Supporting LGBTQ+ Students

ACCKWA & YSHAG

April/May 2018
Who are we?

YSHAG
Youth Sexual Health Action Group
Gender Context

• Social and cultural construction of gender
  – Genitals = sex (binary)
  – Sex = gender (binary)
  – Gender = expression (binary)
  – Expression $\rightarrow$ attraction (binary)

• Transgressions are punished
The Gender Unicorn

Gender Identity
- Female/Woman/Girl
- Male/Man/Boy
- Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression
- Feminine
- Masculine
- Other

Sex Assigned at Birth
- Female
- Male
- Other/Intersex

Physically Attracted to
- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)

Emotionally Attracted to
- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to: www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore
Curricular considerations

• Puberty
  – Dysphoria
  – Intersex
  – Transition (puberty blockers)

• Reproduction
  – Dysphoria
  – Intersex

• STIs, pregnancy
  – Higher rates, ways to have a family
Curricular considerations

- Bullying, stereotypes, impacts of violence (incl. tech)
  - Homophobia and transphobia, beingouted
- Decisions about sexual activity, relationships
  - Models
  - Power dynamics
  - Asexual, aromantic
- Self-concept
Group work!

• At your table, reflect on the situation
  – What are some factors impacting this experience?
  – How could we use the curriculum and/or build our classrooms to support students in this experience?
LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to experience unintended pregnancy

- “proving heterosexuality” (to self or others)
- “proving” gender (to self or others)
  - “double down”
- Access to information
- Self worth affects decision-making
- Opportunities to create families

“In sex-ed, don't just focus on the penis or how to put a condom on one, assuming people either have a penis or will encounter one.”

“I've never been in a classroom that didn't equate vagina to woman, and penis to man”
LGBTQ+ youth & Mental health

“I remember feeling every day like an outsider [...] I remember going to bed every night hoping I would wake up straight so I could get by at school without the burden of my secret.”

“I was constantly on guard, and constantly anxious that people would find out [...] I constantly felt scared for my safety because one slip up on the part of admin or teachers could cause me to end up being harassed (which did occur on occasion when other students found out).”

“I didn’t trust any adults in my school. Even the ones I liked. I struggled to form lasting friendships because I didn’t have language to explain what was going on with me and I didn’t know how to tell anyone. I tried to kill myself to end the suffering. I was suicidal for years. It left me feeling so completely empty.”
Trans youth have higher rates of eating disorders

- Control over bodies
- “Passing”
  - Achieving idealized versions of femininity and masculinity

“Don't assume what any person’s body looks like or how it works. Stress that it's okay to want or not want things done with their body, that it's all okay. And don't pressure anyone into making a certain choice about their body, just give them the information to make that choice themselves.”
Trans people are more likely to develop bladder infections

- Access to bathrooms
- Hygiene (UTIs) as a result of dysphoria

“I didn't feel safe going to the bathroom so I held it in all day and didn't drink any water so that I wouldn't have to pee”

“I didn't feel comfortable taking gym classes because most of them were gendered and even the ones that weren't I would still have an issue with the change rooms”
LGBTQ+ youth are over-represented in people with addictions

• Coping mechanism
• Trauma
• “Don’t ask why the addiction, ask why the pain”

“I literally didn't do anything outside of going to school, eating or playing video games with 3 hours of sleep a day”

“Well basically I stopped going to class and started smoking dope. I went from having an A+ average at the beginning of grade 9 to graduating (barely) with a D average”
LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to skip school and/or leave school

• Mental health
• Not reflected
• Unsafe

“My most positive experiences were with other queer friends of mine, cutting class and hanging out together”

“I didn’t want to attend a teachers class if they were transphobic. If they heard another student being transphobic and didn’t call them out on it, or allowing for transphobic discourse in the classroom all made me want to … only show up for tests and to hand in assignments”

“I just stopped engaging or trying at school - I didn't have relationships with teachers or classmates [...] I dropped out of everything, even choir, which I used to love.”
Inclusive & Affirming Classrooms

- Group agreements
- Decorating your classroom

“Don’t assume your students are straight. Call out students saying transphobic things. Set an example so every kid with a painful secret knows that they are okay as who they are. Listen to LGBTQ kids and let them lead in terms of what will make them feel safe.”

“[H]ave a pride flag somewhere visible in your classroom [...] Some students may not be out, or even for those who are, it can really make a difference to know that their teacher is inclusive. It lets students know that they can talk to you.”
Inclusive & Affirming Classrooms

• Pronouns
  – Sharing yours
  – If you make a mistake
  – At school vs. at home

• Assignments
  – Books
  – Movies

“When teachers do the sheets where they want some info about you on the first day of class they should ask for pronouns as well, and when a student inevitably asks what that means explain that you can't assume someone's gender and pronouns based on how they look”

“We understand that accidents will happen. Calmly correct yourself and move on. Scenes make us embarrassed and sometimes feel guilty.”

“Acknowledge and celebrate LGBTQ+ scientists, artists, authors, playwrights, visionaries, activists not just in front of LGBTQ+ students but ESPECIALLY straight cis students. Show depictions of LGBTQ+ people that have happy endings or at the very least endings where they end up better than they were before.”
Inclusive & Affirming Classrooms

• Don’t split activities by gender

• Call out oppressive language

“Nothing felt better than having a teacher actually call out transphobic comments that students were making (they weren’t directed at me they were just general "jokes" that kids would say) and when my teachers actually took a second to call it out and say that it wouldn’t be tolerated in the classroom it felt like someone was actually there for me and I could feel safer being there.”

“I honestly just felt like I couldn't just come to school and learn like everyone else because there was always something related to being trans that was in the way. It took so much mental energy to just exist as a trans kid/teen that school most of the time fell on the back burner.”

“All throughout school before I had come out as trans whenever teachers would split the class up between guys and girls I never knew what side I was supposed to be on, most of my classmates saw me as a guy but a few friends knew me as female which meant I couldn’t go on either side without causing some kind of uncomfortable situation.”
Inclusive & Affirming Classrooms

• Human rights are not up for debate

“I definitely want to [talk about] the harmful attitude among some teachers that promotes false equivalencies; the belief that "taking sides is bad", which throws very real oppression and petty arguments under one umbrella and makes it difficult to have meaningful conversations. I encountered a lot of students who thought that being "impartial" in situations re: homophobia and transphobia meant that they were brilliant rationalists untainted by emotion. That gave these students avenue to think of marginalized people as simply ‘too sensitive’.”
Tips for Teachers, from a student

1) be visible and vocal about your support of LGBTQ people and communities [ex. rainbow flag]
2) interrupt homophobic, biphobic, transphobic comments from others
3) support your school's GSA
4) include LGBTQ content in your curriculum (this one is REALLY important - it is so normalizing)
5) show up to LGBTQ events (your students will notice!)
6) advocate for the needs of LGBTQ students in your school, on committees, etc.
7) remember that some of your students aren't out to their families - let them know you're a safe person to talk to
8) always use the pronouns your students want you to use
9) affirm their choice to be out and proud, whatever that means or looks like for them (gender-affirming compliments go a long way!)
10) affirm their choice to NOT be out if that's not safe for them
11) if you are an educator, maybe consider being out to your students if you can - I know, that's maybe a controversial suggestion, but it's an opportunity to be a positive queer role model
12) refer kids to supportive resources like OK2BME
13) educate your colleagues on how to create inclusive and affirming classrooms
“My Vice principal (in high school) was really adamant about having all staff be aware of the fact that our school had trans students and that names and pronouns are to be respected. He asked for trans students’ opinions and feedback on how the staff can better accommodate trans students and actually brought that feedback to a staff meeting (and invited trans students to speak at the meeting if they wanted to) so that all of the staff was getting the same information and were all clear on how to approach certain situations that might come up.”
“In grade 10 I had changed my name over the summer and had won an award during grade 9. The award assembly was the take place in September while I was in grade 10. My name wasn’t changed on the award and my home room teacher noticed so she told me & asked me if I wanted her to see if they would change it. She went to the committee, to other teachers, to the board, really just above what I expected to try and help me.”

“If you set the precedent about respecting people's names and pronouns and don't tolerate deliberate misgendering from students towards their peers then the classroom feels so much safer. Also if there is a specific trans student that is experiencing some issues in the classroom ask them what you can do to make it a space where they feel safe and able to learn like everyone else.”
Resources

- Carolyn  education@acckwa.com
- Erin  youthservices@acckwa.com
- YSHAG  yshag.wr@gmail.com
- Doin’ It  www.doinit.ca
  - managed by Carolyn & Erin
- Google Doc  bit.ly/WRDSBresources