



NORTHERN
MOSAIC
NETWORK

RAINBOW CLASSROOM toolkit

tips for making your classroom
a more equitable space for
2SLGBTQIPA+ students



Northern Mosaic Network

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The Northern Mosaic Network is dedicated to creating a safer space for 2SLGBTQIPA+ youth, through raising awareness about 2SLGBTQIPA+ issues and identities; helping 2SLGBTQIPA+ youth build confidence and capacity across the NWT; being actively anti-racist and challenging colonial systems when delivering programs and services, engaging with communities and collaborating with external partners; supporting families of 2SLGBTQIPA+ people to accept, love, and understand them; providing advice, support, and resources to community organizations and agencies about 2SLGBTQIPA+ issues; providing culturally safe and relevant programming and resources; advocating for a safer and more equitable territory and safer communities for 2SLGBTQIPA+ youth; and running a Rainbow Youth Centre in Yellowknife.

We acknowledge the generous support of the Government of Canada for the redevelopment of our educational resources and materials.



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Electronic versions of this toolkit and other resource materials available online at **www.northernmosaic.net/resources**



Developed by Jacq Brasseur, with support from Catherine Currie following consultation with 2SLGBTQIPA+ Northerners in 2021/2022.

Everybody deserves to feel safe at school.

According to Egale Canada's Still in Every Class In Every School study from 2021, 62% of 2SLGBTQ+ respondents reported that they feel unsafe at school, compared to 11% of non-2SLGBTQ+ respondents. Every educator knows that if a student doesn't feel safe at school, their learning and academic growth are threatened. It can be really hard to create an inclusive classroom for any educator, but if you don't work with a supportive administration team or if you work in a small school with limited resources, it can be even harder.

Often, people don't realize that their classroom even has 2SLGBTQIPA+ students, but young people are identifying as 2SLGBTQIPA+ at much higher rates than previous generations. It's important to point out that this isn't because more students are 2SLGBTQIPA+, but because it is getting safer and safer for people to come out. For 2SLGBTQIPA+ students, a safe and supportive classroom might look very different than what it looks like for students who are heterosexual or cisgender.

This toolkit isn't a safer school guide; it's a toolkit for individual teachers to be able to make their classrooms safer, and more inclusive spaces. We've put thought into these tips, to ensure that every educator can implement them, no matter if they live in Yellowknife or in a smaller, isolated community.

It's important to remember that no matter how much effort you put in to supporting 2SLGBTQIPA+ students, you might always make mistakes. You should always be ready to hear feedback, suggestions, and concerns from others about how you can be even better at supporting 2SLGBTQIPA+ people in your classroom.

Everybody deserves to feel safe at school, and you can help make that happen!

Tip #1: Have the knowledge.

Knowing which words to use and what questions to ask is really daunting, but it's really important. Without having a simple understanding of the challenges and issues of what your 2SLGBTQIPA+ students might be experiencing, you won't be able to grasp what sorts of things your students might need to feel safer at school.

The Northern Mosaic Network creates and maintains resources on our website, and we have a library of books, movies and graphic novels available to everybody. Other good places to learn from are organizations like Egale Canada, and the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity.

All the being said, it's especially important to recognize the unique ways that your 2SLGBTQIPA+ students might understand their identity. 2SLGBTQIPA+ people have different understandings of themselves that are often related to their cultural identities or lived experiences.

You can contact NMN to hear about when our next workshop is, but there is a wide range of things you can do to learn more about 2SLGBTQIPA+ realities.

- Seek out professional development opportunities that touch on gender and sexual identity.
- Read peer-reviewed academic literature from education scholars about best practices related to 2SLGBTQIPA+ inclusive education.
- Access NMN's online and print resources all about 2SLGBTQIPA+ identities and experiences.
- Follow 2SLGBTQIPA+ educators and content creators on social media.



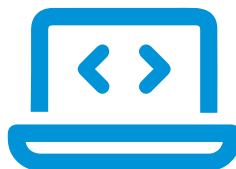
Tip #2: Be accountable.

When we claim that our classroom is a positive or inclusive space for 2SLGBTQIPA+ students, we have a responsibility to make sure this is true. Part of this accountability means ensuring that the needs and realities of 2SLGBTQIPA+ students are specifically addressed and considered.

Being accountable means ensuring that you aren't only engaging in performative actions (such as participating in a Pride event), but actually being willing to make changes and address it when homophobia, transphobia or biphobia show up in your classroom.

Northern Mosaic Network can work with you on creating a safer classroom, where all students are challenged to put a stop to homophobia, transphobia, biphobia or other types of anti-2SLGBTQIPA+ violence.

- Instead of “positive space” signage, opt for signage that clearly indicates where people go if they experience classroom bullying or violence. It's impossible to ensure a space completely free from violence, but you can provide your students with knowledge of where to go if they do experience it.
- Ensure that there classroom rules or expectations clearly state that students who are 2SLGBTQIPA+ deserve respect and care.
- If a 2SLGBTQIPA+ or allied student tells you that there's still work to be done in your classroom or practice to be more inclusive, challenge the temptation to disagree with them or defend yourself. Instead, offer appreciation for their willingness to come forward, and commit yourself to learning more and trying harder.



Tip #3: Incorporate it into curriculum.

We know that teachers themselves don't create curriculum. Luckily, the Department of Education, Culture & Employment's Guidelines for Ensuring LGBTQ2S+ Equity, Safety and Inclusion in Northwest Territories Schools clearly explains that educators have an obligation to enable 2SLGBTQIPA+ students to have full, safe and equitable participation in both curricular and extra-curricular activities

For a 2SLGBTQIPA+ student to have full, safe and equitable participation in school, this means that they also have the right to learn about their own experiences and community at school.

Incorporating 2SLGBTQIPA+ material and content into existing curriculum is probably a lot easier than you might think. While we invite you to reach out to us to ask about specific ways that you might build 2SLGBTQIPA+ content into a lesson, here are some suggestions about how you can incorporate inclusive content:

- Select teaching resources that include representation of 2SLGBTQIPA+ experiences and people. Try your best to seek out diverse representations that allow for all kinds of 2SLGBTQIPA+ students to see themselves by considering race, (dis)ability, gender, age, and more.
- Incorporate 2SLGBTQIPA+ history and stories into humanities, social studies and language arts classes.
- Invite flexibility for all students to be able to choose their own focus or materials, allowing 2SLGBTQIPA+ or allied students to focus on 2SLGBTQIPA+ topics if they want to.
- In any health, science or sex education classes, don't ignore the realities, needs and experiences of 2SLGBTQIPA+ people.



Tip #4: Affirm 2SLGBTQIPA+ students.

Sometimes, efforts to build inclusive spaces for 2SLGBTQIPA+ people end up manifesting more as spaces that are simply “tolerant” or “accepting” of difference, rather than actively affirming and celebrating diversity.

Classrooms should support all students, regardless of their sexuality, affectionality, gender expression, gender modality. This support should translate into teachers and educators genuinely valuing the unique experiences and contributions of 2SLGBTQIPA+ students in their classrooms.

When it comes to ensuring that all students feel affirmed, we also have to consider how the experiences of 2SLGBTQIPA+ students who navigate multiple types of discrimination may be unique. For instance, Egale Canada’s 2021 report found that 2SLGBTQIPA+ Indigenous students are twice as likely to experience verbal harassment based on their race than non-2SLGBTQIPA+ Indigenous students.

- Use students’ chosen names and pronouns, and affirm their right to participate in gendered activities of their choice.
- Support and celebrate Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) or other 2SLGBTQIPA+ support groups that might exist in your school or community.
- Recognize the contributions of 2SLGBTQIPA+ students, staff and families in your school and community.
- Learn about the impacts of homophobia, transphobia, biphobia and transmisogyny on 2SLGBTQIPA+ students, and how these types of violence might lead to barriers in success for them, particularly for 2SLGBTQIPA+ students of colour or 2SLGBTQIPA+ students with disabilities.



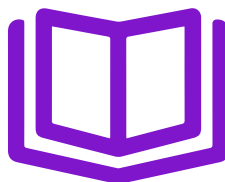
Tip #5: Respect confidentiality.

2SLGBTQIPA+ students need space where they can be their authentic selves without being scared that their personal stories and experiences will be shared with others without their consent. All students have the right to confidentiality and privacy, and when this right is breached for 2SLGBTQIPA+ students, it can be really dangerous.

It may be tempting to share knowledge of a student's 2SLGBTQIPA+ identity with other staff, other students or their parents, or you might just disclose something by mistake, but outing somebody without their consent can lead to harm. A 2SLGBTQIPA+ person may be choosing to keep things private for all sorts of reasons, and we need to trust that they know what's best for themselves.

Some things to consider when creating space for students to share with you, without breaching their confidentiality:

- Invite students to share about their identities and experiences in private ways, rather than in front of everyone.
- Don't assume that a student who has disclosed their 2SLGBTQIPA+ identity with you is comfortable with other people knowing this about them.
- Be careful when encouraging students to be open about their identity without them indicating they want to be; it's not always the safest choice, particularly for youth who may not have supportive families or communities.



Looking for more help?

If you're looking for even bigger ways to implement 2SLGBTQIPA+ inclusion in your classroom, don't worry. The Northern Mosaic Network is always willing to work with Northern educators and schools in creating safer places for 2SLGBTQIPA+ people.

Get in touch with us

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Find more resources

We encourage all NWT-based educators to review the GNWT's Guidelines for Ensuring LGBTQ2S+ Equity, Safety and Inclusion in Northwest Territories Schools.

www.ece.gov.nt.ca

We also encourage educators and teachers to learn more from Egale Canada, and the Canadian Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity.

www.egale.ca

www.ccgds-ccdgs.org

Additionally, there are curriculum resources and materials that complement the BC and Alberta curriculums available through The ARC Foundation's SOGI Education initiative.

www.sogieducation.org



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