

## **Training Course on Sexual Identities for Preservice English Language Teachers**

*Stefano Barozzi*

The doctoral thesis I am working on is based on a training course on sexual identity issues for Spanish preservice primary and secondary school English language teachers. The course took place at the University of Granada in Spain at the end of 2011. The idea of a training course was born after a pilot study on sexual identities in which participants, Spanish preservice primary school English language teachers, requested a training course. The course was offered entirely in English, and it is the first of its kind in Spain.

The specific aim of the course was to find ways to counter queerphobia and heterosexism in education through queer pedagogical activities. The general aim was to support a queer transformation of both education and society.

This qualitative research study is inspired by queer theory, pedagogies of inquiry, and critical and transformative pedagogy. Sexual identities in this work are related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-, intersexual (lgbti) as well as heterosexual persons.

The course was divided into ten units of four hours each. The eighteen participants, fourteen women and four men, attended voluntarily. The average age was 24. It was an interactive course and apart from some theoretical notions sent via email and illustrated in class using power point presentations, at least 60% of the course was dedicated to classroom workshops in which participants were required to contribute with their own knowledge and skills.

In an initial questionnaire, most participants identified themselves as heterosexual, three did not recognise themselves as 'typical' heterosexuals and one described himself as gay. Only three participants knew the meaning of heterosexism and heteronormativity. They acknowledged that training on sexual identities in education is essential for

their professional development, and some added that queer issues are easier to deal with in secondary education as primary school pupils are “too young to understand”.

As for their motivation, at least half participated because they wanted to improve their English and receive credits from the university, whilst about one third was really interested in the subject. As part of the course, participants had to prepare and present a didactic unit based on queer issues in English language teaching.

The course was evaluated by the participants three times: a written mid-course evaluation, a written final course evaluation, and a final course recorded discussion. Most participants enjoyed the course as a whole; they learnt how to deal with queerphobia and heterosexism in English language teaching, and were able to recognise heteronormativity almost everywhere in education and in society as a whole. They highly appreciated and enjoyed the workshops and group activities.

At the end of the course most of them agreed that it would be easier to teach queer issues to primary school pupils than secondary school students.

As part of my thesis, in order to improve the content and outcome of the course, another training course will be offered in the autumn of 2012 entitled ‘Sexual identities in education’.