Stories of LGBT+ students:

There is strength in diversity

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Content

Introduction

The number of children and adolescents openly claiming an LGBT+ identity has increased rapidly in recent years. Such voices are coming from schools, but also from the general public, judging by the increased presence of LGBT+ issues in the media and in everyday conversations. But this is also confirmed by the experience of professionals and experts in the fields of psychology and sexology. Various surveys asking young people about how they identify themselves also suggest that the category 'other' is chosen more than before alongside 'girl' and 'boy'. While there is no radical increase in the proportion of young people addressing sexual orientation and gender identity, it is evident that these topics occupy the younger generation more than in the past.

In schools, the fact that this topic is individually important to a large proportion of young people cannot be ignored. Children and adolescents' school performance is inevitably affected when they go through a period of searching and clarifying their identity and orientation, as well as when they subsequently make an open self-identification as LGBT+. It has the same effect on other classmates.

The fact that young people are embracing non-heterosexuality and multiple gender identities offends and even dismay in some parts of society. What is happening? Don't they have anything more sensible to deal with? Are they fragile and need to be special in everything? What's next for them? How could society survive if such anomalies are encouraged? We can hear similar questions concerning this topic. They may seem logical and legitimate, but they are rather a dead end. What is dangerous about such questions?

- The questions assume that the same reasons and circumstances exist for all young people claiming an LGBT+ identity. In other words, they are very similar. However, people with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations are very diverse. They each have their own specific backgrounds, experiences, and needs. Each life story is unique. And if we want to be supportive of young people, it is important to try to see their individual stories.
- Behind the issues, one can sense the mistrust and discounting of the experiences of young people who fall outside of the normal expectations of women and men. Often their feelings are downplayed - they are not taken seriously by those around them, but only as a phase or even a pose. However, this is very hurtful to young people and can lead them to avoid contact with people who downplay their feelings.
- Questions are often asked about how the young generation is different from previous generations. Less often, they ask about what has changed in society and in the living conditions that surround the young generation. However, over the past 30 years, the emphasis on

individuality has gradually strengthened. This has naturally translated into changes in family education (it is more democratic and partnership-based) and in school education (it is more focused on developing the potential of each pupil). Knowing one's personality, being aware of one's needs, and feeling free is considered desirable. It should come as no surprise, then, when gender identity and sexual orientation are also affected. In today's society, young people cannot avoid searching for their identity. They are bombarded with questions of "who am I?". At the same time, our society is freer, so (thankfully) more people can overcome their fears of claiming their minority orientation and identity.

Most teachers are looking for ways to address the issue and support their learners. However, some feel insecure and perhaps even doubtful. This publication aims to offer them support. However, it is not a cookbook and does not give recipes on exactly how to proceed pedagogically. LGBT+ learners are a broad, internally diverse group. Through eight real-life stories, this publication shows the different difficulties young LGBT+ people face at school, in their families, and in their peer relationships, and what helps them to overcome them. The stories aim to give educators insight into issues of sexual orientation and gender identity that most are not personally familiar with while increasing sensitivity to what is unique in each life story.

We hope you will find this publication useful.

Sex, sexuality and gender

Sex, gender and sexuality have certain areas of contact, but they are nevertheless largely independent and can be combined in various ways. Some specific examples of the combination of sex, gender and sexuality are given below:

- Martha woman: physical sex female (has XX chromosomal makeup and female sex organs, predominance of female sex hormones), gender identity female (experiences self as female), bisexual (attraction to both men and women)
- non-binary Leo: male physical sex (has XY chromosomal make-up and male genitalia, predominance of male sex hormones), non-binary gender identity (does not experience self as either male or female), androsexual (feels attraction to men)
- Male Sam: intersex (has XX chromosomal makeup but partially male sex organs), male gender identity (experiences self as male), asexual, heteroromantic (does not feel sexual attraction but falls romantically in love with women)
- trans woman Viki: physical gender male (has XY chromosomal makeup and male genitals, now taking female hormones), gender identity female (experiences self as female), heterosexual (feels sexual attraction to men)

Let´s have a closer look at divers gender identities. Unlike sex, which is a biological characteristic, gender and gender identity reflect a person's internal experience and perception of their own maleness or femaleness. Despite the common belief that biological sex determines gender identity, scientific evidence shows that these are interrelated but distinct characteristics. There are many variations of minority gender identities. While people with diverse gender identities may appear similar to outsiders, their experiences can vary greatly. Gender diverse students include the following four main groups:

- Transgender People: Transgender individuals have a gender identity that does not match their biological sex. Some transgender people wish to alter their bodies to fully or partially align with their gender identity and seek acceptance in their new gender by society and authorities. Others may not want or need to undergo physical changes, or they may fear the process. For most transgender people, the crucial aspect is living authentically in a social role that aligns with their identity, which may involve changing their dress, name, and pronouns.
- Non-Binary and Gender Fluid Persons: Non-binary individuals experience their gender outside the traditional male and female categories. They may feel somewhere in between, outside these genders, or their experience of gender may be fluid and shifting. Like transgender people, non-binary individuals may adopt a new name and pronouns and change their outward

appearance. However, they generally have less desire to change their bodies, though this too varies individually.

- ❖ Agender Persons: Agender people do not associate their identity with any particular gender. They experience themselves purely as human beings, without any specific attachment to masculinity or femininity. Their dominant sense of self is not tied to gender categories at all.
- ❖ Gender Non-Conforming Persons: These individuals reject strict gender roles and are uncomfortable expressing themselves solely in ways traditionally expected of their biological sex. For example, they may find it unacceptable that makeup and nail polish are considered exclusively feminine. They resist being confined by gender norms in their expressions. However, their gender identity often aligns with their biological sex—for instance, a woman who identifies as a woman but whose appearance and expressions do not conform to traditional female roles.

Understanding these diverse identities is crucial for creating an inclusive environment that respects each individual's unique experience.

LGBT+ Coming out

People begin to address gender and sexual needs in adolescence. They feel certain desires within themselves that they think about and try to realize. Their surroundings indicate what is acceptable and what is not. And adolescents use these explicit and implicit messages to shape their gender and sexual identity.

The process of becoming aware of one's LGBT+ sexual identity and eventually communicating it to others is called coming out. It usually has several stages - from initial questioning of one's feelings, to internal awareness of one's difference, to external communication to others. Nowadays, society is much more open and has a lot of information that makes people with a minority sexual orientation and gender identity less likely to be rejected. Young people can now start to discover their LGBT+ identity while they are growing up.

Although equal treatment is guaranteed by the Constitution in the Czech Republic and opinion polls show a relatively high level of tolerance towards LGBT+ people, this does not mean that growing up is always easy for these people. Tolerance is far from meaning respect. Research shows that LGBT+ people face rejection and ridicule. For example, research by the ombudsman in 2019 showed that 53% of LGBT+ people felt they had to hide their identity at school. Research by Being LGBTQ+ in the Czech Republic (2023) showed that 36% of LGBT+ people had experienced taunts, insults or threats from fellow students during their schooling, with gay and trans and non-binary people experiencing the most

negative expressions. A shocking finding is that 20% of trans men have also experienced such treatment from their teachers. This can have a negative impact on their engagement in school and their academic performance. Research by the European Agency for Human Rights in 2019 showed that in the Czech Republic, people were most likely (43% of respondents) to become aware of their sexual orientation between the ages of 10 and 14.

A group of adolescents under the age of 19 have also experienced hateful behavior outside of school. They are more likely than older groups to have experienced physical or sexual violence, with 20% having this experience. The vast majority (90%) have experienced hateful content online against themselves or other LGBT+ people. Young people may often not find support and understanding at home. For fear of harassment, assault, and threats, 47% of 12-15 year olds hide their identity at home, compared to 43% of 16-18 year olds.

It is therefore important that schools are safe places for all learners - including LGBT+ pupils. For a school to be a place where they have the space to express themselves openly and also the opportunity to seek advice or support. Most teachers agree with this but sometimes encounter a lack of awareness and a lack of clarity across the school. The first, necessary step is to have enough information and communication about the topic.

LGBT+ as a Fashion?

In primary and secondary schools, teachers increasingly encounter students addressing their sexual orientation and gender identity, or directly identifying with minority identities and orientations. A survey conducted by the Faculty of Education at Charles University in 2020 and 2021 as part of the OUT research found that 75% of nearly 600 teachers reported having LGBT+ students in their classrooms. These students are either openly identifying as LGBT+ or showing behaviors that lead teachers to believe they might be. This requires teachers to understand and respond to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to both individual students and the class as a whole.

Unfortunately, the same research revealed that 80% of participating teachers believe that identifying with the LGBT+ community is considered fashionable in schools. When something is seen as fashionable, it implies that the motives are superficial, insincere, and adopted from external influences rather than being genuine. This attitude can be very harmful as it undermines trust between teachers and students. Young people crave respect from adults, and dismissing their feelings as merely a trend can lead to them withdrawing from communication with adults.

This withdrawal means they lose the opportunity for support and protection during a challenging period of self-discovery. It also means they miss out on important conversations with adults that could

help them understand their feelings about sexuality and gender better. If a student is engaged with the topic of gender and sexual diversity, it indicates that this is personally important to them, and they need a respectful adult approach to navigate how it affects them. Labeling their feelings as a fashion trend is disrespectful and dismissive.

Consider the following situation: Mark tells his teacher, "I think I have become very interested in space physics. I think I'm going to become an astronomer." The teacher's response could vary:

- Encouraging: The teacher replies enthusiastically, "I'm glad to hear that! I think you're the perfect type of person for that kind of job. Becoming an astronomer is challenging, but I will encourage you all the way."
- Supportive and Reflective: The teacher responds with surprise, "That's news to me, but I think it's great that you're thinking about your future career and have found something that interests you. It may change, but I'd be happy to discuss what being an astronomer means and see if it really fits you."
- Dismissive: The teacher replies mockingly, "Oh please, it's just a phase. You read something on social media again. I never noticed you gravitating towards physics. I don't think it's the field for you."

The first response represents an ideal scenario where the teacher fully supports the student's interest. In reality, perspectives might not always align, making the second response—supportive and open to discussion—optimal. This approach respects the student's current feelings and encourages further exploration.

This scenario parallels the exploration of sexual orientation and gender identity. Mocking or dismissive reactions destroy trust and hinder developmental conversations. They create barriers and reinforce defiance, preventing young people from freely exploring and discussing their feelings. Conversely, a respectful approach maintains the young person's self-esteem and allows for open reflection, exploration, and dialogue.

Stories

In this part of the publication, you will find five stories whose main characters are young people with minority sexual orientations and diverse gender identities. The stories are based on reality but have always been adapted in such a way that it is not possible to recognize a particular person. The similarity of names and circumstances is therefore rather coincidental.

The stories differ in how the young people experience their identity and orientation. Some are already fully aware of it and communicate it to their surroundings. They encounter support in the family and at school, but also rejection and humiliation. Some stories depict young people at a stage of searching, when they are unsure of their identity and orientation, but still realize that there is something different about their feelings compared to others. This period of searching can be empowering and lead to a young person coming to an understanding of their identity. But if the search is coupled with judgment, belittling, and coercion, the result can be exactly the opposite - the young person shuts down exploration of their feelings and merely adopts the self-image offered by those around them.

The stories also differ in how straightforward a life path they show. Some seem clear, others have many twists and turns and obfuscations. Through the stories it will be evident how diverse a group of LGBT+ young people are, and how different their needs and experiences can be. Schools are often unaware of this diversity. They view non-heterosexual or trans learners as homogenous groups. And even if such a view is driven by a desire for support, it can lead to a misunderstanding of what is the essential source of obstacles and strength in a particular person's life.

We hope that the stories will help us learn to think of each person as a unique being in a specific life context, not as a prototype of a gay, lesbian, or trans person.

Story 1: Lukáš's classmates are making his life a living hell

Lukáš was not looking forward to the start of the school year. The last one had been hard on him and he didn't expect this one to be any different. He's studying to be an agricultural machinery mechanic and is just about to go into the second year. His class has nineteen boys in it, with the whole school having five hundred. He actually quite enjoys the specialisation he's chosen. The work in the workshop is great, and the foreman and the adult technicians are also chill. They tease him from time to time but it doesn't come off as mean-spirited. Plus, they always show appreciation to people who are interested in their work and do it well. And Lukáš genuinely cares – he takes every opportunity to ask how things work and how to do them better. However, these practical classes only happen only once every two weeks and, in the meantime, they study theory at school.

Being there is miserable for him and he doesn't feel comfortable in his class. He doesn't have any friends, he doesn't have much in common with most of his classmates and they've even been openly hostile towards him. These aggressions started last spring after one of Lukáš's classmates saw him in Prague where he was on a trip with a group of his friends. They were young people that had met over social media. Towards the end of middle school, Lukáš started to realise that he likes boys and tried to learn more about that on social media.

At first, it wasn't easy for him to come to terms with his identity. He didn't know anybody else like himself, nobody who was gay. Most of what he used to hear about gay men and lesbians from the people around him were jokes and occasionally even outright condemnations. Now he says: *When I found out how many famous gay men there are, I was amazed. Excited, even. I thought to myself – alright, so it's not the end of the world. I also read about regular guys, not just singers and actors, but also about doctors, teachers and bus drivers. I simply realised that it's more important what sort of person I am and what I'm good at, not who I date. That helped me a lot.*

The journey from self-acceptance to coming out can be a long one, however. Lukáš didn't think that his parents would understand his feelings, so he never told them back when he was still struggling with insecurities or even once he'd realised his sexuality. He was worried they wouldn't accept it and that he'd disappoint them. His relationship with his parents was never particularly close or warm. He knew his parents loved him, but at home, they never talked much about feelings, mostly just practical matters. Moreover, it was clear to him that being out as gay in their small village would attract attention. The neighbours would talk about him and wonder "why is it that he's so weird"? His parents definitely wouldn't like that.

So he kept it to himself. As time went on, though, the secret began to eat away at him. It didn't feel right to hide something like this, he felt constrained and had to constantly keep himself in check. After a while, he started feeling like a liar – as if he was pretending – which made him tense. He'd go on the Internet sometimes to look up information on what it's like being gay, which is also how he came across the mentoring website Sbarvouven.cz. He wrote in and spent several weeks talking online with a gay man who was 10 years older than him. This man heard out his story – he wasn't surprised by how Lukáš felt and didn't try to comfort him, but he nevertheless gave him courage. He told him his own coming out story, along with those of other people he knew. Lukáš felt relieved because he could openly talk about his feelings with someone else. These conversations made him decide that it would be better if he told his parents.

He found a decent time to do so when his family was getting ready for a visit from his aunt and cousin. He was sitting with his parents at the table and they were planning out the visit. Mum wanted to spend the whole weekend hiking but dad held her back: *Marta said that she wants to have a talk with us. They're having some sort of trouble with Kuba at the moment. Who knows what they're dealing with this time...* Lukáš sensed an opportunity. He took a deep breath and said: *I actually also wanted to talk to you about something that I'm dealing with. A while ago, I realised that I'm gay. I didn't want to tell you at first because I thought it'd make you sad. But I think it would be better for all of us that you know.* His parents looked stunned, exchanged a few glances and went quiet for a while, but eventually mum spoke up: *Well, that is a surprise. I had no idea. But yes, I agree that it's better that we know. I'm glad you told us.* And dad agreed.

In the six months that followed, a lot of things changed in Lukáš's life – he started to be honest both to himself and to his parents and he found friends among LGBT+ people who he chatted with, played online games and even met up with from time to time. But at school, things were complicated, especially after the unfortunate encounter in Prague. Two of his classmates take every opportunity to ridicule him – they laugh at him for how he looks, how he dresses, how hard he tries at school and also for being a "faggot". Nobody stands up for him. In fact, other people also join in, maybe out of fear that they themselves could become targets. Even his teachers had witnessed this name-calling, but they never stepped in and instead pretended that they didn't hear anything and that it doesn't concern them.

Lukáš would rather not to go to school at all. He often wonders about transferring somewhere else or dropping out and working without a vocational certificate. He's managing to hold on for now but he isn't sure how much longer he can last. He feels sick in the morning and sometimes completely zones out during class...

Questions that can be asked about the story:

- **How can teachers help with a safe coming out process?**
- **Why is it important not to ignore homophobic slurs?**
- **Is there a difference between dealing with homophobic bullying and bullying that stems from something else?**
- **How might a person's mental well being be affected by being forcefully outed?**

Story 2: Leo, or Lea

Leo is in the in the final year of a big-city middle school. At school, everybody calls him Leo, even if his school documents list a different name, Anna. Leo just finished applying for a name change – he'd like to change it from Anna Nováková to Lea Novák. In the future, though, he hopes to change his legal name to Leo. Mum agrees with changing the first name and removing the -ová suffix from the last name. However, she was only willing to attach her signature to the document after she and Leo visited a clinical psychologist who specialises in working with transgender people.

Leo had been a fairly normal kid. From an early age, he was quite lively, curious and did well in school. He had a deep vocabulary and got along well with adults. Both of these things probably had to do with the fact that he was an only child and grew up with his mum and grandmother. Even then, he saw his dad somewhat regularly and they had a good relationship.

Leo got along with other children without any issues. He used to attend several after-school activities where he made friends. There were also kids in his class that he got along well with. Back in elementary school, when most kids in class preferred the company of either just girls or just boys, Leo was an exception in that he oscillated between different groups and engaged in different activities – both those that mostly boys participated in (building with legos) and those considered girly (playing musical instruments). Zuzka, Leo's mum, recalls: *Back then, I still thought I had a daughter. As a child, Leo always got angry when he had to wear dresses. He was a bit of a rascal. At the time, I didn't think much of it, but it made sense in hindsight. There was more: the way he played with dolls, the way he wanted to dress up for Halloween, his dreams... All these things sort of form a clear picture. Seeing this picture, it makes sense to me that my little Anna became Leo. But it's still the same kid.*

Leo always had a close relationship with his mum Zuzka. From a young age, she'd talk with him about all sorts of things and discuss how they felt about them. That was also why Zuzka started to be worried when she noticed towards the end of 5th grade that her child began to withdraw. This previously spontaneous and optimistic girl who could fill every space started to shut herself in her room, talked less about other kids, didn't even go out with them as much and gave up on some of the after-school activities. Zuzka tried figuring out what was going on, but her child didn't want to talk. Zuzka calmed herself down: *It's probably just puberty, we just have to tough it out.*

In the next school year, Zuzka asked the school what they thought about her child. Unfortunately, since transferring to middle school meant having new teachers, it wasn't possible for them to note any changes in behaviour. Everyone just said: *She's so quiet, she's not very tight with any of the other kids, but will work with them on group tasks.* Even though the teacher's perspective calmed her down

somewhat, it was hard to overlook that the way her child was perceived is very different from the sort of behaviour she was used to. There was also a change in clothing – baggy shirts and trousers, most often in black, zero interest in swimming in the summer, constantly being excused from PE classes...

At the time, Zuzka also tried initiating discussions about what was wrong, but to no avail. After half a year, she decided to go to the school psychologist. She listened to her and promised to focus on Leo's (who at that time was still presenting as Anna) place within class. She attended class and observed Leo's behaviour, talked to both the previous and current homeroom teachers and eventually even offered to talk with Leo directly. Despite the initial hesitation over what is there to talk about with the psychologist, Leo was eventually happy to accept the offer.

After three sessions, where the psychologist asked about the situation in class, how things were with studying, what it was like at home and what sort of future Leo would like to have, the conversation managed to hit at the main point. The psychologist learned from the insecure girl sitting in the chair in front of her that she increasingly feels as if she was watching herself from afar instead of being directly involved in the events around her. She'd like to act differently, but she's scared that it's not possible, that it's not right, that she's weird. Sometimes, she imagines that she's someone else, which immediately makes her feel different, better, more complete. What kind of someone else? A boy. She views her body as foreign and, especially since she started growing breasts, her body outright disgusts her: *I sometimes wonder whether it'd be better not to be at all than to be this (she points at her chest).*

The school psychologist asked Leo to try to explore these feelings a bit more and suggested that they continue their sessions after the summer holidays, in the 7th grade. She suggested that Leo try journaling, watch a few movies, and read two specific novels. The films and novels were about the confusion that can come with adolescence and some of them even focused on the lives and experiences of transgender teenagers. After the holidays, Leo returned to school with his hair cut short and in even more athletic clothes. During their sessions, the school psychologist was interested in how his feelings did and did not align with the characters from the books and movies. The journal contained certain scenes from a boy's perspective, using the conceit that others are reacting to her as if she were a boy and using he/him pronouns. The descriptions made it very clear and explicit that this is how things should be: *This is me and I'm a boy.*

Eventually they agreed to also invite mum over for one of the sessions. She'd been noticing for the last few weeks that something about her child was shifting, that she's more relaxed but still doesn't want to talk about herself. However, the presence of the school psychologist had a supportive effect, and Zuzka for the first time heard from her kid that she felt like a boy: *I've been feeling this way for a while, over a year, but I didn't know what to do about it. I'm sorry for not telling you sooner. I was scared and*

I didn't even know how to tell you. I'd like you to call me by a boy's name. I like the name Leo and I think it fits me. What do you think?

Zuzka was certainly surprised, but not overly so, because the things that Leo said made sense to her. She was relieved that this secret, which she'd been noticing for the past year and couldn't figure out was now out there. Her child trusted her enough to tell her and even go as far as to apologise for not doing so sooner. She felt grateful that their relationship was saved. She put her arms around Leo and told him that she loves him, that she was worried about him and she'll call him whatever he wants, even if it may not be easy.

Then, of course, came a wave of questions and doubts that Zuzka needed to resolve with the school psychologist: *Why would this be? Did I do something wrong? What do we do now?* They agreed that Leo should continue to attend the therapy sessions but that it's also important to seek out professional advice. Zuzka was also given some numbers to call and potentially make appointments with Leo. At the same time, the psychologist also assured her that there's no rush and that it's important to agree on all the future steps with Leo or even have him suggest the next steps on his own. Parents should provide support and assistance, but the initiative and decisions should come from the kids.

An important step was if and how Leo is going to tell his classmates and teachers. Over the course of several weeks, he discussed a number of options with both the school psychologist and his mum and eventually decided to tell his homeroom teacher first. He asked to meet with her and said he had something important to tell her. She invited him over to her office so that they had some quiet and plenty of time. After Leo told her, she asked him: *How long have you known this about yourself? I'm just asking to make sure you're absolutely certain. It's common for people's feelings to change during puberty. This is a very serious matter, so it's not good to be overly hasty. It helps to not go at it alone and talk about it with some professionals.* When Leo told her that he was seeing the school psychologist and how long he had been processing these feelings, she calmed down. It's good that this isn't an entirely recent development and that she won't be the only person helping him.

They agreed that Leo would also talk to the other teachers on his own. He'll talk with them about using he/him pronouns and on how to approach subjects and activities such as PE class where students get divided by gender. The homeroom teacher would only intervene if both sides couldn't agree on an acceptable solution. Leo's also going tell his classmates on his own during the planning class before the spring holidays. After the holidays, they'll talk about it again so that the classmates can ask whatever questions they have and the homeroom teacher can help provide context. She also felt it was important to go over the class rules and make sure to know how to apply them in this new situation. They also agreed that, for April, she's going to have somebody come to class from one of the organisations that

deal with this subject (Trans*parent, Mezipatra and others). They further agreed that Leo and his mum would write a short message for the parents of his classmates. The teacher will then also add some of her own words and send it out. She'll also make the topic a point of discussion at the parent-teacher conference and invite over the school psychologist. All these steps then proceeded carried out without any major hiccups. The homeroom teacher, Zuzka and Leo all felt like they did a good job.

Leo left for the summer holidays between 7th and 8th grade thinking that everybody already knows about his identity and that everything was going to be easier come the next school year. And he was right. His classmates supported him. Yes, he was different and people sometimes made jokes, which wasn't easy, but he knew that he could always tell one of the teachers or speak up in class. Even though he knew that the comments weren't mean-spirited, that didn't mean they weren't hurtful. But as time went on, things got better. At a session with a clinical psychologist, he thought about the pros and cons of hormone therapy. He wore a binder over his chest. He was a boy in a body that, for the moment, felt more girlish to him[1] – he had accepted that and it wasn't like before when he couldn't think about anything else. Now he felt like he was living a normal life again, that he enjoys the things he does, that he has regular issues to deal with and just this one extra thing on top of those. *But it's not the end of the world. Everybody's got something. I've got a friend who has diabetes and he also learned to live with it. I just think of it as being on a journey. And it's actually kind of nice.* He got back into doing sports as well as his other hobbies and is doing well at school. In 9th grade, he started thinking about which high school he wants to go to. He's interested in social work because he knows how much work the right people in the right places did for him to make him feel better.

Questions that can be asked about the story:

- **What can teachers do if they think that they may have a trans child in their class?**
- **How should one proceed if the child knows that they are trans? What is the right way to talk about this subject with the class or the rest of the school?**
- **How should one deal with locker rooms and classes that are segregated by gender?**
- **What sources of support are there for parents of LGBT+ children? What can help families understand or accept their child's identity?**

[1] Each and every trans person has a different relationship to their body – for some, changing their body can be very important, while others may be happy with it as it is. In Leo's case, he wanted his body to be different and felt that having more masculine features would make him feel better.

Story 3: Call me Sylva

Martin was born as the only son of Alena and Pavel. The two of them met in Prague where Pavel studied and Alena worked, though both of them were originally from the countryside. Both of them are also somewhat introverted and live a peaceful life. They have jobs that they enjoy and find fulfilling. However, their work demands are quite different, so they don't get to spend much quality time together.

From an early age, Martin proved himself to be a very smart child. He was good at a lot of things but had trouble adjusting to changes. He also had trouble forming relationships with other children and preferred instead to spend time with adults. It took him a long time to get used to kindergarten and he was only close with two boys there. When they'd be absent from kindergarten, Martin refused to participate. These issues with forming relationships with other peers continued into school. He did not seek the company of other children, he often felt out of place, and other children also didn't show much interest in spending time with him. He spent breaks between classes on his own, did not want to attend the after-school club and was instead enrolled in several extracurricular activities offered directly by the school. Nevertheless, he excelled at studying which was also a contributing factor to him not fitting in.

It's no surprise, then, that from a young age, Martin did not enjoy going to school. That situation only got worse with time. At the start of middle schools, he started being anxious, depressed and had trouble getting himself motivated to do regular activities. At the age of 13, he started talking about how he doesn't like himself, how he's not a good person, how he should never have been born... His parents didn't understand what was going on with him: *We couldn't figure it out. We showed him all the acceptance we could and we were never particularly demanding of him. We loved him and made that clear to him. So how was it possible that this little boy would suddenly start saying that it would be better if he weren't alive? He said that a few times and it terrified us. We could see that he was changing overall as a person.* They sought professional help and Martin started going to therapy.

At the time, he often skipped school, which culminated in a talk with the school counsellor and the headmaster. The school tried to help Martin but none of the approaches yielded any significant improvements. They tried to get Martin more involved with his classmates, but that did not work out. The teachers constantly appealed to the parents to be stricter with their son and do a better job at motivating him. The parents felt that the school didn't understand or was even openly distrustful towards reports from professional examinations that repeatedly confirmed that their child had increased depressive symptoms and social anxiety.

After two years, the parents decided to homeschool Martin instead, because his situation was not getting better and the school was refusing to change its approach. However, both parents viewed homeschooling as more of a forced decision: *We would much rather have our son go to school like all the other kids. But when that didn't work, we didn't have any other choice. We felt like we were bad parents. The headmaster and the teachers acted like it was our fault. They even threatened us with child protection.*

So, Martin was home-schooled. His parents took turns teaching him – Pavel often worked from home and Alena worked shifts. Martin was very independent in completing the tasks that his parents set up for him to do over two or three days. Martin passed the exams at school without any issues, although entering the school itself, being around teachers and meeting other children was difficult for him.

Martin spent his free time playing video games, during which he'd be talking with other players. Gradually, a community formed around those games and Martin felt accepted as part of it. He considered his online teammates to be his friends: *I may not know them and I've never met them, but we talk about all sorts of things while playing and I think I really vibe with them. We arrange when we'll be playing next and, when we meet up, we ask each other what's new and how we're doing. It's nice.*

Martin regularly visited a psychiatrist and took medication. Although his parents didn't see any improvements in Martin's anxiety with being around other peers and going to school, his condition at least did not get any worse. They also noticed that he sometimes took it upon himself to complete a difficult task, such as returning books to the school library. He wouldn't always succeed, but his parents viewed his willingness to even try as a positive change from before when he'd have zero initiative towards socially difficult tasks.

On his 15th birthday, Martin announced to his parents that he didn't feel like a boy: *I was getting ready to tell them and my birthday felt like a good opportunity. I'd be getting my ID, so it felt sort of special. I'd been feeling for a long time that I wasn't exactly a boy. I discussed it with my psychologist as well as with my friends. Then I also wanted my parents to know. I felt relieved when I no longer had to keep that secret.* The parents were taken aback, but decided to stand by their child. They looked up information, went to a support group for parents and also visited Martin's psychiatrist.

It took them many months to fully take in the news and unify their thoughts as a parenting couple. The subject was difficult for them in that it simply seemed incomprehensible. They couldn't imagine how their child was feeling, but they also weren't able to talk about it with Martin. But what they wanted most was for their child to start feeling better and be able to participate in everyday life: *I wasn't thrilled about it, but I thought that if this was the issue that was preventing him from operating normally, then*

we need to help him sort it out. The main thing was for him to go back to school, start going out and that sort of thing. And if he can do that as a girl then that's alright.

After Sylva told the parents that she didn't feel like a boy, things went quiet for a few weeks. She didn't bring the subject up again. But they did notice that her mental state improved after coming out. She appeared calmer, it seemed to them that she sought their company more (such as while watching TV or would talk over food) and would also talk about regular things. So, they waited, not wanting to exert any pressure, but they also didn't know what to do and how to talk to Sylva. She said she didn't feel like a boy, but she didn't explicitly say that she feels like a girl. So the parents also weren't sure which pronouns to use.

Gradually, they worked to wrap their heads around the concept of transness and, after four weeks of Sylva's silence, they broached the subject themselves: *We're glad that you told us what's been bothering you. We understand that you don't feel like a boy. But we don't exactly understand what that means and what you would like us to do. If you don't feel like a boy, do you feel like a girl, then? Or are you still not sure? Or is it something else altogether? Would you like us to call you by a different name and use she/her pronouns? We will try to support you, but we need you to tell us what you need.*

They got an answer: *I'm not entirely sure. Sometimes, I feel like it's clear that I'm a girl. I'd like to grow long hair. And I like the name Sylva, I think it suits me. But sometimes it's like... it doesn't matter, it's not important.*

At that time, Sylva was about to enter high school. They consulted everything with a psychologist and mutually agreed that it's important to inform the school and ask the teachers to keep an open-minded approach and to let the class know. The homeroom teacher was very helpful. She asked Sylva which pronouns she wanted her to use and if she wanted to explain the subject to others. However, there were also teachers at the school who insisted on using the name that was in her ID. They refused to adjust their approach in the slightest and even made comments in front of other students, such as: *You need more homework – you've got too much free time and then you think about nonsense like changing your gender.*

Currently, Sylva is in the first year of high school and follows an individual study plan, but she also goes to school two days a week for two classes. She attends classes of those teachers who were willing to accommodate her and refer to Sylva using she/her pronouns. The plan is to gradually have her come to school more frequently.

Sylva has grown out her hair to her shoulders and wears ambiguous clothes (wider jeans and looser shirts). She speaks of herself in the feminine grammatical gender at home, in therapy and around

people who said they are okay with it. But in other situations, she still uses the masculine: *I feel no need to explain anything to them. It's not a big deal for me to refer to myself as a boy.*

Six months after she came out, her parents offered to set up an appointment with a sexologist. She declined. Her parents also asked her therapist to incorporate the subject into her therapy plan and they explained to Sylva what the requirements for changing one's gender are in the Czech legal system. They also told their child that: *This is your journey and your decision to make. You can take as much time as you need. We can't make this decision for you. If you feel like you need to take any more steps, we'll help you take them. But that's not something we can determine, you have to tell us yourself.*

So far, Sylva has not taken any further steps in transitioning or telling her extended family. She's in no hurry with making any decisions and her parents patiently support her. The main thing for them is that they can see that Sylva feels happier.

Questions that can be asked about the story:

- **What legal options does a school have in terms of accommodating trans students? How should one deal with teachers who refuse to call a child by their chosen name?**
- **What kind of feelings might trans and non-binary people experience while realising their identity? Are suicidal thoughts common?**
- **What is the difference between trans and non-binary identities?**
- **What can help parents accept that their child is trans?**

Story 4: Juli Doesn't Want to Be a Girl

Julie's standing in the kitchen door and yelling at her parents: *I'm not a girl! I don't want to be a girl! I'm a boy!* The situation is tense. Julie's parents were angry at her because she hadn't done her chores – she didn't do her homework, didn't clean out the dishwasher and came home late from being outside. And then they also had an argument over what clothes she should wear to the photo shoot tomorrow at school. Julie's mum prepared a white-and-purple dress, but Julie rejected it. She said she didn't like it and that she didn't want to wear dresses anymore. She feels good wearing jeans and a t-shirt. Her parents argued: *Sure, dress like that if you want. But there are situations when a dress is better. You're a girl, so you should look like one.* Julie retorted: *I'm not a girl! I don't want to be a girl! I'm a boy!* She slammed the door and locked herself in her room, sobbing.

Julie is 12 years old and in sixth grade. She's loved animals since she was little and, in addition to owning a dog and a guinea pig, she also visits the animal club and reads a lot about animals. She's especially interested in large farm animals. She's fascinated by the fact that although a cow or a horse are bigger than a human, they'll listen to people if they are well cared for. Her grandfather is a beekeeper, her uncle is a gamekeeper, her grandmother often talks about her childhood when her family used to have a cow. She often hears about animals at home. She herself talks about the fact that she'd like to be a vet, ideally out in the fields rather than in small-town office that takes care of pets. But at home they tell her: *Do you know how hard of a job that is? You're always out in the cold and in the heat, it's physically demanding and the guys who work at farms only respect each other. To put it bluntly, it's no job for a woman. If you want to work with animals, pets would be a better option. But you still have a lot of years ahead of you and who knows where the current will take you.*

Julie is going through a regular childhood. She does alright at school – she's no valedictorian, but she's not too shabby either. And she gets along with basically everybody. She's got a few really good friends at school as well as two friends from the building she lives in whom she's known since childhood. She also has a good relationship with her parents, her grandparents and her older brother. Julie spends a lot of time with them, especially over the weekends when they go on trips or to the cottage.

Over the last year, she's started to change. She started quickly growing, her breasts started to take shape and she got her first period... What's more, all these physical changes also made her feel different. Sometimes she's daydreaming, sometimes she's nervous and angry. She's going through rapid mood swings, and alternates between wanting to be alone or with other people, either hanging around her parents or being independent. Sometimes she wants to be held by her mum, other times

she gets angry about having her hair stroked or being given a kiss in public. In short, Julie's adolescence is starting out in full force.

People also now more frequently tell Julie what she should or shouldn't do as a girl: *Camo patterns are not suitable for a girl; You have hair like a princess, so take care of it; Walk with the tips of your feet apart, like a big lady*. Or does it just seem to her like she hears these sorts of things more often? Either way, she's starting to detest being bossed around like this. She doesn't quite understand it herself, but it's as if she doesn't want to big girl, she doesn't want to be a woman, mainly because all of these things represent a bunch of restrictions. As if her life had to be forever altered from now on because she's a girl.

Julie yelling at her parents in a fit of rage that she's a boy wasn't the first time she'd mentioned it. She had talked about it before with one of her friends as well as with her uncle, the gamekeeper, whom she told: *I hate the colour pink, I hate long hair. Being a girl feels horribly annoying. It's better to be a boy. I'd like to be a boy.*

On the Internet, she came across information about being transgender. People who were born as women but considered themselves men and who changed their gender. She feels like it completely fits her feelings in that she dislikes the idea of the various requirements and limitations stemming from expectations towards women and girls. However, her experiences are also different in some respects from what they're describing. The idea of having a male body seems foreign to her and she’s maybe even a bit scared of it. Nevertheless, calling herself trans and saying that she feels like a boy does make her feel better. It seems to her that it makes people ask fewer questions and they aren't as likely to cast doubt on her feelings and opinions. To stress that she doesn't want to be a girl, she also starts wearing more clothes that aren't traditionally girly – no skirts, no light colours, rejecting pink entirely. She wants to cut her hair into a short bob cut. It brings her joy when somebody tells her that she doesn't look very feminine (even if they might not mean it as a compliment). She also stresses that she wants to be called Juli. She considers Juli to be a gender-neutral name.

She often gets into discussions about inequality between men and women and holds rather radical views on the matter. She feels a deep sense of anger and injustice when, at school, girls and boys are given different tasks. She disagrees with the idea that, at home, she has different responsibilities than her brother just because she's a girl and he's a boy... She does not understand why it is necessary to keep emphasising whether someone is a woman or a man. And she disagrees with the idea that being a woman should mean all these sorts of prohibitions and worries and limitations – at least as far as her opinion is concerned. Whenever she feels like she's being told what she can and can't do (as a girl), she yells internally: *I don't want it that way!*

Questions that can be asked about the story:

- **What is gender expression and how should we understand it?**
- **How should we respond to students whose gender identity falls outside of the binary categories?**
- **What form can gender identities take and what are different forms of transitioning?**
- **How to deal with the rejection of gender roles? What steps can the school take in this regard – could more comprehensive sex-ed play a positive role?**

Story 5: Jakub the Teacher

The story of Jakub begins in the countryside, in a small village hidden in the shadow of the South Moravian Pálava. His entire childhood and adolescence were closely tied to family life. His grandparents acquired one of the local vineyards during restitution and successfully built a family business out of it. Even Jakub's father has spent most of his life working in agriculture. Only Jakub's mother works in a different industry – she cooks at the local pub. Thanks to this, Jakub's family is well-regarded throughout the village, which is also reflected in the fact that his family members are involved in all sorts of community events, whether it's the annual ball or regular Sunday mass at the local church. During his childhood and adolescence, Jakub and his friends from the village attended school in the nearest small town, where children would gather from all the surrounding villages.

The unwritten master of Jakub's class was Igor the Bully. Him and his gang of boys would call people different names – "nerd" and "faggot" being his favorites. Sometimes it didn't take much for somebody to become the victim of Igor's malice – for example, getting a good grade (*You goddamn nerd!*), not wanting to play football with the others (*Don't be a fag and come along!*) or, God forbid, shedding a tear after failing a maths test (*Hey, lookit! He's crying! Only faggots cry!*). Jakub listened to Igor's variations on the words "faggot", "bugger" and "puff" for most of his school life. He even sometimes joined in on the harassment, mostly so that Igor wouldn't target him. The teachers almost always ignored these verbal exchanges.

Jakub's family and neighbours were so overjoyed when Jakub got accepted to university. A university student came from a family where everyone had at most a high school education! Although they weren't thrilled about it, Jakub's parents tacitly accepted his choice not to study agriculture and instead follow his dream of going to the Faculty of Education and becoming an English teacher. It was in his first year at university when Jakub began to notice that something might be different about him, and he began to think more openly about his sexuality. Until then, he was never very interested when his classmates talked about girls, but it didn't bother him in the least – thanks to his hobbies and work at home, he didn't have time, and he simply never was interested in any girl (nor boy). But something awakened in him in university and he started feeling entirely new emotions.

It was hard for him to accept. At that time, he got a lot of help from his classmate Verča who was dating a girl. Only after meeting her did Jakub understand that being gay is nothing to be ashamed of. After some time spent exploring his feelings, he came out to his classmates and friends. He also started to look more actively for dates on mobile apps. Among the various photos of boys, Jakub also saw a few familiar faces from where he grew up – including that of his classmate Igor.

Going back to visit his parents always felt like going to a different planet. While he could "be himself" at school and among his friends, at home he was forced to keep his sexuality concealed. He was scared of how his parents and grandparents would react. On one hand, it was difficult for Jakub to tell the people at home, but on the other, he was annoyed by the constant questions about why he doesn't have a girlfriend. In the end, he took a more indirect option. He wrote his secret on a note, which he then left in his parents' bedroom just before heading back to school after Christmas. His parents found the note in the evening. The following day, his mum called Jakub and told him that she loved him the way he was. He just needs to make sure not to spread the news too much because of what the neighbours would think. Honestly, though, Jakub didn't care about the neighbours.

His mum was moved to tears, his father was brimming with pride and his grandmother only regretted that his grandfather wouldn't live to watch as Jakub formally graduated with honours, received his diploma and gave the speech for his class. Although Jakub was offered to study for a doctorate, he instead decided to start working as an English teacher at a secondary grammar school in a big city. He didn't know anyone at the school and he did not mention his sexuality during the job interview. However, a few days before prep week, he started to worry: What if the other teachers mind that he's gay? And, God forbid, what if the students find out? What if a student tells him that he won't listen to a faggot? They didn't prepare him for something like that at school. However, he did know from the field work he did during his studies that many teachers are suspicious of LGBT+ topics.

Jakub's boyfriend Adam told him to not worry about it, that it'll be fine in time. The most important thing is for him to be himself. With this thought, Jakub set off for the first day of his new job. Jakub shared an office with two other teachers – a young English teacher named Katka (who sometimes reminded him of his friend Verča from university) and the older and somewhat more reserved Bohuslav, who taught geography. It didn't take long for Katka and Jakub to become close friends. He felt comfortable around her and fairly soon accidentally outed himself to her by saying: *My boyfriend and I went swimming.* This was also overheard by Bohuslav, who mumbled something about "perverts" and left the room. Katka then revealed to Jakub that Bohuslav is deeply religious and that he isn't fond of "these sorts of things". But this was the only time that Jakub's sexuality came up on school grounds. The other teachers and the school management paid no attention to the subject and the only thing they discussed with Jakub was how he was doing with the teaching and how he was managing his class.

Standing up in front of the students and teaching was a big challenge for Jakub. After some time, however, he developed a system and the students increasingly started to like him. He nevertheless tried to retain some professional distance and he only rarely mentioned his private life to his students (following advice from both his boyfriend Adam and his fellow teacher Katka). However, the students' approach towards their own private lives was radically different. Jakub was surprised when a third-year

female student said during conversation practice about what they did over the weekend *I was with my girlfriend and we watched movies*. At that age, he wouldn't have had the courage to say something like that in front of his classmates, even if he had known he was gay back then. Perhaps it was this experience that made Jakub pay more attention to other LGBT+ students at the school who he had previously mostly overlooked – whether it was similar expressions in class or two boys holding hands in front of the school. There was even one student who was transitioning. At the teacher meeting, they were advised to call him by the name Alex. Jakub ignored Bohuslav's sardonic comments about "54 genders" and worked to get used to the new situation so that he could support Alex.

Although Jakub wasn't aware, people started whispering around school that's he's an "ally". LGBT+ students were less afraid of expressing their identity in front of him compared to Bohuslav's classes, where they didn't want to start any arguments. Even students who were still discovering themselves and were going through the process of coming out sought support from Jakub. For example, when they were writing essays in English class on the topic of "My Dreams," where the goal was to practice the use of subjunctives, Jakub's interest was piqued by a text in which the author mentioned going through a mentally difficult time because he was dealing with accepting his sexuality. He said that his biggest dream would be to tell those around him and, especially his parents, but that he didn’t know how to go about it. Jakub wasn't sure if he should react to the essay. He also discussed the dilemma with his co-worker Katka. Ultimately, he decided to send the student an email, thank him for his trust and refer him to the online counseling at Sbarvouven.cz.

One time, when he was teaching a class for first-year students on the subject of "My Hobbies", Jakub used a video in which a number of people talked about their hobbies and the students were supposed to answer questions in their worksheet. There was a boy in the video who did ballet and theatre. The moment he spoke, one of the students in the back exclaimed: *WTF, he sounds like a fag!* Jakub decided to pause the video and respond to the derisive comment. While the original idea was to talk about why things like that are inappropriate to say, it eventually devolved into a debate about the LGBT+ movement as a whole and nearly the entire class got involved. This made Jakub feel uncomfortable. Not because he wasn't knowledgeable on the subject, but he wasn't sure how he was supposed to react. As a result, he mostly tried to guide the discussion and not say much. He was surprised, though, that for the most part, the students were able to able to discuss things matter-of-factly and with civility.

Then, however, came the questions aimed directly at Jakub: *Teacher, what do you think about gay people?* and *Do you know any?* It was this direct address that Jakub was worried about. He didn't want to ignore the questions, but he also didn't feel like talking about his opinions and experiences. But the questioning didn't end there: *We heard that you've got a boyfriend!* Damn, how did they find out? The eyes of all the students were fixed on Jakub. He could feel all of them waiting with bated breaths for

what he was going to say. In the end, he decided to not deny anything and show his true colours: *Yes, I have a boyfriend and know a lot of gay people. So, what is there for me to think about them – they're people like everybody else, some of them are alright, some of them aren't. People aren't defined by their sexuality but by their personality and values.* From the left, he could hear somebody whisper: *See? Told you I was right!* Afterward, the students proceeded with their debate (specifically listing off the celebrities who are open about their LGBT+ identity) and nobody paid Jakub any more attention. He felt relieved. Clearly, the students are more okay with his domestic life than he had assumed.

Thanks to this experience, Jakub no longer felt constrained by the fear that his class would reject him over being gay. He started thinking about what he could do to support students who are struggling with finding their orientation or gender identity and to effectively speak out against displays of homophobia in the classroom. He's trying to deepen his knowledge of these things and find more resources to use both during language classes and as a homeroom teacher, and he's not scared to talk about the subject among his fellow teachers, with the parents of students and on social media. His attitude makes it clear that, as teachers, we can't ignore out personal experiences. Instead, we can harness them to be more empathetic and to provide better support for our students.

Questions that can be asked about the story:

- **Are slurs like "faggot" or "fag" only used against children who are gay? What sort of climate does that create in class?**
- **What are some important things for teachers to consider if they want to come out?**
- **What can a school do to create an environment that is friendly to LGBT+ students and teachers alike?**
- **How much should teachers talk about their private lives at school? What are the pros and cons of doing so?**
- **Where can one refer students who are dealing with questions of sexuality or gender identity?**

What Schools Can and Should Do

Today's primary and secondary schools are characterized by a high diversity of learners. Regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, most classes include LGBT+ students, students with LGBT+ family members, and students who are indifferent or even hostile to the topic. For a school to function effectively, it must promote safety and mutual respect in its diverse classrooms, ensuring that differences are enriching rather than harmful.

The OUT research mentioned earlier found that the majority of the nearly 600 participating teachers want to support their learners. However, many feel they lack the knowledge and skills to do so effectively. Almost half of the teachers in the study indicated a need for better understanding and competence in these topics. This need is critical because issues of sexual orientation and gender identity are not clearly defined in educational curricula. Teachers often lack sufficient guidance on what and how to teach, and how to support LGBT+ learners. Additionally, many fear negative reactions from parents, some students, and colleagues. Even in the OUT survey, where most teachers advocated for safe and accepting school environments, a small minority expressed negative views about LGBT+ students. In extreme cases, some teachers openly identified as homophobic.

Addressing gender identity, sexuality, and relationships in school is essential. While some believe these topics are too sensitive and should be left to parents, this approach is inadequate. Understanding one's identity and relational and sexual needs is vital for overall health and happiness. Relying solely on parents can leave many young people unprepared, as parents may lack education on these topics or have their own barriers to discussing them.

Schools must support the personal development of young people by addressing these crucial topics. Adolescents are often preoccupied with issues of identity and relationships, experiencing self-doubt, anxiety, and curiosity. Many prefer discussing these matters with peers or seeking information online, which can be unreliable. Schools play a critical role in helping students understand their feelings and needs, providing key knowledge to navigate their paths.

Teaching these subjects is challenging, so a basic consensus among the teaching staff on how to approach them is essential. If teachers fear parental backlash and lack support from school management, they are less likely to address gender and sexuality issues, leaving students more dependent on potentially harmful online sources and peer misinformation.

Research shows that LGBT+ individuals face higher rates of psychological issues due to prejudice and fear of rejection, including mental and physical attacks. For young people, such experiences can lead

to unhealthy isolation, avoidance of school, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, and risky behavior, all detrimental to mental health and academic performance.

Most teachers aim to create safe and supportive school environments, and for good reason. In such settings, students feel calmer, better understand themselves and others, and experience a sense of belonging and acceptance. This supportive atmosphere enhances their focus on learning and fosters cooperation and mutual support among students and teachers.

From the stories and interviews presented earlier, several key recommendations for schools emerge:

- **Acknowledge Identity and Sexuality**: Adolescents have a natural need to explore their identity (Who am I?), sexuality (Who am I attracted to?), and relationships (Who am I falling in love with?). Schools must recognize and address these needs.
- **Provide Accurate Information**: Young people need reliable knowledge about identity and sexuality. If schools do not provide this information, students will turn to the internet, where they may encounter unreliable sources. Schools should fulfill this educational role.
- **Support Emotional Well-being**: Effective learning requires mental capacity. If students are preoccupied with doubts and fears about their identity, their ability to learn is compromised. Schools should help students manage these concerns rather than exacerbate them.

These recommendations suggest that schools should consider LGBT+ issues in three main areas: curriculum content, classroom management, and school counseling services. Each of these areas will be briefly described below.

Opening up discussions about identity, gender, relationships, and sexuality can be approached both specifically and non-specifically. A non-specific approach involves subtly integrating these topics into everyday interactions and lessons. This includes being sensitive to comments, referencing LGBT+ individuals across subjects, and using inclusive language.

A specific approach involves direct activities or lessons focused on these topics, aiming to provide new information and shift attitudes. Addressing LGBT+ issues should not necessarily require introducing an entirely new topic but rather incorporating these discussions into existing conversations about human diversity.

All young people, not just those who identify as LGBT+, benefit from discussions about identity and sexuality. Understanding these aspects is easier for those who fit the conventional norms, but everyone is navigating these questions.

There are two principles for Addressing Gender and Sexuality:

- **Know Where You Stand**: Teachers should be clear about their own attitudes and possess enough knowledge to avoid perpetuating myths and stereotypes. This clarity can be achieved by reflecting on questions such as:

  How do I approach students of different genders?

  What are my thoughts on teaching about sexuality?

  What is my professional knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity?

  How do I want to approach these topics in the classroom?

- **Provide Safety and Information**: Create an environment where students feel safe to discuss sensitive topics. Set clear rules about what is non-negotiable knowledge and what can be discussed. Teachers should initiate these discussions rather than waiting for students to bring them up, as some may be too afraid to do so.

One effective way to foster a respectful approach in schools is by referencing LGBT+ people and issues within various subjects. This practice provides role models for LGBT+ learners and promotes overall respect for diversity, benefiting all students. Here are some specific examples of how to integrate LGBT+ mentions into different subjects:

- **Math**: Include word problems involving diverse family structures, such as two moms.
- **Biology**: Discuss animals that change sex (e.g., clownfish) or exhibit same-sex behaviors (e.g., black swans).
- **Literature, Art, Music**: Highlight figures like Virginia Woolf, David Bowie, Frida Kahlo, Oscar Wilde, or Toyen.
- **History, Civics**: Explore how different societies have perceived gender identities and sexual orientations, such as in Ancient Greece or during the Stonewall Riots.

By incorporating these examples, schools can raise awareness of LGBT+ issues in a non-confrontational manner, making diversity a natural and respected part of the learning environment. This approach helps all students feel safer and more accepted, enhancing their overall educational experience.

If we as teachers strive to put the principles described into practice, the climate in our schools will be safer and more welcoming. We have no doubt that the majority of teachers want this and realize how important it is. We hope this publication has inspired you as to why and how it can be done.

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