LGBTQA Inclusiveness in the Language Classroom: Challenging Heteronormative Assumptions While Teaching and Learning a Foreign Language

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Project Overview

After concluding that many foreign language textbooks currently available on the marketplace tend to overlook gender and sexuality and are designed from a heteronormative perspective, I proposed a workshop to share possible pedagogical strategies and teaching materials to raise awareness of and respect for diverse gender and sexual orientations. The language classroom should be a welcoming and inclusive environment where we not only accommodate LGBTQA students, but also heterosexual ones who perhaps strive hard to avoid heterosexist misconceptions in society. The aim of this project is to identify and reduce homophobic biases in order to create an inclusive classroom climate that works towards the dissolution of entrenched heteronormativity.

Participants

FACULTY
45 people participated in the 1st workshop and 17 people participated in the 2nd workshop, including administrators, coordinators, lecturers, and GSIs in Romance Languages and Literatures

STUDENTS
55 SPAN 103 students completed an anonymous questionnaire about LGBTQA representation in the language classroom

FACULTY in Romance Languages and Literatures:

“After the first workshop, I modified all the materials of the Catalan course I teach every semester”

“I taught Spanish this summer as part of a Study Abroad program in Santiago, and I thought that it was a very good opportunity to use the new adapted student information form”

“I usually teach elementary classes, and I have become more aware to include more diverse family structures”

“We are implementing more cultural aspects in SPAN 231, and one of the instructors has submitted a proposal to include a Miniconferencia about LGBTQA marriage in Argentina and LGBTQA rights in Costa Rica”

“Last spring semester 2016, I had a student who came to my office hours to tell me that they did not feel comfortable with the heteronormative given pronouns. Thanks to the workshop, I was able to explain to them about the limitations of neutral pronouns in Romance languages”

STUDENTS in Spanish 103:

In the questionnaires, students expressed their desire to:

“…use readings that include LGBTQA [voices and experiences]”

“…talk about LGBTQA people in Spanish-speaking countries”

“…analyze the struggles LGBTQA people face there and compare it to the struggles of American LGBTQA people”

Artifact

- LGBTQA Inclusive Teaching DEMONSTRATION
- LGBTQA Inclusive STATEMENT for all syllabus in Romance Languages and Literatures
- Adapted STUDENT INFORMATION FORM to include LGBTQA students
- TOP 10 TIPS to challenge heteronormativity in the language classroom
- PowerPoint PRESENTATION with a detailed analysis of heteronormative assumptions in foreign language textbooks in Romance Languages and Literatures
- Anonymous STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE about LGBTQA representation in the language classroom

Resources

- SPECTRUM CENTER at U-M

Next Steps

- Initiate conversations with PUBLISHING COMPANIES to discuss the design of foreign language textbooks
- Organize a mandatory workshop about LGBTQA inclusive techniques for NEW HIRED FACULTY MEMBERS during the first orientation week in RLL
- Implement an annual seminar in ROMLANG 528 (Teaching Romance Languages) for GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS who teach in RLL for the first time
- Create a CANVAS folder to share LGBTQA inclusive materials across languages (Catalan, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish)
- Teach an intermediate SPAN232 TOPICS COURSE: “LGBTQA in the Hispanic Worlds: Artistic and Cultural Manifestations”