



## CHAPTER 3

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# Teaching Our Teachers: Trans\* and Gender Education in Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

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Queer Literacy Framework Principles:

2. Understands gender as a construct that has and continues to be affected by intersecting factors (e.g. social, historical, material, cultural, economic and religious); and,
6. Engages in ongoing critique of how gender norms are reinforced in literature, media, technology, art, history, science, math, and so on.

When I was an elementary school teacher, one of my colleagues had a student in his classroom who was born as a biological male. This child wore pink, princess crowns, and loved to play with the girls. He even told his teacher that when he grew up he was going to be a woman and a mommy. I remember the discussions in the teachers' room about this child. Colleagues asked the teacher how he "dealt" with the issue. They were shocked that a parent would "let" their child dress and act that way. Other teachers blatantly made fun of the child. I was appalled by the

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discussion. At the time, I did not have the understanding of terms such as trans\*, gender nonconforming, or gender creative, but I knew that I had never addressed these types of gender issues in my teacher preparation program. The gender issues we addressed involved making sure classrooms were equitable for both boys and girls. We had never discussed gender existing outside the gender binary.

Since then, I have made addressing issues of homophobia and transphobia a component of all of my teacher preparation courses, whether it is an introduction to education course, a social studies methods course, or a multicultural education course for elementary or middle school preservice teachers. As a cisgender, heterosexual woman who has a history and belief system that had demonstrated care that has and continues to recognize and affirm all identities in my courses, I actually thought that I was doing a pretty decent job including and teaching about these topics. In fact, over the past several weeks, I have watched many of my former teacher preparation students comment about how Caitlyn Jenner's "coming out" as a transgender woman has played out in social media. Most of the responses I have seen across social media have been positive, yet at the same time, I have seen several posts from former students of mine asking questions as to why anyone should care about Caitlyn's gender identity. It appears I have missed the mark as a teacher educator. My former students, most of whom are now teachers employed in Pre-K-8 public schools, have failed to see the consequences of why understanding gender identity and the needs of trans\* and gender creative youth is important.

With this book's focus on recognizing, teaching, and affirming trans\* and gender creative youth, it is critical to not only discuss the experiences of these students in schools and the specific practices teachers can employ to make school spaces more inclusive, but to also include a discussion on the preparation of teachers to work with these amazing populations of youth. In this chapter, I present a discussion of the experiences of trans\* youth in schools, followed by an analysis of two studies that address preservice and practicing teachers' sense of self-efficacy in working with and working for trans\* and gender creative youth, and end with a discussion of the ways in which queer inclusive pedagogies can be infused into the teacher preparation classroom. The goal is to avoid situations such as the two presented above and to make all spaces trans\* inclusive spaces.

## STATE OF SCHOOLS FOR TRANS\* AND GENDER CREATIVE YOUTH

The biennial GLSEN report (Kosciw et al. 2014) indicates some startling realities for trans\* and gender creative youth. Out of the 7,898 students between the ages of 13 and 21 surveyed:

- 37.8% felt unsafe because of their gender expression.
- 56.4% heard negative remarks about gender expression (not acting “masculine enough” or “feminine enough”) frequently or often.
- 33.1% heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people, like “tranny” or “he/she,” frequently or often.
- 55.5% reported hearing negative remarks about gender expression from teachers or other school staff.
- 55.2% were verbally harassed (e.g. called names or threatened) in the past year because of their gender expression.
- 22.7% were physically harassed (e.g. pushed or shoved) in the past year because of their gender expression.
- 11.4% were physically assaulted (e.g. punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) in the past year because of their gender expression.

Additionally, most school policies and curricula are not inclusive for trans\* youth.

- 42.2% of transgender students had been prevented from using their preferred name (10.8% of LGBT students overall).
- 59.2% of transgender students had been required to use a bathroom or locker room of their legal sex (18.7% of students overall).
- 31.6% of transgender students had been prevented from wearing clothes considered inappropriate based on their legal sex (19.2% of students overall) (Kosciw et al. 2014).

These experiences in schools can lead to a number of negative effects for trans\* and gender creative youth, including isolation from friends and family (Beam 2007), drug and/or alcohol use and addiction (Beam 2007; Holmes and Cahill 2004), low self-esteem (Beam 2007), lack of engagement in school (Holmes and Cahill 2004; Kosciw et al. 2010, 2012, 2014) academic failure (Kosciw et al. 2010, 2012, 2014), fighting (Beam 2007), and suicide (Ybarra et al. 2014).

As Miller discusses in Chap. 2 of this book, using a Queer Literacy Framework (QLF) is essential because it legitimizes all students, regardless of their (a)gender, and it can begin to combat the negative experiences that trans\* students experience in schools. In order for teachers to be able to engage in a QLF in their classrooms, they must be trained to do so effectively so that their students can “as individuals leave schools [and] can remain autonomous and embodied by an internalized safety as they navigate their life pathways” (Miller 2015, pp. 42–43). Not only do teachers need this training as a part of their teacher education and professional development opportunities, but teachers also need to have self-efficacy in order to effectively implement a QLF pedagogy in their classrooms.

### SELF-EFFICACY IN WORKING WITH TRANS\* AND GENDER CREATIVE YOUTH

Teacher efficacy can be defined as a teacher’s belief in his or her ability to accomplish a specific teaching task (Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998). The concept of teacher efficacy can be applied to teaching specific content (e.g. teaching fractions, covering the civil war, etc.), from classroom management practices, to working with specific populations of students. Teachers’ sense of self-efficacy in the different areas of classroom instruction, interactions with students, and classroom management impacts why and how they engage in the various elements of classroom life (Friedman and Kass 2002). These topics are reflected by two larger studies which focused on teachers’ sense of their own ability to work with and work for LGBTQ students and their families (Brant 2014; Brant and Tyson, In Press).

As a part of the larger studies, prompts were focused specifically on teachers’ sense of self-efficacy when working with and working for trans\* and gender creative youth using Likert-style items. Study one (Brant 2014) surveyed 69 preservice teachers at a large Mid-Western institution. This study focused on the preservice teachers’ understanding of terms relevant to multicultural education and LGBTQ issues in addition to their sense of self-efficacy in working with and working for LGBTQ youth and families. Specifically, the Likert prompts relating to (a)gender in this study were as follows:

- I can work with gender nonconforming, transgender, or queer students.

- I can work with gender nonconforming, transgender, or queer parents.
- I can plan instructional activities to reduce prejudice about gender nonconforming, transgender, or queer people in my current or future classroom.
- I can identify biases against gender nonconforming, transgender, or queer people in commercial materials used in teaching.
- I can identify school practices that may be harmful for those who identify as gender nonconforming, transgender, or queer.

The participants in this study were preservice teachers in Early Childhood, Middle Childhood Education, Physical Education, and Art Education.<sup>1</sup> The preservice teachers ranged in age from 21 to 50, with an average age of 26, and a median age of 23. Two-thirds of these participants were in the ages of 21 and 25. The surveys in study one were administered in person during the participants' student teaching seminar.

Study two (Brant and Tyson, under review) grew out of study one and surveyed a smaller sample (48 participants). Since study one was a dissertation covering a variety of topics, study two's focus was solely on teachers' sense of self-efficacy in working with and working for LGBTQ students and families. The Likert prompts used in study two discussed in this chapter include:

- I can teach students who are gender nonconforming.
- I can teach students who are transgender.
- I can work with parents/caregivers who are gender nonconforming.
- I can work with parents/caregivers who are transgender.
- I can implement instructional activities to reduce prejudice about gender nonconforming people.
- I can implement instructional activities to reduce prejudice about transgender people.
- I can identify commercial materials, textbooks, and curriculum with biases against transgender people.
- I can identify commercial materials, textbooks, and curriculum with biases against gender nonconforming people.
- I can identify school practices and/or policies that may be harmful for those who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming.

The participants in study two ranged in age from 21 to 63 years, with an average of 28 and a median age of 25. The participants came from a total of 17 states. When this project was initially conceived, we wanted to only survey preservice and novice (5 years or less) teachers. We received a number of responses from more seasoned teachers, and we decided to deepen the scope of our data to include them as well.

In this chapter, I provide the data from the two studies relevant to the participants' sense of self-efficacy in various (a)gender issues. The self-efficacy prompts from the two studies addressed the following topics:

1. Working with trans\* and gender creative students;
2. Working with trans\* and gender creative parents and guardians;
3. Implementing instructional activities to reduce prejudice about trans\* and gender creative individuals;
4. Identifying commercial materials, textbooks, and curricula with biases against trans\* and gender creative individuals; and
5. Identifying school practices and/or policies that may be harmful for those who identify as trans\* or gender creative.

Taken together, the two studies yielded results that are especially relevant for teacher educators when addressing gender issues in their teacher preparation coursework or within professional development for teachers. The first two Likert Scale prompts assessed participants' self-efficacy in working with trans\* and gender creative parents and/or guardians. Some of the examples from the Likert Scale prompts included ratings on *I can work with transgender and gender nonconforming students* and *I can work with transgender and gender nonconforming parents and/or guardians*. In both studies, the participants reported a high sense of self-efficacy in working with trans\* youth as well as working with trans\* parents. Results from study one (69 preservice teachers) demonstrated that 84% of respondents reported a high sense of self-efficacy (e.g. *I am confident I could do this, or believe that I could do this reasonably well, if I had time to prepare*) in working with students and 90% demonstrated readiness to work with parents and guardians. For the participants in study two (48 preservice and in-service teachers), 87% reported a high sense of self-efficacy in working with students and 89% in working work parents and guardians. These findings are very encouraging because teachers should be comfortable working with all their students as well as with different types of parents and guardians. When individuals have a high sense of self-efficacy while

working with trans\* and gender creative youth, it provides a gateway for teachers to be able to enact change in their classrooms about topics related to (a)gender issues.

Regardless of participants' self-efficacy in working with trans\* youth, it is critical that teacher preparation and professional development provide preservice and in-service teachers with information regarding the realities of the experiences of trans\* and gender creative youth. Teachers need to understand how this group of students may experience schools in ways that are different from their cisgender and LGB peers. The goal is to prepare teachers to establish positive, productive relationships with their trans\* and gender creative students. Most importantly, teachers need to understand that gender is a social construction and that for many individuals gender identity and gender expression are fluid and flexible (Miller 2015). Teachers need to support the students in their classroom regardless of their gender identity or expression within both the formal classroom setting and the school community at large.

In the final three Likert Scale prompts, there was a shift in the self-efficacy from predominantly high self-efficacy (e.g. *I am confident I could do this*, or *I believe that I could do this reasonably well, if I had time to prepare*) to a mix of both high and medium self-efficacy. The third prompt assessed the participants self-efficacy in engaging in lessons that reduce (a)gender prejudice (e.g. *I can implement instructional activities to reduce prejudice about those who are trans\* or gender nonconforming*). In study one (69 preservice teachers), 80% of participants reported a high sense of self-efficacy, and 15% a medium sense of self-efficacy. In study two (48 preservice and in-service teachers), 50% reported having a high sense of self-efficacy, and 44% reported a medium sense of self-efficacy. It is interesting that there is such a significant discrepancy between the two studies. There are several reasons why this may have occurred. The first may be that study one was administered face-to-face with the participants' professor present. While they were told that their answers would not be shared with their instructor, many of them may have wanted to please them or me. Another difference may be attributed that study two involved in-service teachers. Given the realities of their particular contexts, they may feel less able to do this effectively than those who are still preparing to become teachers.

Despite these differences in self-efficacy, these results have some clear implications for what teachers need to be prepared to do in their classrooms. They need to explore their own biases and prejudices about trans\* and gender creative students, understand the ways in which this prejudice

manifests itself in society, and be given the tools about how to address these issues with Pre-K-12 students. The acceptance of all individuals, regardless of gender identity and gender expression, can be addressed in schools at any grade level; the ways in which this is done, though, will vary. Teachers need to learn developmentally appropriate ways to do so. As Miller (2015) suggests, drawing on the QLF as a pedagogical tool for recognizing, teaching, and affirming equality across all categories of (a)gender, teachers have endless potential to impact the contexts which their students will inhabit.

The fourth Likert prompt in the study, *How can I can identify commercial materials, textbooks, and curriculum with biases against transgender people*, assessed self-efficacy in identifying bias in commercial materials, textbooks, and curriculum against trans\* and gender creative individuals. In study one (69 preservice teachers), 81% reported a high sense of self-efficacy (e.g. *I am confident I could do this*) and 13% reported a medium sense of self-efficacy (e.g. *I could probably do this*). In study two (48 preservice and in-service teachers), 47%, reported a high sense of self-efficacy, and 38% reported a medium sense of self-efficacy. Results from these findings clearly indicate that teacher preparation and professional development programs should be in place to help teachers recognize the ways in which trans\* and gender creative individuals can be marginalized within the materials mass produced for schools. Once individuals understand their own and others' biases and prejudice toward trans\* and gender creative individuals, they can then begin to unlearn the ways that biases and prejudices can manifest themselves in the curriculum. Teachers who are taught to recognize that when trans\* and gender creative youths' identities are absent in textbooks and commercial teaching materials (Miller 2015), they are vulnerabilized from experiencing both internal and external recognition (Miller, this volume, Chap. 1), and they are susceptible to becoming part of the statistics revealed by GLSEN (2014).

The final Likert prompt, *How can I identify school practices and/or policies that may be harmful for those who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming*, measured self-efficacy in identifying school practices and/or policies that may be harmful for those who identify as trans\* or gender creative. The findings revealed a large discrepancy between the two studies for this prompt. In study one, 82% of the 69 preservice teachers reported a high sense of self-efficacy and 13% reported a medium sense of self-efficacy, while for study two, 66% of the 48 preservice and in-service teachers reported a high sense of self-efficacy and 30% reported a medium



sense of self-efficacy. These findings indicate that the first step in practicing teachers' classroom is to make teachers aware of the ways in which school practices and policies can be harmful to trans\* and gender creative youth. In fact, the study indicates that schools need to have antibullying and harassment policies enumerating language that includes protection for trans\* and gender creative youth. Such a policy will permit teachers and schools to take action when students are discriminated against. Secondly, findings from the study indicate that schools must acknowledge trans\* and gender creative students, allow them to go by their chosen names, and use bathrooms or locker rooms that reflect their gender identities. Lastly, findings indicate that dress codes need to be revised so trans\* and gender creative youth can dress in the way that reflects their chosen gender expression and identity.

While these statistics are in fact quite encouraging such that for almost every Likert prompt, over 90% of the participants had either a high or medium self-efficacy, this is not yet enough. For change to be truly sustained, 100% of all teachers should have a high sense of self-efficacy in all of the five areas indicated by the two studies. The way to do this is *through* teacher education, both during the teacher preparation process and well as professional development opportunities for in-service teachers. The remainder of this chapter will focus on a method to teach preservice teachers about trans\* and gender issues and will conclude with an example of how the QLF can be applied to teaching teachers about these important issues.

## TRANS\* INCLUSION IN THE TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Just as teacher education programs are taking up issues of race, ethnicity, and class as a part of the teacher preparation process, issues of sexuality and gender should be addressed across all content areas as well. It is clear, from the aforementioned statistics, that trans\*, gender creative, and (a)gender youth have difficulties in schools and their teachers and school administrators must take action. Such preparation should begin in the teacher preparation classroom and be scaffolded from the first class taken and then across all subsequent coursework. This raises the following questions: Are trans\* and other related gender issues being addressed in teacher education programs? If so, how are they addressed?

Issues of heterosexuality and homophobia are topics that are minimized or omitted from multicultural teacher education coursework (Gorski et al. 2013) and textbooks (Gorski 2009; Macgillibray and Jennings 2008; Sherwin and Jennings 2006). In fact, Gorski, David, and Reiter reported that during an average of 45 hours of college level instructions, LGBTQ issues were only addressed for 1.7 hours. Even if that time were split equally between issues of gender and sexuality, less than an hour would likely be focused on trans\*, gender expression, and gender identity issues. These studies, spanning the past 9 years, show that issues of (a)gender are not being addressed for the amount of time they could be or should be.

### *Using a QLF in Teacher Preparation Programs*

Throughout this chapter, I have provided statistics that demonstrate the importance of the preparedness for both pre- and in-service teachers and professional development to address trans\* and gender creative issues in the classroom and schools writ large. In this section, I apply the QLF and two salient principles to this task. More specifically, this lesson will focus on the following QLF principles:

- Principle 2: Understands gender as a construct that has and continues to be affected by intersecting factors (e.g. social, historical, material, cultural, economic, and religious)
- Principle 6: Engages in ongoing critique of how gender norms are reinforced in literature, media, technology, art, history, science, math, and so on.

Addressing these principles as a part of a teacher preparation program can ostensibly enable preservice teachers to see the ways in which gender not only impacts them, but also their future classroom students.

### *Rationale*

In my ongoing work as a preservice teacher educator, I find that discussing issues of sexuality and gender is more difficult for my students than talking about race or class. When I bring up (a)gender in my college classrooms, I experience resistance from my students for a number of reasons. Many students argue that there are only two genders, male and female and believe that gender is immutable. They also argue that these

“controversial” topics are best left for parents to address at home and fear being fired if they take up these “controversial” issues. They also proffer that it is inappropriate to address these issues in early childhood classrooms because it will confuse children about their own gender identity, and that there is no need for them to address these types of issues because they do not have students in their classes that identify as trans\*, gender creative, or (a)gender. In my work with my students, I try to acknowledge and validate their reservations, but push them further to understand why addressing these topics is so critical, not only for trans\* youth but for their cisgender peers.

### *Lesson*

To address these two principles in a teacher preparation classroom, just as in a Pre-K-12 classroom, requires a great deal of scaffolding. The figures below show the activities teacher educators can engage in with their pre- and in-service teachers, and critical questions they can be asking along with those activities. First, in an attempt to help preservice teachers understand the ways in which gender is socially constructed, they can look at how the gender norms have changed over the years. We look at sources such as television shows, movies, and magazines. I engage the students in critical discussion about what changes have occurred, but also why those changes occurred (see Fig. 3.1).

My goal is to help them understand that our gender expectations are based on society and culture. I also work with them to recognize the ways in which these gender roles are reinforced through the media. I find it especially effective to look at holiday toy catalogs and commercials from some of the major retailers. They are often shocked to see how gendered they are. From there, I ask the students to go to one of their local stores and walk down the toy aisles and baby aisles. Once again, students return to the teacher preparation classroom surprised at the sharp divide between “boy” toys and clothes and “girl” toys and clothes. Figure 3.2 presents some of the questions I ask my students.

Once the preservice teachers have a strong understanding about the ways in which society creates and reinforces gender roles and norms, we can then have a serious discussion about the ways in which trans\*, gender creative, and (a)gender students experience the classroom and the world. One of the ways that I find effective in discussing these types of issues with my students is through the use of children’s literature (see [Appendix](#)),

<b>Critical Questions When Analyzing Gender Norms Over the Years</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are men/women and boys/girls represented?</li> <li>• What things can someone do/not do because of his or her gender during this time period?</li> <li>• How were gender norms policed/enforced?</li> <li>• What were the consequences of someone not meeting gender norms/expectations?</li> <li>• How and why have things changed?</li> <li>• What are/were the consequences of things changing?</li> <li>• How have those changes brought us to where we are today?</li> </ul>

**Fig. 3.1** Critical questions when analyzing gender norms over the years

<b>Critical Questions For Analysis of Children’s Clothing &amp; Toys</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What toys are being specifically marketed to girls? Boys? How do you know?</li> <li>• Why are those toys being marketed in that way?</li> <li>• What did you notice about the ways that stores lay out gendered clothing and toys for children?</li> <li>• What happens in schools and society when boys play with “girl” toys or girls play with “boy” toys?</li> <li>• Is there a difference in how they are treated? Why do you think this is?</li> <li>• What is problematic about the ways in which these stores are laid out of for children who may not identify with their assigned gender?</li> </ul>

**Fig. 3.2** Critical questions for analysis of children’s clothing and toys

regardless of discipline or preservice grade level focus. There are a growing number of children's picture books, in particular, that address trans\* and gender creative youth. After reading the books to the class, I have my students react both as a listener/reader and as a teacher. I begin to encourage them to think about whether they would use the book in their classroom and how they would do so. We discuss the benefits of using texts such as these in their classroom for both trans\* youth and their cisgender peers. Often, during these discussions I am able to let the students discuss and debate the issues on their own.

### *Assessment*

While it is difficult, as a teacher educator, to know which of my students will engage in a QLF in their classrooms, I can, by the end of the semester, have a deeper awareness about who is open to engaging in socially just pedagogies. This is most evidenced when I let the students talk and debate issues with one another. It is always interesting to see who becomes quiet during these discussions and who is willing to stand up for trans\* kids against their peers.

### TO CONCLUDE OR NOT TO CONCLUDE

The need for the inclusion of trans\* issues in Pre-K-12 classrooms is critical for trans\* and cisgender youth alike. In order for teachers to engage in a QLF in their classrooms they must have the appropriate amount of self-efficacy to do so. Supporting pre-and in-service teachers, and school personnel to develop the dispositions that can travel with them across contexts and across space and time can truly impact the future and normalization for trans\* and gender creative youth to live life without fear of harassment or negative self-worth. Every human is entitled to the same inalienable rights and as Miller (this volume, Chap. 2) suggests, a life worthy of dignity and respect. Teacher education and professional development must challenge the recognition gap (Miller, this volume, Chap. 1) that is still so pervasive. I, however, am confident, that change is in the making and as changes are made, we can move ourselves into more inclusive spaces for all. The teacher preparation program is the *key place* to help trans\* and gender creative youth become recognized and its efficacy can and will make schools a safe and inclusive space for all.

## APPENDIX

*Children's Picture Books Addressing (A)Gender Topics*

dePaola, T. (1979). *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* (Reissue edition). S.l.: HMH Books for Young Readers.

Ewert, M. (2008). *10,000 dresses*. New York: Triangle Square.

Fierstein, H. (2005). *The sissy duckling*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Herthel, J., & Jennings, J. (2014). *I am Jazz*. New York, New York: Dial Books.

Hoffman, S., & Hoffman, I. (2014). *Jacob's new dress*. Chicago, Illinois: Albert Whitman & Company.

Kilodavis, C. (2010). *My princess boy* (1 edition). New York: Aladdin.

\*List adapted from:

<http://www.therainbowtimesmass.com/2013/03/21/transgender-parent-friendly-picture-books-for-young-children/> & [https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/20314.Transgender\\_Friendly\\_Young\\_Children\\_s\\_Books\\_](https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/20314.Transgender_Friendly_Young_Children_s_Books_)

## NOTES

1. Each study cited was approved by IRB.

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