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Creating Trans-Inclusive Schools: Introductory Activities that Enhance the Critical Consciousness of Future Educators

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Creating Trans-Inclusive Schools: Introductory Activities that Enhance the Critical Consciousness of Future Educators

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The Lawrence King murder and other tragedies surrounding transgender youth have prompted a national discussion about the need for schools to be more supportive and inclusive of transgender students. In this multi-authored reflection, the authors describe a series of three introductory activities in an undergraduate educational studies course aimed at cultivating critical consciousness about transgender students. The instructor and students discussed their viewing of televised interviews featuring transgender individuals and participated in a gallery walk and a role-playing activity. These activities cultivated students' critical awareness of the experiences of transgender students and strategies for creating trans-inclusive classrooms and schools.

On February 12, 2008, fourteen-year-old Brandon McInerney brought a handgun to school and shot his classmate, Lawrence King, a transgender¹ student, twice in the back of the head during a computer class at E.O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard, CA. Major news agencies such as CNN and the *New York Times* covered the events leading and following this shooting for several years until Brandon McInerney's second degree murder conviction. *Valentine Road*, a 2013 HBO documentary, chronicled the tragedy, including the perspectives of E.O. Green teachers and students and the prosecution of Brandon McInerney. The murder of Lawrence King and other recent tragedies (e.g., the widely publicized suicide of a transgender high school student, Leelah Alcorn) have shed light on the victimization of transgender youth in schools throughout the country (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Pullen, 2010). Findings from the 2013 National School Climate Survey (NSCS) show that teachers and principals have crafted policies that directly target transgender students. For instance, the NSCS found that 42.2% of transgender students had been prohibited from using their preferred names, and 59.2% of transgender students had been required to use a bathroom or locker room of their legal biological sex. Other studies have found that transgender youth experience significantly higher levels of verbal and physical harassment from peers when compared to their gender conforming peers (Kosciw et al., 2012; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011). Forms of harassment include having their gender and/or sexual identity questioned by peers, experiencing physical assault, being deliberately excluded from school activities, being the object of hate-motivated speech, and having feelings of social isolation (Kosciw et al.,

2012). A hostile school environment and consistent school victimization are associated with depression, suicide, dropout, academic failure, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, and long term outcomes such as poverty and unemployment (Goldblum et al., 2012; Greene, Britton, & Fitts, 2014).

In response to recent tragedies and concerning school climate data, national education organizations (e.g., Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) have advocated for the training of teachers, principals, and other school staff on how to support the well-being of transgender students. Some professional development for educators conducted by organizations such as Gender Spectrum and TransYouth Family Allies have emerged in public schools throughout the country. Given the call for more training, this multi-authored reflection of a professor and students in a undergraduate education course outlines introductory activities for future educators interested in creating inclusive schools for transgender youth.

Creating Trans-Inclusive Schools

Cultivating a supportive school environment for transgender students necessitates the training of teachers, principals, and school staff in how to develop safe and protective classroom and school environments (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012). However, recent research has indicated that university-based teacher education programs lack curriculum and training opportunities for future teachers and principals. In a content analysis of educational foundations textbooks, Macgillivray and Jennings (2008), for instance, found that less than 1% of content in educational foundations textbooks include any lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender topics. Of the content that relates to these topics, the authors found that educational foundations textbooks treat LGBT individuals

¹ A term for people whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.

in general as victims and pathologize their sexual and gender identities and life experiences. Moreover, few teacher education programs provide training on school and classroom-based strategies aimed specifically at supporting the students in school (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011; Jennings & Sherwin, 2008; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008).

Affirmative Trans-Inclusive Educators

Teachers and principals can affirm transgender youth by approaching the planning and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and school policies with a trans-inclusive perspective (Meyer & Pullen Sansafacon, 2015). In classrooms, teachers and other school staff can model the use of gender-inclusive language with students and develop caring relationships with transgender students (Meyer & Pullen Sansafacon, 2015). Teachers could also include transgender topics across the curriculum. When choosing texts for a high school literature class, for instance, a teacher could assign students an autobiography that describes the complexities of life for a transgender individual. At the school level, principals may develop and implement school-wide policies and procedures that address discrimination. School leaders enforce policies that protect the rights of transgender female students to fully participate in girls' sports teams, provide gender inclusive facilities, and draft dress codes that permit transgender students to express their gender identity without discrimination.

The Role of Critical Consciousness in Developing Trans-Inclusive Educators

The main objective of this course was to create learning opportunities for future educators to develop their critical consciousness about transgender students in schools and how to make school environments trans-inclusive. Educators develop critical consciousness by participating in dialogues about how schools reinforce power, privilege, and oppression in society and how they can interrupt transphobia and cisgender privilege² through curriculum and school policy.

Defining critical consciousness. Critical consciousness aims for students to develop an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exploration of social and political contradictions (Freire, 1973; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Watts,

Diemer, and Voight (2011) also defined critical consciousness as providing educational spaces "where oppressed or marginalized people learn to critically analyze their social conditions and act to change them." (p. 44). In educational settings that aim for critical consciousness, Freire (1973) implies intergenerational equity between students and teachers. Both students and teachers learn, question, reflect and participate in meaning making activities as a community. Freire (1973) outlines three interrelated mechanisms of critical consciousness that are seen in social justice oriented courses: critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action (Freire, 1973). First, critical reflection is the process in which a person has the opportunity to observe and reject oppressions in society. This includes observing and evaluating social behaviors, laws, and policies in any given situation. For instance, cisgender students may experience greater critical consciousness by watching a film of a gender non-conforming student who is murdered at school by a cisgender classmate. Freire (1973) explained critical consciousness as a sociopolitical educative tool that engages learners in questioning the nature of their historical and social situation. Second, students experience a sense of sociopolitical efficacy: the belief that one is able to transform the conditions of a society that produces injustice. Third, students develop skills for critical action, defined as active participation in personal and/or community level activities and practices that change the conditions that sustain social inequities. In the context of this course, the series of activities primarily created opportunities for students to develop their critical consciousness, specifically 1) using critical reflection through observing transphobia and cisgender privilege in televised interviews; 2) developing a sense of sociopolitical efficacy by identifying how schools as institutions reinforce transphobia and cisgender privilege; and 3) simulating critical action through role playing activities that bring about strategies for change.

Using sociocultural learning and counseling approaches for critical consciousness. Classroom activities framed by sociocultural learning support the development of critical consciousness. Sociocultural learning theories emphasize the interconnectedness of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge among students and teachers (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1998). Current applications of sociocultural theory include students and teachers co-participating in cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and joint discovery. Hence, instead of a teacher lecturing about existing knowledge of a topic, knowledge about the topic is co-constructed by teachers and students (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1998). In a sociocultural learning classroom, teachers and students share defined tasks of questioning, clarifying,

² Cisgender is a label for individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity. Cisgender privilege refers to institutional and interpersonal practices that reinforce cisgender as normal and transgender as abnormal. Transphobia is defined as emotional disgust, fear, anger, or discomfort felt or expressed towards people who do not conform to society's expectations.

summarizing, and predicting in order to construct knowledge. In the context of this course, sociocultural theory was demonstrated in the viewing of the televised interviews, gallery walk, and follow-up discussions in both whole group and small group formats. These activities supported students in a) gaining awareness about oppression aimed at the transgender community, b) assessing the role of social institutions (e.g., schools, family, health care, religious institutions) in reinforcing the marginalization of transgender students, and c) exploring how schools can support the inclusion of transgender students.

Counseling approaches can also be utilized to help students develop critical consciousness. According to Blatner (2006), counseling techniques can be useful tools when teaching in a classroom setting, especially in the higher educational system. Blatner (2006) believed that “experiential learning, for some academic subjects, is an ideal tool” (p. 30). One such tool is role-playing, a therapeutic activity used in Gestalt therapy, psychotherapy, person centered therapy, reality therapy, and sociodrama (Berven & Thomas, 2004; Blatner, 2006). For college students, role-playing with peers helps them understand multiple perspectives of highly sensitive, controversial issues (Berven & Thomas, 2004). Role-playing also gives students the opportunity to visualize a meaningful conversation or situation with another person or group (Blatner, 2006). In the process, students figuratively place themselves in the lives of the other individuals as they practice what they would do or say in a particular situation. An open-ended whole class dialogue follows and elicits critical thinking about the controversy. In this course, role-playing was utilized to help students understand the challenges of school leaders implementing trans-inclusive policies, amidst resistance from parents, teachers, students, and other school stakeholders.

Methods

From the perspectives of an instructor and students in an undergraduate education course, this instructional article outlines activities designed to introduce future educators to key issues surrounding transgender youth in schools and practices for creating trans-inclusive school environments. The activities enhanced the critical consciousness of students as they investigated cisgender privilege and transphobia in schools and ways to interrupt these dynamics as future educators. Sociocultural learning and counseling approaches in the activities were utilized so that students could actively construct critical consciousness.

Overview of Trans-Inclusive Educational Strategies

As seen in Figure 1, students engaged in a series of three classroom activities aimed at facilitating critical consciousness: critical reflection, development of a sense of socio-political efficacy, and critical action. First, students and instructors viewed television interviews featuring notable transgender advocates and witnessed transphobia and cisgender privilege. Second, the students embarked on a classroom gallery walk to document how cisgender privilege and transphobia operate in schools and other social institutions (e.g. law and health care). Third, the students engaged in a debate about the inclusion of transgender athletes in high schools and participated in a role-playing activity in which they, as school principals, described a trans-inclusive athletic policy in a fictional high school in front of an audience of teachers, parents, students, and other school stakeholders.

Prior to these activities, the instructor presented the concepts of cisgender privilege, transphobia, and oppression to the class. After each concept was defined, the instructor provided examples of cisgender privilege and transphobia in the media. In order to create a safe space, the instructor and students also constructed a list of group norms for all class activities. Some expectations included understanding that there are no right or wrong answers, using “I” statements, maintaining confidentiality (e.g., what is discussed in the room stays in the room), and bringing positive energy. The instructor and students also agreed on the norm, “move forward, move back,” which encourages students to monitor how often they contribute to small group and whole group discussions. As seen in Tables 1-3, we provide key suggestions for the implementation of each activity.

Transphobia and cisgender privilege in media.

As seen in Table 1, the first activity involved students’ viewing of television interviews between transgender advocates and popular journalists on major television networks. The first clips were two interviews between Janet Mock, an African-American transgender woman, and Piers Morgan, a prominent journalist on the CNN program, *Piers Morgan Tonight*. The first interview held the tagline, “Born a boy, now a girl.” Piers Morgan asked Janet Mock about questions focusing on the biological transition. For instance, Morgan repeatedly asked questions regarding the gender re-assignment surgery and being born a boy, which offended Janet Mock. In the days that followed the interview, Morgan received public backlash on social media websites such as Twitter for his series of questions, which were perceived by members of the transgender community as offensive. Morgan and his CNN team conducted a second, impromptu interview with Janet Mock days

Figure 1
The Development of Critical Consciousness in a Series of Three Activities

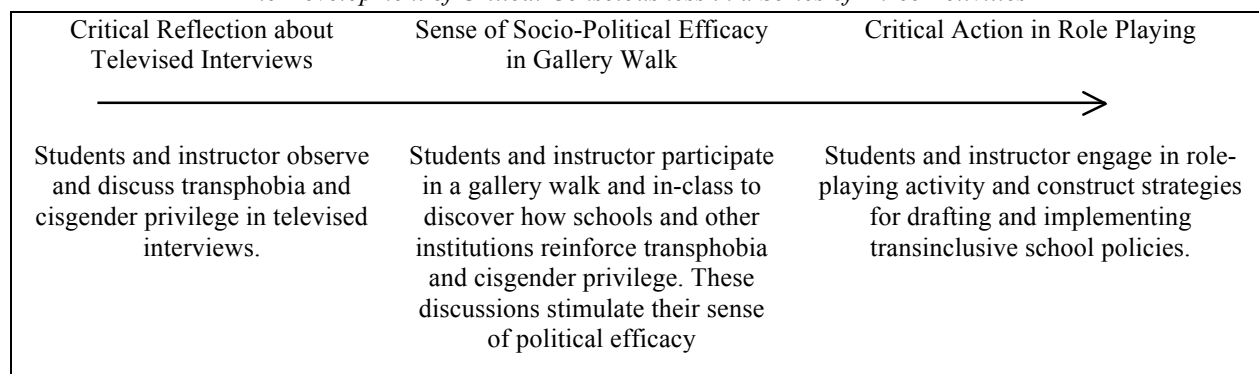


Table 1
Critical Reflection of Transphobia and Cisgender Privilege in Televised Interviews

Learning Objective	Summary of Activities	Suggestions for Activity Implementation
1. Identify transphobia and cisgender privileges occurring in each interview.	1. Students view a series of television interviews between transgender advocates and popular journalists.	1. Anticipate that students may display a variety of reactions, including abhorrence, to transphobia in the interviews.
2. Participate in critical reflection about transphobia and cisgender privilege.	2. Students then share their initial reactions with partners.	2. Help students to understand that there may be other views other than their own.
	3. As a whole group, students assess and discuss examples of transphobia and cisgender privilege in the televised interviews.	3. Encourage students to challenge their own cisgender privilege and transphobia.

later to discuss the social media aftermath of the first interview.

Students then watched a second series of two interviews on the Katie Show between prominent talk show host and journalist Katie Couric and a transgender actress and advocate, Laverne Cox. In the first interview, Katie Couric also asked probing questions about gender reassignment. Laverne Cox responded with the explanation that the lives of transgender women are more complex than the gender reassignment process and include disproportionate rates of unemployment, homelessness, and violence towards transgender women of color. After students watched these clips, they shared initial reactions with partners and then were prompted by the instructor to assess and think about transphobia and cisgender privilege in the televised exchanges. As a whole class, the class also discussed how Piers Morgan's line of questioning may have been transphobic and how Mock used media to uncover other issues surrounding the transgender

community (e.g., poverty rates, homelessness, and discrimination). One student, a cisgender male, responded by saying that Piers Morgan, a cisgender male, talked over Janet Mock, adding that this is an example of cisgender privilege at work.

Developing awareness of how schools and other institutions reinforce cisgender privilege. As seen in Table 2, the second set of activities involved a gallery walk for students to assess how schools and surrounding institutions can reinforce cisgender privilege through transphobic school policies and practices. In this activity the instructor posted seven pieces of chart paper at different points in the room. Each piece of chart paper had a name of an institution in large print: school, family, health care, religious institution, law, and media. Students were divided into seven groups of 3-4 students and were assigned to one institution. As a group, they discussed how this institution may reflect cisgender privilege and enact transphobia and then write examples on the chart paper.

Table 2
Sense of Political Efficacy for Transgender Students in a Gallery Walk

Learning Objectives	Summary of Activities	Suggestions for Activity Implementation
1. Assess how schools and surrounding institutions reinforce cisgender privilege.	1. In a gallery walk format, students in groups of 3-4 are prompted to write down examples of each institution reinforces transphobia and cisgender privilege. Societal institutions include school, family, health care, religious institutions, laws, and media.	1. Mark and affix each piece of chart paper with the name of a societal institution around the room. One piece of chart paper is the school institution and is positioned in the center of the room on a table. This demonstrates that surrounding institutions influence schools.
2. Explore how multiple societal institutions influence school policies and practices.	2. After the gallery walk, each group reflects on written responses in one institution.	2. Allow enough time for each group to reflect at each institution (about six minutes per institution).
3. Transition from critical reflection to the development of a sense of political efficacy for transgender students.	3. The whole group conducts an open discussion about transphobia and cisgender privilege.	3. During whole group conversations, make connections on how forms of cisgender privilege and transphobia in different institutions are interconnected. (E.g. Negative media representations of transgender individuals may fuel the views and practices of transphobic teachers).

Every six minutes each group rotated to the next institution, discussed previous responses, and recorded new responses. At the end of the multiple rotations, each group returned to their first institution, discussed all the responses, and reported back to the whole group about what written responses were most surprising to them. One group of students was tasked with reviewing their peers' written responses to how media reinforce cisgender privilege and enact transphobia. A student from this group commented that she was surprised that current portrayals of transgender individuals in television shows are pathologizing and/or objectifying.

Enacting trans-inclusive policies as a high school principal. As seen in Table 3, the third activity involved students reading a recent state education policy about the inclusion of transgender female athletes in high school girls' sports. In small groups, students discussed their personal perspectives, which resulted in a whole class discussion on how high school sports reinforce the gender binary in such sports. The instructor then asked students to hypothesize a new policy requiring the inclusion of transgender athletes into girls' sports at a local high school near the college campus. Then, drawing from personal knowledge of the community, students discussed the potential reactions of parents and then challenges of a principal tasked

with policy implementation. Students then drafted a two-paragraph school policy and implementation plan. The next part of the activity required a student to play the role of a principal delivering the policy and enforcement plan at a high school parent meeting. Students in the audience played the role of parents, teachers, and school staff, asking potential questions regarding transgender athletes in girls' sports. After the role-play activity, the instructor then led a group discussion regarding the misconceptions of transgender athletes, stereotypes, and school enforcement challenges. One student, who played the role of the principal, commented that transgender male to female athletes have an unfair advantage in competitive high school sports, which resulted in a class debate. This debate provided students with an opportunity to reflect on cisgender privilege and its effects on transgender students.

Students' Reflection about Activities

In this section, each of the three student co-authors present their reflections on the activities. Each co-author demonstrated their process of growing awareness of issues surrounding transgender students and trans-inclusive schooling.

Table 3
Enacting Trans-inclusive Policies as a High School Principal

Learning Objectives	Summary of Activities	Suggestions for Activity Implementation
1. Develop skills for critical action.	1. Students read a recent state education policy about the inclusion of transgender female athletes on high school girls' sports teams.	1. Be aware that students playing the role of the principal are faced with the difficult task of announcing a plan to a concerned school community with individuals who may or may not agree with the policy. Remind students about safe space rules.
2. Reflect on cisgender privilege and its effects on transgender students.	2. Small groups of students discuss their personal and others' perspectives about the policy.	
3. Experience how critical action can be embraced or rejected by a variety of individual in a school community.	3. Students then draft a school policy and implementation plan for the inclusion of transgender athletes.	2. During the role-play, instructor can spark the role playing activity with questions, comments, and concerns. .
4. Transition from a sense of political efficacy to critical action.	4. The class chooses one student to play the role of a principal who will explain the implementation plan at a school board meeting.	3. Encourage students to see how school policies may be accepted and critiqued by members of a school community.
	5. During the role-play, other students in the audience play the role of parents, teachers, students, and school staff, asking potential questions regarding the new transgender inclusive policy.	4. Provide students with an opportunity to debrief through writing an in-class individual reflection after the role play activity.

Exploring Transphobia and Cisgender Privilege in Television Interviews: Student Co-Author #1

Just one week before inter-term classes started at Chapman University, Leelah Alcorn, a transgender female, took her own life. News of this tragedy quickly spread through countless media outlets. The world's eyes were opening to the devastation that affects so many transgender youth. The LGBT and Question Issues in Education class was an enlightening course because it opens students' eyes to many issues that the LGBTQ community faces. The way media was used in the classroom to educate students on transphobia, cisgender privilege, and the exploration of the experiences of transgender individuals was extremely insightful.

I believe using videos from media outlets can fight transphobia. I've always believed bigotry could be stopped by literally putting a face and personality to an individual. I believe it's more difficult to hate a group of people when you can understand and empathize with their struggles. When we watch videos of someone sweet and funny like Jazz or eloquent and powerful like

Laverne Cox who speaks about their life experiences, it's one of strongest ways I've ever seen oppression fought. It reminds me that everyone is human being and deserves respect.

Even when our discussion became controversial, I could tell that everyone in class had their best interests at heart, though some conversations (like one about transgender teens joining high school sports) began to border on discrimination. A reminder that the discussion was about children who just wanted to enjoy their high school experience helped steer it back. Seeing actual transgender people helped humanize them for many students, especially those who may have never met a transgender person before. Shows like *Orange Is the New Black*, discussed several times in class, are essential to this process, as well as for people who have yet to come out to friends and family and want to ease them into the concept.

As a cisgender woman with transgender friends, I feel it is part of my responsibility to promote equity. Using videos of transgender individuals is a great way to advocate by, not over their voices. I believe this class proved this approach to be true. I believe by the end of

the class the students came more enlightened and able to be better allies for transgender individuals.

Developing My Awareness of How Institutions Reinforce Cisgender Privilege: Student Co-Author #2

Before taking LGBTQ Issues in Education, I took a primarily ambivalent stance about issues the LGBTQ community faced. After watching inspirational and enlightening LGBTQ advocate videos and participating in The Gallery Walk exercise that facilitated much classroom discussion, I quickly transformed my stance on LGBTQ issues. I began to adopt a more active approach. I suddenly felt the overwhelming urge to protect the rights of the transgender community as if they were my own rights being attacked. The Gallery Walk was one activity that facilitated internal change by humanizing the experiences of the transgender community. This activity allowed me to disassemble the mystery, fear, and uncertainty behind transgender individuals and cisgender privilege. I began to establish a level of equality between the different groups of individuals.

The Gallery Walk was particularly effective in educating myself and other students about transphobia by encouraging the students to give specific examples of transgender oppression they've seen or experienced within the various institutions they're a part of. These included such institutions as schools, churches, courts, and healthcare systems. Providing real-life examples helped students understand issues in the Transgender community by directly stating the rights being stripped from them in comparison to the cisgender individuals. These activities introduced new information to create ways to deconstruct transphobia and cisgender privilege. Because previous exercises and discussions placed transgender and cisgender individuals on an equal level, students soon adopted an active approach to understanding the constructs that particularly oppressed the transgender community. In addition to understanding the existing oppressions, we were motivated to go a step further by using class activities to initiate change.

Enacting Trans-inclusive Policies as a High School Principal: Student Co-Author #3

This course was the first LGBTQ class I've taken, and to say that the process was an eye opener is an understatement. I realized the issues of the LGBTQ community are constantly disregarded. Through discussions, role-playing, activities, and reflections the instructors were efficiently able to cover critical, difficult, and important material. The instructors

effectively used different methods to teach an eclectic group of students about LGBTQ issues.

The most eye-opening and thought provoking aspect of the course was our time specifically exploring transgender issues. We touched on various parts of the subject, from basic language to the psychological aspect a transgender person might go through and issues they face in schools and society. To me, the best activity in the course was when I role-played as a principal of a high school who was implementing new school policies for the equality of transgender students. The rest of the class role-played as parents who raised issues and concerns about the new policies. Granted, everyone was playing a part, but the hurtful, ignorant questions and comments coming from the 'parents' made me see the struggle transgender individuals endure.

Transphobia in education is a prominent issue that is difficult to eliminate. Society doesn't always cope well with change because we don't know how to handle change. I've learned that fear from transphobia has a much broader definition than just being afraid. Transphobia is immeasurable today because transgender inclusivity is a new concept for society. Leaders should consider the interests of everyone and apply transgender inclusive policies. Role-playing as a principal made me think, how does one eradicate transphobia? Being in a leadership position, like a high school principal, you have to be cautious to do what's right and execute policies in a reasonable manner. This role-playing experience made me believe our society needs transformational leaders that demonstrate strong leadership skills.

Discussion and Limitations

The reflections suggest that all three activities supported students' critical consciousness (e.g., sense of political efficacy, critical reflection) of transgender students and the need for trans-inclusion in schools. Erin's and Jade's reflections indicate a sense of critical reflection about how transgender students are mistreated by teachers and students and at the institutional level, prompting a desire to change schools. Moreover, Brock's reflection shows that students may have developed a sense of political efficacy. Brock's reflection recounts the role-playing exercise, where students participated in divisive arguments, common among parents and educators regarding trans-inclusive school policies. Brock further notes that application of trans-inclusion in schools accounts conflicts with the prejudice of stakeholders in a school community (e.g., parents and principals). A principal interested in transinclusion would have to craft school policy that advances inclusion but acknowledges the lack of willingness of parents,

teachers, and other stakeholders to accept trans-inclusive policies.

One challenge that arose in the experience of teaching this undergraduate course was the tendency of the instructor and students to infuse dialogue with political correctness, especially as members of the dominant group—cisgender students enrolled in this course—expressed fear of making offensive comments toward the transgender community and wanted to identify the “right” strategies to foster inclusive environments for transgender students. Moreover, we found that the instructor and students had the tendency to “police” other students during group discussions. For instance, in the discussion on transgender athletes in high schools, some students pointed out the argument that transgender female athletes had an unfair advantage when competing in high school girls’ sports teams. Other students responded by verbally attacking their peers, stating that their arguments were ethically wrong. Policing may have prevented some students and the instructor from unpacking their own prejudices toward transgender individuals.

There are multiple reasons for the orientation toward “political correctness” and “policing.” One explanation may be the general lack of discussions about gender identity from a social justice perspective in college courses and in their K-12 schooling. In schools throughout the country, there is a dearth of opportunities for students to engage in dialogues about social justice and diversity issues. Another explanation could be that the instructor and students needed more opportunities to reflect individually about issues concerning transphobia and cisgender privilege, especially after intense class debates. Social justice and diversity educators often recommend opportunities for facilitators and students to debrief after intense discussions on concepts related to diversity, power, and privilege (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). Debriefing activities, such as an in-class written reflection, provides a space for students to develop empathy and understanding for their peers. For instance, after the heated debate on the inclusion of transgender students in sports teams, the class could have participated in individual written reflection activities in which the instructor and each student could have identified personal beliefs and biases about transgender individuals and reactions to contrasting perspectives on the controversy. Both the instructor and students could have then shared individual reflections with partners, followed by a whole group discussion.

To address political correctness and policing in the classroom, we offer a few more recommendations for students and instructors. First, the instructor and students can create ground rules that provide a safe space for class discussion. In this class, we encouraged each other to *sit in the discomfort, that there are no*

wrong answers and to use “I” statements. Both faculty and students could remind each other of these expectations during moments of heated debate. Second, we recommend that instructors and students engage with research and data to provide a social context to controversies. For instance, in the principal role playing activity, the instructor and students could begin the activity by presenting data that compares the school experiences (e.g. bullying, mental health, teacher support) of transgender and non-transgender youth from the 2013 GLSEN National School Climate Survey. Data showing the adversities of transgender youth in schools could provide an objective case for changing exclusionary school policies regardless of personal beliefs.

Conclusion

Educators have to be capable of creating supportive classrooms and schools for all students, especially marginalized youth. This requires professional development and training. At present, educators have few opportunities for training on the issues of transgender students and trans-inclusive school environments, and thus they are ill-equipped to prevent tragedies such as the murder of Lawrence King. The series of activities described in this paper were designed to enhance the critical consciousness of future educators as they learned about cisgender privilege and transphobia, the challenges facing transgender students, and strategies for creating trans-inclusive school environments in their future professional roles. These experiences provided the class with a space to learn how to navigate conflicts with transphobic school adults, students, and parents as they create and enforce trans-inclusive school policies and procedures.

While educator training on transinclusive schools has emerged in recent years (e.g., Gender Spectrum), the inclusion of transgender topics is largely missing from most educator development programs. There is a need for educational leaders and researchers to integrate transgender issues into teacher training. The activities presented in this paper reflect a potential critical consciousness framework that can be applied to the training of future trans-inclusive educators.

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