

**Part II**

**Building a Culture  
of Democracy in the  
Music Classroom**



## 5 Safe Classrooms: A Fundamental Principle of Democratic Practice

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As current and future educators, one of the motivating factors in pursuing a career in education may have been our sense of safety and acceptance within our learning environment. Pedagogical theories abound with the creation of judgment-free zones in every aspect of education relating to individual expression, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and circumstance. Anti-bullying and creative oppression are current “buzz words” within the educational paradigm as teachers and administrators have come to realize that all students have worth and are capable when free from judgment. This is especially relevant to creative problem solving.

For the music educator, this is nothing new. Educators outside of the creative arts may have only recently experienced the role that unconditional acceptance of the individual plays within the learning space (Maslow 1993). The creative arts classroom, in particular the music classroom, by its very nature can allow the student to learn, create, and explore in a unique and often un-traditional manner. Unfortunately, in many instances, music students are faced with challenges that may be a direct result of their own gender identities as well as societal expectations of their exterior genders. As a greater understanding of gender identity continues to come to light, historic stereotypes are set aside, allowing each student to express him- or herself in the context of an individual and not a gender.

Certainly, national organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) have heightened the awareness of anti-bullying and verbal abuse toward the LGBTQQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning) community throughout our educational system. However, within the music classroom, students are constantly faced with issues that not only facilitate or challenge creative expression, but are also an extension of their own and/or society’s expectations of gender expression. As we encourage the individual to create, how do we, as educators, create an educational environment that supports each student and assures that he or she is free to make creative choices in the music classroom regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression? How do we ensure that our music room is a “Safe Space”?

The term “Safe Space” originated during the late twentieth century (Kenney 2001) and was coined as an expression of concern for the feminist movement,

in largely activist and pedagogical communities. As we progressed into the twenty-first century, the term has expanded in definition to include, as the primary focus, the LGBTQQ communities within our educational institutions. The familiar symbol of the pink triangle surrounded by a green circle may be placed on a classroom door to indicate the teacher's commitment to "keeping marginalized groups free from violence and harassment" (Roestone Collective 2014) as well as encouraging "a certain license to speak and act freely, form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance" (Kenney 2001). Members of marginalized communities should not experience fear within their educational space, rather they should feel safe in this very public environment. According to Tyner (2012, 12), "The idea of safety generally relies on an underlying threat of violence, particularly physical violence. Although in many respects it is considered pervasive in society, violence is often perceived not as something we continually engage with, but rather as enacted upon us in a way that interrupts daily life." Anxieties related to the potential intrusion of the unsafe reflect gendered power relations and can be understood as a product of "systematic structural violence rather than actual attacks" (Koskela 1997 as cited in Roestone Collective 2014). This need for safety in the classroom has been the prevalent belief in the United States since the 1960s, with educators understanding that safety is not only possible, but also the ethical obligation of teachers and school administrators (Barrett 2010). When we allow for creativity to take place in a space that is safe and free from the aforementioned "anxieties related to the potential intrusion of the unsafe," the classroom in this instance offers an invitation to interpret and respond to conflict (Koskela 1997 as cited in Roestone Collective 2014; Stengel 2010 as cited in Roestone Collective 2014).

### **Safety in Creative Expression**

Creativity is the mainstay of music as an art form, and students cannot give rise to creative expression in an oppressive environment. When we examine the plethora of definitions of creativity, there are seemingly two constants across the wide array of examples:

- 1 There is an intrinsic need for something to be produced; a by-product of the creative process, or a novel relational product (Rogers 1961).
- 2 The product must be new and not a variation on a pre-existing item, theory, or practice (Dowd 1989).

In terms of "safety," it is the creative process that we wish to foster within our music classrooms and, according to both Rogers (1961) and Dowd (1989), the key element in the creative process is "the uniqueness of the individual ... and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life" (Rogers 1961, 350).

Thus, in order to foster maximum creative engagement of the student, we as educators must nurture the individual and encourage the uniqueness of each, free from stereotypes and insensitive remarks and judgments. At

the 1952 Conference on Creativity held at Ohio State University, the noted American psychologist Carl Rogers was in attendance and, after taking notes from talks by some of the country's leading artists, writers, dancers, musicians, and educators, penned the article "Toward a Theory of Creativity" (1961), leading the way to a more humanistic approach not just to psychology, but to all aspects of interaction. He was particularly interested in how creativity and education came together via the symbiosis of the individual and his/her environment. Rogers opened the door for future researchers to focus upon the role of creativity in the uniqueness of the individual and the role of the individual within the creative process, most notably described in the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (see, for example, *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*). It was Rogers who first examined the role of external conditions and whether they foster and nourish the internal conditions of the individual. Rogers (1961, 349) noted that:

From the very nature of the inner conditions of creativity it is clear that they cannot be forced, but must be permitted to emerge. The farmer cannot make the germ develop and sprout from the seed; he can only supply the nurturing conditions which will permit the seed to develop its own potentialities. So it is with creativity.

LGBTQQ students and those from other marginalized groups may struggle with feeling safe in any classroom, especially one that encourages creative activity. Rogers identifies three psychological conditions that should be present in order to achieve what he calls "constructive creativity."

- 1 An Openness to Experience—According to Rogers, the individual who is open to experience allows for all stimuli to be freely relayed through the nervous system; unblocked by fears or any type of defensiveness. There is a perceived lack of influence upon the individual by societal stereotypes and opinions; the individual is free of the need for defenses when making creative decisions.
- 2 An Internal Locus of Evaluation—The creative person evaluates his creative process on how it affects him or her not on how it pleases or displeases others. "Am I pleased by what I have created?" The individual is not swayed by the opinions and judgments of others but seeks his or her own satisfaction.
- 3 The Ability to Toy with Elements and Concepts—There must be an element of spontaneity, allowing the individual to play with ideas, concepts, colors, shapes, relationships, etc. Through this exploration the individual is more apt to create the best product relative to his or her self rather than as a result of societal priorities (1961).

As much as he was interested in the internal factors that contributed to optimal creative conditions, Rogers noted two external factors that influenced the creative process. The following aspects describe the nature of a safe space that

promotes freedom of expression despite the student's sexual orientation, religious affiliation, special needs, or other marginalizing factors in the classroom:

### 1 Psychological Safety

- 1.1 Acceptance of the individual as of unconditional worth. When a facilitator, for example, a teacher, feels that a student is of intrinsic worth in his/her own right, regardless of any internal or external variables, he or she fosters the creativity of the individual and is "thus able to have an unconditional faith in him, no matter what his present state" (Rogers, 1961).
- 1.2 Providing a climate in which external evaluation is absent. Teachers/facilitators must be free from the formation of judgments based upon their own locus of evaluation and allow for the student to produce, experiment, and play in a space free from stereotypes, judgments, and societal expectations.
- 1.3. Understanding empathetically. This can be the greatest challenge for an educator. If we are able to say that we "accept" a student knowing nothing about him or her, then that is, in the words of Rogers, a "shallow victory." However, if we are able to say to the student, "I understand you empathetically, see you and what you are feeling and doing from your point of view, enter your private world and see it as it appears to you—and still accept you—then this is safety indeed" (Rogers 1961, 357).

2. **Psychological Freedom**—When a teacher or facilitator gives the student complete freedom of expression without fear of retribution, judgment, or insensitive comments, true creativity is fostered within the individual. It allows for the freedom to play, experiment, and grow.

A 1989 study led by David Harrington and Jeanne and Jack Block at the University of California at Berkeley utilized 106 families whose children were enrolled in two nursery schools associated with the University. Although the majority of the students came from two-parent households where the average educational level of each parent was greater than four years of college, the socio-economic range was wide, as was the racial and gender diversity of the study group. Their findings substantiated the theoretical work of Rogers, recording "significant correlations ... between all indices of Rogers-prescribed preschool child-rearing practices and indices of creative potential in both the preschool and early adolescent years are compatible with Rogers' theory" (Roestone Collective 1987, 851). Several empirical studies utilizing the Rogers theory for creativity (e.g., Chambers, 1964; Datta & Parloff, 1967; Dewing & Taft, 1973; Domino, 1979) and the current work of the Carl Rogers Symposium (led by his daughter, Natalie Rogers, PhD) in La Jolla, California, also corroborate the need for a "judgment-free" educational space, particularly when it comes to creating. With all professional research aside, how does one achieve a "Safe Classroom"?

What are some of the real-life, concrete resources and practices that aid in allowing the individual to be his or her true self in the creative music classroom? Regarding the climate of the music classroom, how do we as educators provide a space that is a safe haven from insensitive remarks or harassment based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, all of which can deter an individual from fully participating in the learning and creating process?

### **Creating a “Safe Space” Classroom for the LGBTQQ Music Student**

There are several steps an educator may take to provide a safe and welcoming space for LGBTQQ students. First, music teachers must learn the terminology. In order to be an empathetic educator and an accepting role model, a clear understanding of the current terminology for gender and sexual orientation is absolutely necessary. GLSEN gives the educator the following definitions:

- Sexual Orientation—The inner feelings of who we are attracted or oriented to sexually and emotionally.
- Gender Identity—How we identify ourselves in terms of our gender.
- Gender Expression—An individual’s physical characteristics, behaviors, and presentation that are linked, traditionally, to either masculinity or femininity, such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions.
- Gender Non-Conforming—An identity of a person who has gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal gender expectations.
- Transgender—An identity of a person whose gender identity is not aligned with the sex assigned at birth and/or whose gender expression is non-conforming.
- Gay—A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some members of the same sex.
- Lesbian—A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is female-identified and who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some other females.
- Bisexual—A sexual orientation and/or identity of a person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to some males and some females.
- Queer—An umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression that does not conform to heteronormative society.
- Questioning—An umbrella term used to describe a lack of clarity in sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- Androgynous—Having the characteristics or nature of both maleness and femaleness; neither specifically feminine nor masculine.

- Homophobia—Refers to an irrational fear of or aversion to homosexuality or lesbian, gay or bisexual people.
- Transphobia—The irrational fear or aversion to transgender people or those who are perceived to break or blur societal norms regarding gender identity or gender expression.
- Heterosexism—Applies to attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favor of heterosexual sexuality and relationships. It includes the presumption that everyone is heterosexual or that male/female attractions and relationships are the norm and therefore superior. It is the belief that everyone is or should be straight.

Second, music teachers need to learn the history of those who paved the way for LGBTQQ civil rights as a public movement. Harvey Milk began his political career in a very modest, unassuming way, by being urged by family and neighbors to run for a seat on the San Francisco City Council in the densely populated Castro section of the city. This area, along with the more widely known Haight-Asbury district, attracted socially conscious individuals to its streets, largely as a result of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. However, as Haight-Asbury was extremely popular with Jack Kerouac's "beatnik" generation, the neighboring Castro district became a destination for the country's emerging lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community.

Prior to the late 1960s, Castro was a neglected "suburb" of run-down, turn-of-the-century Victorian homes, apartment buildings, and boarded up businesses, a district with little or no political clout in San Francisco. The area's political capital quickly grew, as LGBTQQ businesses, social clubs, civil rights organizations, and political activist groups quickly found refuge within the safe confines of the Castro. By the mid-1970s, the popularity of living within the Castro district gave it enormous political influence within the city and, upon electing Harvey Milk as its supervisor, gave the Castro and, in effect, the nation's LGBTQQ movement, a fierce advocate in the war for equal rights.

Milk began an aggressive campaign to unify the political voice of the LGBTQQ community in San Francisco. He worked quickly and tirelessly to gather the community into areas of the city where even more political clout could be built. Areas such as Polk Gulch and the Tenderloin began to see a growing LGBTQQ community as word spread across the country of Milk's efforts to create a unified voice in the fight for equal rights and acceptance for all LGBTQQ people. As San Francisco's reputation as the nation's most accepting city for LGBTQQ people grew, so did the political influence of Harvey Milk. As city supervisor, he was the new "face" of all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. He was their voice in government, as well as a champion for the social and political causes of the bay area's disenfranchised gay community. Along with LGBTQQ-sympathetic mayor of San Francisco, George Moscone, the LGBTQQ community began to see itself as an accepted

and valued part of the San Francisco community. Milk wrote legislation calling for the end of anti-gay discrimination within the city, legislation that was quickly passed (although ardently fought for), making San Francisco the first city in the country to recognize its LGBTQQ community in legal terms (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,991276-1,00.html>). In the late fall of 1978, the “warrior” who created the visibility of the LGBTQQ community was assassinated along with Mayor Moscone; they were shot on the steps of the city hall of the city they so fervently fought to protect.

It was through Milk’s and Moscone’s efforts that the seeds of the LGBTQQ musical movement were sown. In early spring of 1979, Edward Weaver gathered with fellow members of the San Francisco gay community to protest the shooting death of Harvey Milk (Vivyan 2005). Weaver, an avid musician who loved to sing, gathered with friends who spontaneously broke into verses of “We Shall Overcome,” in reaction to the hate crime against one of their own. That impromptu gathering marked the beginning of the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus, an organization in which Edward Weaver played a vital role. Weaver worked diligently with other members of the San Francisco Gay Men’s chorus organization to solidify the structural foundation of this new musical community during the critical first months of its development (Vivyan 2005).

Third, music teachers must advocate for all students. There are many resources available for educators, students, and parents that deal with LGBTQQ support in the educational system. Materials such as publications from Safe Space, GLSEN, and PFLAG are all geared to help support students in need of reassurance. As an advocate of the LGBTQQ student, understand that advocacy means being an ally. Any counseling support, however, should be done by trained professionals in the confines of a counseling office, whether at school or in the greater community. Music teachers might display LGBTQQ supportive materials such as stickers and quotes from famous LGBTQQ icons and celebrate LGBTQQ History month in October and LGBTQQ Pride month in June. Including LGBTQQ history within the paradigm of other visible and vibrant cultures whose history is celebrated nationally gives legitimacy to the student in need of help and support. Other methods of advocacy may include the following:

- Informing other educators of your decision to make your classroom a safe space for all students. Visibility within your faculty will not only secure your space as safe, but may also help other faculty members decide to do the same with their educational spaces.
- Making no assumptions to students or parents that you know a student’s sexual orientation. Stereotypes are inaccurate. Your actions will demonstrate to your student and others that there is no “one way” someone should be.
- Using inclusive language when addressing students and their relationships. Do not assume that every boy has a girlfriend or every girl has

- a boyfriend; rather, address the person as a “partner” or “significant other” and not make an assumption of the student’s sexual orientation.
- Responding and reacting to negative and anti-LGBTQQ behavior. Don’t just “talk the talk.” Show students that you are serious about creating a space that will not tolerate poor and discriminatory behavior toward any human being. There is a point when issues that surround the LGBTQQ community are less about sexual orientation issues and more about human issues. Knowing that their teacher will not tolerate harassment and insensitivity goes a long way toward fostering creativity within the classroom.

Fourth, it is the teacher’s job to educate for acceptance. Students learn from what they see and often model the behavior of those they respect. As educators, we make no assumptions concerning the education of children at home; rather we can only control what takes place within our educational space. We have the ability and the responsibility to control the events within our classrooms and the information and lack of information available to students in our schools.

Teachers must teach respect and approach student’s education from a humanistic standpoint. Believe that your students are intrinsically good and that each and every one of them is special and unique. Teaching the basics of respect, tolerance of those who may be different from you and the societal norm, and empathy go a long way in producing not only quality students but also quality humans who accept differences.

In addition, creating a safe space within your classroom can be the start of creating a larger, school-wide safe space. Be the role model for other faculty and staff members and lead the discussions concerning safe space training and education. It is possible, however, that not all faculty and staff will jump on the safe space bandwagon with the vigor and enthusiasm that one would expect. It may become necessary to ask for administrative involvement in creating a comprehensive policy that creates a “safe school” as well as a safe classroom. Administrative support is vital in the education of a school’s faculty and staff as you advocate for professional development in working with LGBTQQ students and others of marginalized communities. Schools must utilize the vast amount of resources available, from guest speakers to webinars and TED talks, in order to help facilitate change within the building. It starts with your classroom, your creative space. From there, let the students carry the ideals with them throughout their day, influencing faculty and staff members.

Fifth, implement Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Harassment Policies. Studies published by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network show that broad-based, generic Anti-Bullying & Harassment policies within a classroom or building are not necessarily as effective as those that include a comprehensive policy addressing sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (see, for example, the 2013 National School Climate Survey results

[www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report\\_0.pdf](http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report_0.pdf)). According to the 2013 National School Climate Survey, schools with policies that specifically name the LGBTQQ community report far fewer issues with hostility and a much more supportive school climate. If your school does not have a policy that directly addresses harassment aimed at members of the LGBTQQ community, be a leader in the advocacy for change.

Sixth, it is important that music teachers promote non-discriminatory policies and practices. If your school does not have a policy of non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, you can work to educate the administration about this necessary and vital tool for the health and well-being of staff and students alike. Work with coaches and physical education teachers to create a “safe space” within their environment as well, as this can be the most traumatic experience for a student who is non-traditional in sexual orientation, expression, or identity. If your school utilizes a dress code, work to create a non-gender-specific uniform that is the same for all students, regardless of gender expression.

### **Creating the LGBTQQ Inclusive Music Curriculum**

By its very nature, music is a language that has the opportunity to bridge all communities of race, socio-economic status, gender, and religion, and we as educators utilize this language to instruct and inform our classes of other historic cultures and communities. Ethnic and world music, for instance, is very popular in the music classroom. Arrangers are creating music that utilizes authentic world musical instruments as well as world languages that can captivate and motivate even the most skeptical music students. We educators are encouraged by our administration and even text book publishers to incorporate a vast amount of non-traditional music in our instruction. However, when we examine the creative output of music representatives from the LGBTQQ community, it is not so readily available. Educators are not able to open their textbooks and teach music that is representative of marginalized gender communities. Chants, spirituals and folk songs abound in the elementary music text, but music that is indicative of the gender-based marginal communities does not seem to have its own section in the songbook. This should not hinder the inclusion of music representative of these communities; rather, we may have to look a bit harder to not only find it, but put it into a form of expression that is age appropriate and conducive to class instruction. By carefully choosing music that conveys a positive representation of all communities, we are able to legitimize the role of sexual orientation and gender identity and represent those communities in a positive and impactful manner for all students. In developing the music curriculum to be inclusive of the LGBTQQ community, an educator must have a basic working knowledge of the LGBTQQ musical movement and the resources available.

## The LGBTQQ Choral Movement

One of the finest resources for LGBTQQ music is the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, commonly known simply as GALA.

### *GALA Choruses Mission Statement*

([http://www.galachoruses.org/about/mission\\_vision.html](http://www.galachoruses.org/about/mission_vision.html) )

“We [GALA Choruses] believe

- in the power of music to change lives.
- that there is unity in diversity, that the diversity of our associates strengthens us all, and that all people are welcome to the stage.
- that we can sing together with respect and understanding, and in so doing, we offer community, hope, inspiration and healing.
- that every time a member chorus of GALA Choruses sings, the chorus commits a political act.
- that GALA Choruses can assist in strengthening and inspiring our member choruses.
- that striving for musical excellence strengthens the LGBTQQ choral movement.”

The community choral movement has been a popular form of musical expression within American society for hundreds of years. However, the formation of choral organizations labeling themselves as “Gay,” “Lesbian,” “LGBTQQ,” or “Transgender” is a relatively new designation within the musical realm. It wasn’t until the 1970s that members of the LGBTQQ community recognized the potential importance of such an active vehicle in transforming the lens through which mainstream America viewed their emerging society. These newly formed LGBTQQ choruses began to sprout up in a few large urban areas, cities where large numbers of gay men and lesbian women began to congregate during the first half of the twentieth century. The first cities to see these vehicles of change were Philadelphia, San Francisco, and New York City, establishing Anna Crusis Women’s Chorus, the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus, and the New York City Gay Men’s Chorus respectively.

These choruses were established to serve a multitude of purposes. They created a surrogate “family” for gay men and lesbian women, who were often turned away from their biological families, as well as safe spaces where gay men and lesbian women could feel free to create music and “generate strategies for resistance” (Kenney 2001). Choruses became a central force within the social life of the LGBTQQ individual, creating a feeling of acceptance and belonging that many heterosexual counterparts found in their community chorus of choice. Drawing upon past inspirations, such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, LGBTQQ choruses quickly used the power of music to reshape common misconceptions

of their community by mainstream American society. LGBTQQ choruses began focusing upon the non-threatening nature of music to reach out to non-marginalized communities in order to educate the populace on issues of LGBTQQ justice, civil rights, and tolerance. Education became the central focus early on, and many larger choruses began establishing smaller singing ensembles from within their ranks to perform music addressing these pertinent social issues.

The international Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA Choruses) is the governing organization for the LGBTQQ Choral movement. GALA Choruses lists 261 member choruses and over 6,000 individual members. Additionally, the Seattle Men's Chorus, with over 300 members, is considered to be the largest community chorus in North America; the New York City Gay Men's Chorus, with 286 members, ranks second (Sparks 2005). Understanding the history of the musical movement within the LGBTQQ community is paramount in selecting music for the classroom, and that history lies in the LGBTQQ community choral movement. However, these organizations are made up of adults largely over the age of 21. How can this be translated into an educational experience for younger students and be more impactful?

### **The LGBTQQ Youth Chorus**

In response to the growing need for specific information regarding the formation of LGBTQQ youth choruses, the New Initiatives Committee of GALA Chorus, Inc. set out to gather information from community youth choruses throughout the world. This information was collected and organized as a resource for a sponsor chorus in the development of a LGBTQQ youth chorus. Youth chorus development may be the result of a sponsor chorus entering into a joint partnership with a community social services organization (SSO), ideally one that has expertise in youth enrichment services. The resulting partnership not only provides youth chorus members with an inclusive community in which to share song, but also provides many counseling and outreach services. Such partnerships have been known to greatly reduce the degree of concern and skepticism that may accompany the formation of a youth organization by a LGBTQQ-identified sponsor chorus and serve to provide a wealth of resources for the educator and the greater community at large ([www.gaycenter.org/family-youth/youth](http://www.gaycenter.org/family-youth/youth)). Successful youth chorus programs have emerged in cities with well-established social services geared toward the LGBTQQ youth; the best examples are the Diverse Harmony Chorus in Seattle, Washington; Youth Pride Chorus in New York City, and Diverse City Youth Chorus in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Not all communities require the depth of counseling services that may accompany the collaboration with an SSO and may choose to make counseling an extension of the larger sponsor chorus. Additionally, many youth choruses form to integrate into the musical landscape of the community not

strictly as LGBTQQ organizations. Youth choruses may also be partnerships between sponsor choruses and the local schools' or Board of Educations' Gay-Straight Alliance; any social services would then fall under the guidance of the educational institution.

In short, there is no one way to form a youth chorus. Formation practices are as individual as the communities they represent. For communities that support youth choruses, the amount of resource materials geared toward the younger student is plentiful and often freely shared amongst educators and conductors/managers of the choruses. Many youth choruses have music specifically written for them to communicate the history of the LGBTQQ movement to their student singers and public audience, as well as deal with many of the complex issues surrounding the emerging LGBTQQ student. Societal pressures and messages of love and universal acceptance tend to be popular themes in music written and performed by the youth choruses of today, as well as popular artists who sing of acceptance and include messages of anti-bullying and harassment in their lyrics.

Youth choruses, like their adult counterparts, have mission statements that serve as the framework for their existence within their communities. As cited in the *GALA Choruses Youth Chorus Manual* (Hayes 2006), examples selected from current youth chorus mission statements are as follows:

- “The purpose of the youth chorus is to provide lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender youth and their allies with opportunities to develop Artistic Excellence and Leadership Skills; and to engage these youth in movements for social change through the use of their individual and collective voices and through their visibility as a performance group.”
- “The youth chorus fosters the acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer youth and their allies by empowering and inspiring its members and community through mentorship, education, and musical presentations. The youth chorus provides a welcoming, safe and creative arena for all youth, regardless of their financial status, housing situation, sexual orientation or gender identity.”
- “The mission of the youth chorus is to sing out and model acceptance by providing challenging and educational musical opportunities, an affirming social environment for youth of all sexual orientations, and a positive example of young people in society.”

LGBTQQ chorus mission statements tend to be “works in progress,” fluid documents that may change and adjust as time passes and needs of the singers change. These choruses serve not only as a musical outlet, but as a source of help for students who are beginning to find their way within the larger society and want to seek out those who can help them navigate societal pressures and inner struggles. These choruses also serve as a resource for the music classroom; be it the borrowing of music or having the chorus come into your school or classroom to perform and speak with your students.

This age of seemingly limitless technology makes these performances and talks available for any classroom in any location. If there is the desire to integrate the LGBTQQ youth chorus into your curriculum, there is most certainly a way to accomplish it. Information on LGBTQQ youth choruses and their larger counterparts may be found on the GALA Choruses website at [www.galachoruses.org/resource-center/youth](http://www.galachoruses.org/resource-center/youth) or at the website of your closest GALA Chorus. For a list of GALA Choruses, see [www.galachoruses.org/membership/member-directory](http://www.galachoruses.org/membership/member-directory).

Specific music written to convey the sentiment of acceptance and direct issues surrounding same-sex relationships can also be used as teaching opportunities for students. GALA Choruses can serve as a resource for specific titles and publishers of music geared to educate students on issues surrounding gender identity/expression and sexual orientation. Yelton Rhodes Music Publishers ([www.yrmusic.com](http://www.yrmusic.com)) specializes in music with lyrics that address the complexities of gender issues and highlight LGBT composers who are currently working to “build bridges through song.” Yelton Rhodes Music website allows the educator to directly sample songs and read lyrics for hundreds of choral works that speak to the LGBTQQ community in a variety of ways.

Of all music written for the education of the young in understanding sexual orientation issues, one of the most enduring songs is certainly “Everything Possible,” a work written by Fred Small and sung by every member chorus of the GALA network over the past 30 years. The song is beautiful in its simplicity and message, being sung by a parent to his or her child:

We have cleared off the table, the leftovers saved,  
Washed the dishes and put them away  
I have told you a story and tucked you in tight  
At the end of your knockabout day  
As the moon sets its sails to carry you to sleep  
Over the midnight sea  
I will sing you a song no one sang to me  
May it keep you good company.

Chorus:

You can be anybody you want to be,  
You can love whomever you will  
You can travel any country where your heart leads  
And know I will love you still  
You can live by yourself, you can gather friends around,  
You can choose one special one  
And the only measure of your words and your deeds  
Will be the love you leave behind when you're done.

Verse:

There are girls who grow up strong and bold  
There are boys quiet and kind

Some race on ahead, some follow behind  
Some go in their own way and time  
Some women love women, some men love men  
Some raise children, some never do  
You can dream all the day never reaching the end  
Of everything possible for you.

Verse:

Don't be rattled by names, by taunts, by games  
But seek out spirits true  
If you give your friends the best part of yourself  
They will give the same back to you.

Repeat Chorus

(Words and Music by Fred Small. Copyright 1983 Pine Barrens Music  
BMI)

Choruses and solo singers alike have used this song in a variety of ways to help educate the non-marginalized communities that it is OK to grow up and be yourself, that you will be loved unquestionably. Utilization of such songs in the music classroom can not only validate the safe space of the music room, it can also become a jumping-off point for discussion, should there be a need for such discourse. Songs such as "Everything Possible" can be located by searching the wide array of recordings by LGBTQ choruses and/or by contacting the GALA Choruses office directly via their website at [www.galachoruses.org](http://www.galachoruses.org). As a non-profit, they seek to help anyone wishing to learn about LGBTQ music and welcome any and all inquiries into suggestions for educational materials for the music classroom.

Democratic classrooms are inclusive and accessible to all students. Awareness and use of appropriate terminology, understanding the cultural history of the LGBTQ community, and introducing students to LGBTQ role models and their music are all ways to make students with gender identity/expression and/or sexual orientation issues feel welcome in the music classroom. Resources are readily available to help any educator create a safe space for all students. Music has the ability to reach all students regardless of gender identity/sexual orientation or any other form of marginalization. A music classroom has the ability to transform all students, including those who find themselves questioning their sexual identity and/or expression.

## References

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