

LT3 - Creating a Trans Awareness

Danielle Gauthier

Department of Education, University of Calgary

EDUC 450 S10 - Diversity in Learning

Fouzia Usman

March 12th, 2021

I attended two online zoom events on Eventbrite called: “Transgender Inclusion 101: The Basics presented by Prism Services” on February 16th and “Supporting Transgender Children in School” led by Shelley Bridgman on February 23rd. I enjoyed the opportunity to hear from both a transmasculine (first seminar) and a transfeminine (second seminar) perspective. I was going to attend “Basics of Trans Affirming Medical Care presented by Dre Ceja” on February 19th, but due to technical difficulties, I was unable to attend.

In “Transgender Inclusion 101” the co-participants were mostly outsiders/cis-gendered people that wanted to expand our understanding of people who are trans and how to interact with them respectfully. This event was presented by Parker Hewes (a trans-masculine person) hosted by Prism Services which is part of Vancouver Coastal Services which “provides workshops and training for healthcare and social service providers, students and service users on inclusion, diversity and promoting health and wellness for the LGBTQ2+ communities” (Prism Services, n.d.).

During this seminar, I learned LGBTQ2+ language with the associated definitions. A new term I learned that I had never heard before was “two-spirit” which is an indigenous term for one that has both male and female spirit. This is a term that can only be given to indigenous individuals that include this practice. I also learned that the term “transsexual” is an old term for people who have medically transitioned but is not used today due to being often used in a negative and harmful way. I also learned other terms such as “genderqueer”, “agender”, “gender diverse”, “pansexual” and “gender creative”. One important thing that I learned was that gender identity is not tied to sexual orientation. For example, a trans man can be gay, straight, bisexual, etc. while also being trans. I learned that gender affirmations are transitional steps that trans people might take to align their physical body with how they feel that does not only include medication or surgery. Examples of these steps could be: a change of name, change of preferred pronouns, changing their legal ID, changing how they dress (clothing, chest bind), wearing prosthetics, changing their vocal pitch or tone, body language, shaving or not shaving, and electrolysis. I also learned that not all trans people will choose to take affirmation steps. I learned that many of the laws that criminalized LGBTQ2+ people were due to colonization and that colonization formed the basis for

“homophobia”, “transphobia”, “racism” and other forms of oppression. I learned that trans people in the United States are twice as likely to be incarcerated as the general population and that black trans women are ten times as likely as the general population to be incarcerated. I learned some stats about trans people: 64% of trans people reported that they avoid three or more public spaces due to the fear of being harassed, 40% of trans people are living in low-income households, 56% rated their mental health as poor, most have experienced verbal harassment, 16% have experienced physical harassment and 26% have faced sexual assault. These stats reveal to me that these people need more support, more acceptance, and more people to stand up for them.

I learned how to be aware of the language I used when talking to a trans person and to avoid words such as ladies, gentlemen, ma’am, sir, girls, guys, etc, and to use gender-neutral terms or pronouns (they, their). I have been trying to implement this before this seminar by using words such as group, team, friends when referring to group members or students. I learned to ask for permission to ask a question to a trans person before asking it to be respectful of that person’s boundaries. I also learned about what to do if I use incorrect language. These steps are: 1) apologize briefly, 2) use the correct term/name/pronoun, 3) move on. This allows you to resolve your mistake without making it a huge deal or embarrassing the other person. This idea influenced me so much that I made sure to include in it my group’s presentation on “Common Rebuttals”.

The second seminar “Supporting Transgender Children in School” was hosted by Bowden Education and presented by Shelley Bridgman a psychotherapist. Co-participants in this seminar were teachers and educators that are wanting to further their understanding of trans people and how to interact with students that may be trans. In this seminar, I was introduced to several trans pioneers and their contributions. We also went over several terms again associated with transgender and LGBT2Q+. I additionally learned about the Gender Recognition Act in 2004 that gave legal recognition to people in their acquired gender located in the United Kingdom. This was a very important time in history for trans people and had a big impact on people accepting trans people. This also allowed trans people to have rights and responsibilities associated with their new gender, their original birth gender became

confidential information, they could marry the opposite gender (pre gay/lesbian rights), and had access to pension benefits associated with their new gender. Shelley Bridgman explained that gender is a mosaic and not linear or binary and each person fits in the mosaic to create a beautiful picture.

Some key ideas I learned in this seminar related to teaching children were the potential of adding a gender-neutral uniform and creating a gender-neutral bathroom but still giving students the choice. Students should be given options but at the same time having the choice to use what is the most comfortable for them. During the seminar, someone additionally asked if we would ever encounter a child who is trans and Shelley Bridgman stated that it would be highly unlikely and that it is not typical for children to decide their gender at a young age. She also stated that it is important not to suppress the expression of any of our students and to watch out for bullying because any form of diversity might cause bullying. She also gave advice about discussing same-sex relationships and for young students, it is age-appropriate and understandable to students to say they are two boys who like to be together and it is not necessary to go into explaining the sexual education about the topic yet because it is not age-appropriate. In addition to this trans people can not go through reassignment surgery until they are 18 years or older which means any changes they make can be reversible.

Through attending these seminars I raised my consciousness and understanding of what it means to be trans and the struggles they may face that I as a white cisgender female will never face. For me, there are fewer public spaces where I may feel the need to avoid due to fear of being harassed. The only time I do fear this is when I am walking outside in the dark. I also am grateful that I have a family who accepts me but I know for some LGBTQ2+ people they often face conflict with the public and sometimes conflicts with their families not accepting them. When I was younger I faced bullying at a young age and I understand how harsh children/people can be to someone who seems different. I know when I am a teacher I want to be an advocate on including all diversities and promoting bully-free spaces. I also want to be someone that is an ally for students that may experience bullying and someone that they are comfortable talking to. Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017) chapter 12 section “Act in Service of a More Just Society” (p. 211) expresses the importance of being an ally and taking action by validating, engaging,

position yourself as an equal, advocating, letting go of control, taking risks, taking responsibility for mistakes, having humility and earning trust through action. I also learned that the importance of pronouns is associated with a person's preference and by using those pronouns you express respect for that individual. I know from previous experience and cultural norms to not use hurtful language with certain groups of people, and this same principle of respect applies to trans people. I know I will treat trans people respectfully like I would treat any other group of people and try my best to communicate and ask questions to create a comfortable situation that promotes understanding.

I initially chose this topic because I have not had many experiences interacting with trans people and that it is a current popular discussion in today's media. I reaffirmed my belief in not grouping and treating each person I meet as an individual and accommodating their needs (such as pronouns) and being respectful. One misconception I had was that being trans is currently a trend. The video *The Chloe Connection* (2020) stated that being trans may seem like a trend because trans people have been discriminated against for years and have been pushed to hide their identity. In addition to this, they stated that we have come to a time where people are more accepting and more willing to come out as trans. Additionally due to this reason more people feel safe to discuss and share more about their trans experiences. So I learned that it is not a trend but is just being more openly and frequently talked about.

One question that I had in my part 1 plan was "does naming a trans person 'a woman' undermine the struggles and experiences a woman at birth has had?". I am still having difficulties moving my perspective on this topic because I do believe that trans feminine people undermine the struggles and experiences women who were women at birth have gone through. Because a transfeminine person grew up as male they will never experience the inequalities and introductions of their preferred gender at a young age. I am still learning and receiving more information about this topic but this is where I stand now and I hope this does not make me transphobic.

Two concepts from Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017) that relate to what I learned in this exploration are "Culture and socialization" and "Oppression and Power". In the "What is Socialization?" section in chapter 2 we learned how "socialization refers to systematic training into the norms of our culture" (p.

36). Through this teaching of norms, we are taught what it means to be a girl and what it means to be a boy, and how the two are different. This is different from what I have learned about trans people and LGBTQ2+ that gender is a spectrum and not binary. These popular thoughts that genders are binary create confusion when introducing this topic to people who are unfamiliar, unaccepting, or unopened to because “society is invested in the research that validates differences...” (p 39) Trans people are related to “Oppression and Power” because Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017) stated that, “prejudice + power = oppression” (p. 62). Because white cisgender men have held power and discriminated against otherness for centuries people with other genders or sexualities have been oppressed. As I had learned in my first seminar that the basis for “homophobia” and “transphobia” started during the colonization period we can see that the white cis-gendered males that colonized brought their feelings of being superior. The indigenous people were seen as others and inferior and ideas like “two-spirit” were seen as different and inferior and were removed from common discussions. I have reflected on how Residential Schools not only tried to erase indigenous culture but remove the “two-spirit” identity/gender from indigenous people. Due to this negativity and precedent in history being seen as anything other than cisgender was perceived as a negative. Therefore there was a fear/shame for people who were secretly transgender which made it unacceptable to come out as trans.

Overall throughout participating in these events and learning in this course I have furthered my understanding of what it means to be trans and how diversity has impacted and impacts our current world. I know I want to teach my future students about the wrongs that have been done in the past and how they can make the world a more accepting place. I want to be an ally for people that don't have equal opportunities and power and give them a voice and listen to their stories and concerns. There are still many questions I had that I was unable to answer during these seminars and my research and I look forward to furthering my understanding beyond this exploration.

References

- Bridgman, S. (2021, February). *Supporting Transgender Children in School* [Conference session]. Bowden Education, Eventbrite online Zoom meeting.
- Hewes, P., & Prism Services. (2021, February). *Prism's Transgender Inclusion 101: The Basics* [Seminar]. Prism, Zoom.
- Prism Services. (n.d.). *Prism Services*. Vancouver Coastal Health.
https://www.vch.ca/Locations-Services/result?res_id=184
- Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal?: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. Teachers College Press.
- The Chloe Connection. (2020, June 27). *Being Transgender is Fad or New Trend? Why Do So Many People Think This?* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyAxQXrzKUY>