



Welcoming Gender Diversity in Schools and Classrooms

Moving beyond exceptional situations to support trans students every day

In reference to the article *The Gender-Friendly Classroom: Practical advice for teachers on welcoming gender diversity every day*

By Dr. Lee Airton

DISCUSSION LEADER CHEAT SHEET: 3 key points from the article

5 minutes

AIM: TO INTRODUCE THE SESSION AND TODAY'S THEME:

WELCOMING GENDER DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS

- 1** School districts tend to interpret their responsibilities in relation to gender diversity as a set of actions triggered by the presence of an out or openly self-identifying transgender student who is in an exceptional situation, usually either crisis or transition. However, responding to the exceptional doesn't mean changing business as usual or acknowledging that the status quo may contribute to the problems facing transgender and gender-diverse students. Schools need to shift towards an every day practice mindset where teachers welcome gender diversity in classrooms where there is no situation of crisis or transition.
- 2** Fostering a 'gender-friendly' classroom means that all of the ways that your students "do gender" are welcomed and expected, where no one is called out for their gender expression, and where no one is told by others that they are not who they are (i.e. their gender identity). This can be achieved by: (1) teaching like it's a given that all of your students' relationships with gender are ambivalent and will change over time; and (2) teaching like you already have transgender-spectrum students, or students with transgender-spectrum friends, family or loved ones, in your classroom.
- 3** Four every day best practices include: (1) creating moments of dissonance where students are challenged to think critically about rigid gender generalizations and using binary gender pronouns (he or she); (2) making and modelling good mistakes, such as correcting yourself when you use the wrong pronoun for someone whose pronoun you do know or who is known to your students; (3) acknowledging and challenging your gender-unfriendly curriculum resources, such as asking students why a particular storybook only shows gender-conforming girls and boys; and (4) coming out yourself as a person with a gender by sharing your pronouns, even as a non-transgender person.

DISCUSS

20 minutes

AIM: TO GET EVERYONE SHARING THEIR THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

The discussion leader can choose 2 questions from the list below or integrate questions of their own.

- ❓ The author states that if there are no out transgender students at your school, it doesn't mean that they are not there; rather, it means that they cannot come out and live who they are because their school may not be a place of trust or safety. **Have you ever felt this way – that there were no trans-spectrum students in your school, and what are your reactions to this statement as it applies to your own classroom or school community?**
- ❓ The author suggests that educators can encourage their students to rethink rigid gender generalizations by sharing a fact that they know to be real and true for many people, such as saying things like, “I don't know if getting married in a big frilly wedding dress is for me,” or “When my friend Peter and his wife had their first baby, Peter stayed home when his wife went back to work and he really enjoyed it.” **What are some other facts that you know to be real and true for many people that you could share with your students? Take turns sharing examples among the group.**
- ❓ **Have you ever come out to your students as a person with a gender, such as by introducing yourself on the first day of class by saying, “Hi there, I'm [title/name] and my pronouns are [x]”?** If yes, how did it go and how did they react? If not, how do you think your students would react and how would you address their possible reactions?

DO IT

15 minutes

AIM: TO UNDERSTAND WAYS TO CHALLENGE GENDER-UNFRIENDLY CURRICULUM RESOURCES

Discussion leader instructions

In small groups (2-3), discuss the following question:

***Have you ever applied unexpected pronouns to characters in books or images of people in curriculum resources, or used questioning to get your students to rethink rigid generalizations about gender?** If yes, give an example and describe how it went. If not, would you consider doing this in the future? What is a lesson that you're currently working on now with your students and how could you integrate critical thinking about gender? Give an example.*

Share back and display

After time for discussion, invite each group to share recommendations and insights.