

An Introduction to Creating Gender Inclusive Classrooms

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Overview:

The purpose of this professional resource is to provide an introduction for educators on the gender spectrum and how to create gender inclusive classrooms for students with a variety of gender identities. It is important for all staff members to recognize and respect students regardless of their gender identify in order to foster learning and social emotional development. All students should feel comfortable expressing their gender identity and should always feel safe at school among their teachers and peers.

Students who are transgender and gender-expansive are among schools' most vulnerable youth, experiencing bullying and harassment at disproportionately high levels (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009). The victimization that occurs at school puts transgender and gender-expansive students at risk for negative mental health outcomes and reduced academic success (Greytak et al., 2009; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010). In order to create a safe and welcoming environment for all students, this handout is provided as an introduction to how you can integrate gender inclusion into your school environment and planned curriculum.



Goals:

- ***Educate staff to understand the complexity of gender and prevent bullying or harassment***
- ***Provide information on gender terminology and gender basics including the Gender Spectrum***
- ***Discuss the concept of a gender inclusive classroom and provide example lessons***
- ***Create a school environment of support and normalize gender diversity***
- ***Provide additional resources to continue education on gender inclusion***

“We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion.”
-Max de Pree

GENDER TERMINOLOGY/DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are intended to be the first step in helping educators understand gender diversity. It must be noted that students may or may not use these terms to describe themselves and their individual perspective should be considered. Definitions were gathered from genderspectrum.org, The National Association of School Psychologists, and Montgomery County Public Schools (2015).

The Gender Spectrum:

Western culture has come to view gender as a binary concept, with two rigidly fixed options: male or female, both grounded in a person’s physical anatomy. Rather than just two distinct boxes, the biology of gender, gender expression, and gender identity intersect to create a range of possibilities. The gender spectrum represents a more authentic model of the diversity of human gender. The spectrum allows for anyone whose experiences do not narrowly fit into binary choices such as man/woman, feminine/masculine or straight/gay.



Biological/Anatomical Sex- The sex designation recorded on an infant’s birth certificate associated with chromosomes, hormones and internal organs and other structures related to reproduction.

Gender- A socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender expectations and norms can change over time and are different between cultures. It is often used synonymously and incorrectly with sex. However, sex refers to physical/biological characteristics and gender refers to social and emotional attributes.

Gender Role- The norms that are created by a society that identify the set of roles, activities, expectations, rules, and behaviors that are connected with being female or male (e.g. masculine vs. feminine). Gender roles may differ culture to culture and may change over time.

Gender Identity- One’s innermost core concept of self which can include male, female, a blend of both or neither, and many more possibilities. It is how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves.

Gender Expression- Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and other forms of representation.

Gender Fluidity- A wider and more flexible range of gender expression or identity, with interests and behaviors that may fluctuate and change over time.

Gender-Expansive- An umbrella term used for individuals that broaden their own culture's commonly held definitions of gender, including expectations for its expression, identities, roles, and/or other perceived gender norms. This includes those who identify as transgender, as well as anyone else whose gender in some way is seen to be stretching the surrounding society's notions of gender.

Gender-Nonconforming- A term for people whose gender expression differs from conventional or stereotypical expectations, such as "feminine" boys, "masculine" girls, and those whose gender expression is androgynous. This includes people who identify outside traditional gender categories or identify as two or more genders. Other terms that can have similar meanings include "gender diverse" or "gender expansive."

Agender- Without a gender (nongendered, genderless)

Transgender- A term used to describe a person whose gender identity or expression is different from stereotypical gender norms.

Genderqueer- A term to represent a blurring of the lines around gender and sexual orientation. Genderqueer individuals typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Cross Gender- Sometimes used to describe children who have adopted attributes that transgress the usual socially assigned gender roles or expectations, or who do not identify as either of the two sexes as currently defined.

Cisgender/Gender Normative- A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth

Transition: The process in which a person changes the person's gender expression to better reflect the individual's gender identity.

Safe Zones: Designated teachers' classrooms, specific offices, or a location in a school that is deemed a safe zone where any student, for whatever reason, may go to be free from judgment and to feel comfortable and safe.

Hallway or "Flash" Pass: If needed, schools should allow students to go to a safe space at any time the student encounters a situation that feels unsafe or uncomfortable

“Kids can do or be or like or want anything because they are individuals with hopes and likes and desires. This is not because they are boys or girls.”
-genderspectrum.org

Creating Gender Inclusive Classrooms Framework

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| <i>Recognize that gender impacts all students</i> | <i>Question Gender Stereotypes</i> |
| <i>Normalize Gender Diversity</i> | <i>Support Student’s Self-Reflection</i> |
| <i>Teach Empathy and Respect</i> | <i>Stop Gender-based bullying</i> |

Use Language That Includes All Gender Identities

- Use inclusive language that emphasizes “All children can....”
- Use inclusive phrases to address the entire class (e.g. students, children, scholars) rather than “boys and girls” or “ladies and gentlemen”
- When grouping students avoid grouping by gender- create groups by favorite color, tables, height, color of shoes, etc.
- Demonstrate it’s okay to do things outside the gender norm- give examples of how you or people like to do things outside of gender stereotypes
- Respect the name/pronouns that a student uses
 - School staff members should address students by the name and pronoun that corresponds to their gender identity
 - Maintain confidentiality of the student’s transgender status
 - When not legally required to use a student’s legal name or sex assigned at birth on school records and other documents, staff members should use the name and gender preferred by the student

Instructional Techniques

Ideas to integrate gender inclusion into the school’s curriculum

- Create lessons helping students understand each other as unique individuals
- Use lesson plans that focus on gender stereotypes through popular culture, advertising, social media, TV shows and how they are created/changing in society.
- Discuss ways to stop gender stereotypes and stop gender-based bullying
- Teach students to be respectful and have empathy for everyone by implementing social emotional curriculums around equality and respect
- Integrate gender topics into the curriculum through:
 - Art projects
 - Persuasive/personal narrative writing prompts
 - Responding to literature
 - History lessons involving the development of social constructs
 - Guest Speakers- to help students understand gender diversity and hear personal stories
 - Read biographies/fictional stories about great accomplishments/achievements for all genders.

For more information and strategies to bring the lens of gender into classrooms please visit
genderspectrum.org

How to STOP Gender-Based Bullying

The following information was gathered from the California Safe Schools Coalition and genderspectrum.org regarding school safety recommendations and what school personnel can do to prevent bullying.

1. Establish and publicize a school policy that specifically prohibits harassment on the basis of gender, including gender Identity and gender-related appearance and behavior
 - Students will feel safer for gender non-conforming students if their schools had harassment policies that specifically included gender identity/expression
2. Instruct Teachers on how to stop slurs and harassment
3. Explicitly inform students where to go for information and support related to gender identity and expression
4. Establish clear guidelines and rules on how to report gender-based bullying and/or harassment
5. Consistency is key: all staff members must consistently respond appropriately to reports of gender-based harassment and bullying
6. Establish the climate of your classroom early in the school year to let students know that bias-related harassment and slurs are not acceptable
 - Establish a warm and welcoming environment in your classroom and stick with it throughout the year
7. Directly intervene when you hear bias-related comments and slurs
 - Use each discriminatory comment as a teaching moment and remind students to be respectful of all students
8. All forms of discrimination, harassment, slurs, and gender related bullying must be taken seriously and must be stopped immediately.
9. Provide Gender-diversity training through professional development to educated school personnel on gender diversity, how to stop harassment, and school policies regarding gender-based bullying
10. Demonstrate school support for gender-diversity by incorporating acceptance of all students within the school climate and activities
 - (e.g. posters around the school, banners, mission statement, curriculum)

Resources

The following resources are recommended to further your understanding of gender diversity and to create more gender inclusive classrooms.

<https://www.genderspectrum.org/>

Gender Spectrum's mission is to create a gender-inclusive world for all children and youth. To accomplish this, we help families, organizations, and institutions increase understandings of gender and consider the implications that evolving views have for each of us.

<http://www.welcomingschools.org/>

Welcoming Schools, a project of the HRC Foundation, is a comprehensive approach to improving school climate in elementary school environments with training, resources, and lessons to help schools in embracing family diversity, creating LGBTQ-inclusive schools, preventing bias-based bullying, creating gender-expansive schools, and supporting transgender and non-binary students

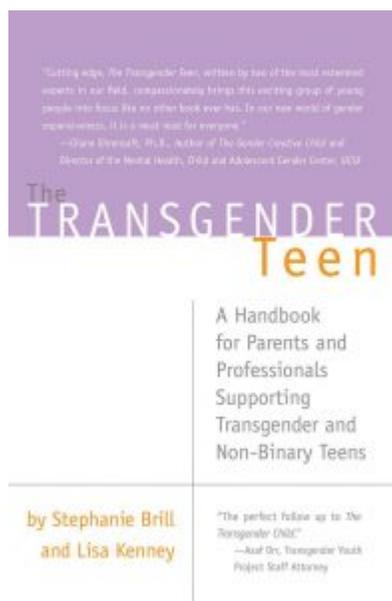
<http://www.genderdiversity.org/>

Gender Diversity increases the awareness and understanding of the wide range of gender diversity in children, adolescents, and adults by providing family support, building community, increasing societal awareness, and improving the well-being for people of all gender identities and expressions

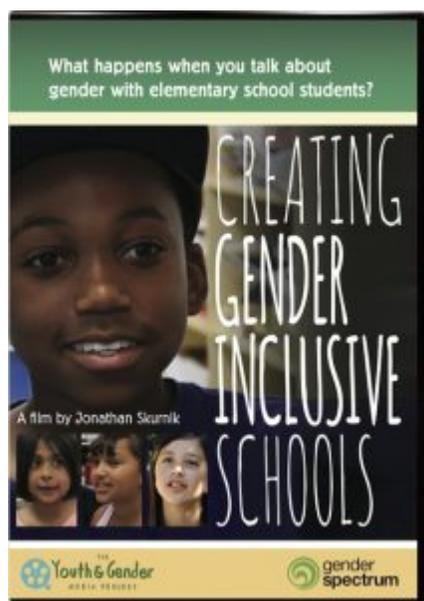
<http://www.tolerance.org/gender-spectrum>

Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children. They provide free educational materials to teachers and other school practitioners in the U.S. and Canada.

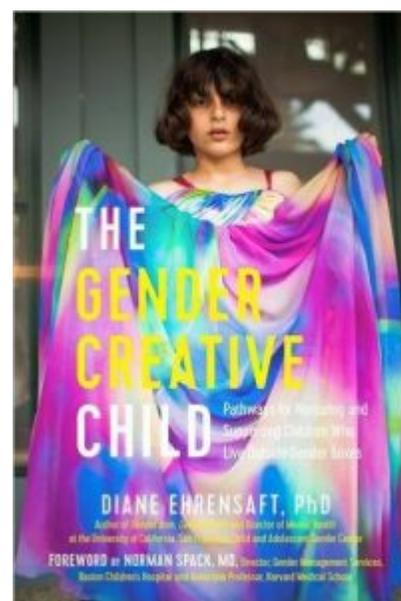
Books/Films



The Transgender Teen
A Handbook for Parents and Professionals Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Teens
by Stephanie Brill and Lisa Kenney



Film: Creating Gender Inclusive Schools
The Youth and Gender Media Project and Gender Spectrum



The Gender Creative Child
Pathways for Nurturing and Supporting Children Who Live Outside Gender Boxes
by Diane Ehrensaft, PhD, with a foreword by Norman Spack, MD

References

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