

The following excerpt is from a previously published book chapter, and is reprinted with permission from the publisher: Detselig Enterprises/Temeron Books. The edited book is an excellent Canadian resource for school administrators and the complete reference is:

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### **Being a Caring School Administrator: Getting Started on Sexual-Minority Inclusion**

Dr. André P. Grace

McCalla Professor & Director, Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services

Department of Educational Policy Studies

University of Alberta

[andre.grace@ualberta.ca](mailto:andre.grace@ualberta.ca)

When sexual-minority students and teachers tell me that they perceive school administrators as a barrier to their freedom, comfort, and inclusion in school settings, my first instinct is not to get angry at principals as authority figures and mediators of life in schools. After all, I have been a school administrator. I know the demands of the job. I know that every day is a political adventure and an exercise in negotiating power and interests. Moreover, I know that addressing sexual-minority issues means working in the problematical intersection of the moral and the political. Many school administrators are uninformed and unprepared when it comes to engaging in this difficult work.

Becoming informed is the first step in working successfully toward sexual-minority inclusion. Building LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans-identified] knowledge takes many school administrators into new territory with respect to role-related learning. So when sexual-minority students and teachers tell me that school administrators leave them out, my first inclination is to ask two questions: What do school administrators need to know in order to become LGBT-inclusive? How might school administrators be supported in this educational and cultural work? In answering these questions, I have developed guidelines to help school administrators get started.

- Work everyday to see, speak to, and interact with every student and teacher across sexual-minority differences.
- Set a caring tone and use an ethic of respect to accommodate sexual-minority differences in your school.
- Use language that is inclusive and sensitive around issues of sexual-minority differences.
- Educate yourself about the realities of sex, sexual, and gender differences, and learn about heterosexism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and different constructions of family.
- Educate yourself about the history of Canadian and provincial/territorial laws and legislation that have abetted sexual minorities in efforts to achieve the rights and privileges of citizenship. See, for example, Lahey (1999) and MacDougall (2000).

- Learn about the social and cultural realities of living as a member of a sexual minority in Canada. See, for example, Janoff (2005). As well, check Egale Canada (2006). Egale Canada was founded in 1986 to advocate for Canadian LGBT citizens. This national organization engages in political action to achieve more equitable laws for LGBT people; intervenes in legal cases that have an impact on LGBT human rights and equality; and increases public education and awareness by providing information to individuals, groups, and the media. The Egale acronym stands for equality for gays and lesbians everywhere.
- Assist your teachers to engage in similar education and learning, and provide them with opportunities for professional development so they can build an LGBT knowledge base and learn about age appropriate ways to address LGBT issues and concerns. For example, see workshops developed by Wells (2003).
- Build a resource base in your school that will provide you with material to help you mediate conflict with those within and outside the school who resist LGBT inclusion. The resource base will also be useful to teachers who want to engage in LGBT-inclusive pedagogical and co-curricular practices. The following resources provide helpful starting points: *Seeing the Rainbow: Teachers Talk about Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Two-Spirited Realities* (CTF & EFTO, 2002); *Lessons Learned: A Collection of Stories and Articles about Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues* (CTF, 2005); Schrader and Wells's (2005) annotated essay of LGBT resources for use in schools; and, the Alberta Teachers' Association's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Website, which was developed by Wells (2004). This website is an encompassing resource for educators. It provides suggestions, guidelines, and an extensive resource base to help teachers address LGBT issues and concerns in their schools, classrooms, and community environments.
- Check with your teacher association and school district to see what LGBT-inclusive educational policies have been developed to assist and support you and your teachers in educational and cultural work to create a school that respects and accommodates sexual minorities. If such policies are not in place, then advocate and work to have LGBT-inclusive policies developed and implemented. Remember, policy enables protection.
- If you are an administrator in a Catholic school, then check with your diocese to see if they have pastoral guidelines for working with LGBT youth. For example, in November 2004, the education commission of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops released *Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation* (OCCB, 2004). This document was developed to help school chaplains, guidance counselors, principals, and teachers address the "pastoral challenge" of counseling and caring for lesbian and gay students (Swan, 2004, p. 4).
- If you are an administrator in a Catholic school district that has a policy recommending reparative therapy as a possible treatment for unhappy sexual-minority youth, then educate yourself about the dangers of

reparative therapy as stated by the Canadian Medical Association and an array of mainstream national and international mental-health associations (Grace, 2005; Grace, in press). As well, read critiques of *Courage*, a Catholic apostolate that promotes sexual-reorientation therapy in religious and psychotherapeutic forms (Grace, 2005).

- Intervene in your school by supporting students who want to initiate a Diversity Club or Gay-Straight Alliance Club. Help them find a teacher-facilitator and provide them with advice around safety and security issues. To develop guidelines see, for example, Wells (2006).
- Intervene to enable sexual-minority teachers to have their needs met in relation to their welfare and work, and their personal safety and professional security. Learn about teachers' association initiatives and sections of collective agreements that provide them with individual protections in keeping with the *Charter*. As well, explore websites such as the one developed by the Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia (GALE-BC) (2006). GALE-BC was formed in 1990 as a community-based educational advocacy and resource group. As part of its mandate, GALE-BC emphasizes the need to work towards the full inclusion of LGBT students, parents, teachers, and administrators in the BC educational system. GALE-BC is the largest community-based LGBT educational organization in Canada. It actively supports Gay-Straight Alliances in BC Schools.

This list is certainly not exhaustive, but it is a substantive starting point for building LGBT knowledge and resources that I have found useful in my work with school administrators as well as pre-service and practicing teachers. The upshot in educating yourself about sexual-minority differences is this: Knowing about LGBT differences makes a difference in the work to create truly safe, caring, and inclusive schools.

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