



## CONNECTING WITH COLLEAGUES: KEY ELEMENTS FOR A TRAINING ON DEVELOPING A GENDER INCLUSIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Professional development is a key step to creating a more gender inclusive and expansive school. Teachers need information and strategies to help them make the most of teachable moments. Professional development also helps educators feel supported in their efforts to create welcoming learning environments.

Provide training for all school personnel—from teachers, aides and counselors to administrative staff, bus drivers, recess aides, and cafeteria workers. Adults in the school need time to practice and be prepared with simple phrases to stop gendered teasing and bullying; they need practice intervening when students are limiting each other based on gender; and they need to be ready to educate students on why it is wrong or hurtful.

Often someone in a training will know about this topic from a very personal perspective – a student they have known or the child of a friend or family member. Be prepared to hear from them during the training or to talk with them afterwards.

As a trainer, be clear about your own values and experiences related to gender. Recognize that this is an on-going learning process. Ideas on gender keep shifting. Continue to seek training, information and support. (See *Gender Expansive Children: Books to Help Adults Understand.*)

Depending upon the length of time available and the particular focus for a training on gender, different activities could be included. (For additional planning steps, see *Affirming Gender in Elementary School: Social Transitioning.*)

### Key Elements of Professional Development on Gender

- Integrate the school’s mission statement into the training to make the connection between developing a gender inclusive school where all feel safe to learn and the values of the school.
- Help participants see that gender is a continuum of expression and identity rather than a binary.
- Understanding language – review definitions related to gender and sexual orientation to develop a shared language and build comfort with the topic. Help people understand the differences between sexual orientation and gender biology, expression, and identity. Recognize though that some of the language around gender is fluid and may be different by age, region of the country, or gender. (See *Definitions of Key Terms for Educators and Parents/Guardians.*)
- Ask participants to write down when they were first aware of their gender and follow-up with a brief discussion. This helps people understand that individuals who question their gender identity or who feel different than the cultural expectations of a boy or a girl have often done so from a young age. However, they have frequently had to hide their feelings for fear of being perceived as different or being rejected.
- Hold a short discussion or brainstorm of negative gender-related messages that participants received when they were younger, so they do not pass on those messages that limit a child’s potential and development.
- Allow time for the people in the training to give examples of approaches they have used at their school to support gender expansive students. This can help generate further ideas for affirming gender expansive students and can help others in the workshop see that it can be and already is being done.
- Provide time for practicing interrupting gender stereotyped statements from students, other educators or parents. Practice interrupting hurtful teasing and bullying. Discuss what could be said in simple ways to teach students why gender stereotyping is hurtful and that welcoming and accepting other students is expected. Practice responding to students’ questions about differences. (See *Be Prepared for Questions and Put-Downs on Gender.*)

- Review relevant policies and laws in the school district or state.
- To make gender transitioning and expansiveness seem much more real and understandable, invite one or more people to tell their stories. Panelists could include a high school student who is gender expansive or transitioning to speak about their experience of gender and their elementary school experience; or a parent of a student who is gender expansive or transitioning.
- Show a short video of a gender expansive child or their parent such as:
  - A video that includes a mother of a gender expansive child and staff from her child’s elementary school. Shows the passion and love of a parent for her child and the willingness of a school to provide a safe and nurturing environment. (Available on the Welcoming Schools website: Resources – Videos.)
  - A young girl named Jazz who was born a biological boy was interviewed by Barbara Walters on 20/20 when she was seven. (Available on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8F9CaPyQz8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8F9CaPyQz8).)
  - The 5-minute segment, “Henry, a Story of Me,” from the HBO show, “Happy to Be Nappy and Other Stories of Me.” Henry, a 10-year-old boy, shows the dancing that he loves while also talking about gender assumptions and teasing. But he also talks of growing more confident in himself.

### **Additional Activities for Professional Development on Gender**

- Brainstorm specific ways that gender impacts students in the school. Discuss how teachers could model gender-inclusive language, as well as ways to avoid gender stereotyping in the classroom and school settings. (See *Gender and Children: A Place to Begin*.)
- Take a brief look at the research on impact of gender harassment on students who are gender non-conforming or look at how young children are when they develop awareness of gender stereotypes. (See *Read-Arounds: A Quick Way to Look at Research – Gender Read-Arounds*.)
- Use the short music video, “I Am Me” by Willow Smith, daughter of Will Smith and Jada Pinken-Smith, to lead discussions on gender expression. Discuss how it could be use in a classroom setting. (Available on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUMK4Da9Avg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUMK4Da9Avg).)
- Show the *Welcoming Schools* film, *What Do You Know? Six to Twelve Year-olds Talk About Gays and Lesbians*. Hear from students how gender stereotyping has hurt them. Use it as a way to prompt discussion of what people have seen and heard of gender stereotyping in their schools.
- Review elementary age books that feature gender expansive children as a way to engage students in discussion of gender. Discuss questions that might come up from students when you read the book to the class or their parents/guardians if you read the book to the class. (See *Recommendations: Looking at Gender Through Books* or *Looking at Gender Identity with Books for Students*.)
- Explore lesson plans on the impact of gender and stereotypes. See how the lessons could fit into your language arts or social studies curriculum. (See *Lesson Plans for K – 5 on Gender Stereotyping and Accepting Who You Are*.)
- Be prepared for a discussion of the “bathroom question,” if you are working with a school where there is a student who is socially transitioning from one gender to another. It always comes up and is important for a student’s safety and physical comfort. Given all there is to discuss about gender, be careful about getting stuck on this topic.
- Include a brief look at historical images to highlight how cultural norms change. Show a photo of Franklin Roosevelt at age 2 or 3 with his long hair, fancy dress and black patent leather shoes – the style of the day. Or, note that in 1918, the *Ladies’ Home Journal* wrote, “The generally accepted rule is pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger color, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl.”

