual freedom, in which students are given the opportunity to discover information relating to both homosexuals or homosexuality. This kind of environment benefits straight and gay students in that provisions are made for greater understanding and tolerance.

The aforementioned historical honesty needs to be encouraged in the study of all subjects where the personal background of the individual is relevant. This would allow all students to recognize the contributions made to their society by homosexuals such as Michelangelo, Tchiacovsky, Eleanor Roosevelt, Joe Orton, E.M. Forester, etc... . This will help to instill hope and self respect in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual youth. Also, it will give them hope towards developing into contributing members of society.

PART TWO: THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

by Tim Guimond

We celebrate the existence of people in many different ways within our school system. The images, resources, statements and stories which surround us serve to celebrate the potential of our lives. When we are lesbian, gay, or bisexual our lives are not celebrated in schools, our images are not shown, our stories are not told, and we do not learn of our potential.

The school system must ensure both the physical and the mental health of their students.

We hope for the day when, as lesbian, gay, or bisexual youth, our physical safety is ensured. As a friend in Oshawa looks forward to the day where he does not need to leave school five minutes early to avoid being beaten up. He is thankful that the bus service has been cancelled, as he no longer is spat upon as the bus passes him on his bike.

We look forward to the day where all educators ensure our physical and mental safety by intervening in homophobic assaults, whether they be verbal assaults, physical assaults or innuendo which devalues our existence, and use this opportunity to address the issues of homophobia.

We look forward to the day when we are taught relevant safe sex education that will enable us to protect ourselves. A young gay man in Chatham looks forward to the day when his teacher does not say that there are no gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the school and that's why they don't need to teach about safe sex for lesbians, gays, and bisexuals. He looks forward to the day when the health clinic when coming to the teach about AIDS does not say that they do not speak about lesbians, gays, or bisexuals because there is only one out of every one or two hundred people and it's really not worth the bother.

We look forward to the day when guidance counsellors, and all educators are sensitized to the reality and challenges that face lesbian, gay, and bisexual students.

Our images should be celebrated in text books, in pamphlets, in posters, our stories shared and our existence acknowledged and included in the schools.

We look forward to the day when we gain access to historical works, novels about and by lesbians, gays, and bisexuals, and art that celebrates our sexuality in our classrooms and libraries.

We look forward to the day when teachers are open to discussing issues of sexuality. We look forward to the day when we can attend the school prom with our partner and not be told that the couple rate isn't for "friends", thereby dismissing the loving nature of our relationships, and devaluing them.

We look forward to the day when we gain access to mentors and information from the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community.

SUMMATION: Our Vision
by James William Anok

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The vision of an educational system that is organized and strong enough to take a proactive stance on the issue of homosexuality, is a vision that all gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth look forward to. By dealing with issues such as homosexuality within the context of education, the intolerance and pain that homophobia causes can be dealt with as well.

The idea of an education system in which all of its employees are sensitized to the problem of intolerance based upon sexual orientation appeals to all youth who have experienced the anguish of feeling persecuted, as well as appealing to the educators who have experienced feelings of helplessness when confronted with situations in which homosexuality and homophobia are at issue. Only by providing the training and resources necessary for our educators to combat homophobia, can we then begin to fully educate the youth of today.

The ideal of an educational system that has been designed to promote the pursuit of knowledge in an environment which protects its charges against the negative influences of homophobia, is a system which will be able to truly say that it has contributed to the intellectual, emotional, and physical well being of its students. Ensuring safety by adopting a zero-tolerance stance on homophobia will be a contributing factor to keeping lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth where they belong ... in the educational system.

In general, the inclusion of the topic of homosexuality into the general educational environment will create a system which is balanced, and which will provide its students with all the relevant knowledge necessary to develop a well informed approach to the complexity of societal interaction.

Ignorance does equal fear, and this fear is expressed by both the youth on the receiving end of homophobia, due to ignorance, and by the youth who channel their fears, caused by ignorance, into homophobic

attitudes and actions. Tolerance and understanding, through the eradication of fear due to ignorance, is a necessary part of our commitment to youth as a whole. Achieving this ideal can only come about through the creation of a balanced educational system in which all relevant aspects of the human experience are presented, and presented within an environment which is free of the negative consequences perpetuated by ignorance.

We would like to leave you with the following questions, so that you may understand what gay, lesbian, and bisexual students experience on a daily basis:

WHAT IF: 99.9% of university curriculum reflected a gay or lesbian perspective?

WHAT IF: Everyday you were bombarded with media images that promoted a homosexual lifestyle?

WHAT IF: A lesbian or gay classmate congratulated you on your ability to hide your heterosexuality, saying that you don't look like one?

WHAT IF: You left a bar and were bashed by a group of drunk gays and lesbians, who laughed at you as you lay on the ground bleeding in agony?

Homophobia kills, think about it!