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Necessary Professional Development for K-12 Educators in Order to Better
Accommodate Gender Difference Within Their Classroom Space

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Education

by

Amanda Susan Lopez

March 2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Necessary Professional Development for K-12 Educators in Order to Better
Accommodate Gender Difference Within Their Classroom Space

by

Amanda Susan Lopez

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Education
University of California, Riverside, March 2017
Dr. Begoña Echeverria, Chairperson

Abstract

Gender variance in school-aged children is a topic that has only recently started to be discussed amongst educators and educational administrators (del Rio et al. 2014). While the unique needs of children who do not identify as one specific gender or another are plentiful, there is little information and research on how schools can best accommodate these children and young adults (Riley et al 2013). This paper will begin with a literature review that not only defines gender variance and explains key terminology that are often confused, but also will suggest ways that educators and school employees can become advocates for children who identify as gender variant. This literature review will also include information regarding effective professional development methods for K-12 educators. This paper will then analyze existing professional development programs and teacher education syllabi that seek to educate those within an educational community on dimensions of difference with a focus on

gender variance. There is a lack of information on what professional development would be most effective in providing members of a school community with resources to best accommodate their students who identify as gender variant, so this paper will seek to provide recommendations on effective development based on the literature review, and the analysis of current professional development programs.

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Introduction

The issues regarding gender and education were topics that interested me as a young student. As a student at an all girls' high school, my experience was different than those who attended a co-educational public high school. My experience consisted of never wearing make-up to school, not worrying about what to wear, and hearing predominantly female perspectives in all of my classes. This experience shaped my initial perspective on gender and education. When I began my undergraduate experience at a public co-educational college I observed that most of the students participating verbally in my freshman level core classes were predominately men. Obviously, this was a different experience than the one I had just left in high school. This observation intrigued me and led me to complete a paper in a freshman English course that researched the different experiences boys and girls have in school.

Many years later as a young high school English teacher myself, I noticed that the majority of students who consistently raised their hands to participate in class were male, rather than female. In addition to this, the curriculum in my English literature textbooks seemed to be focused primarily on male authors, and any matter of gender issues seemed to be non-existent throughout the units. While I was aware of these issues early in my teaching career, spoke to other teachers, and read literature regarding issues of gender and education, I didn't incorporate thoughtful curriculum or discussion into my classroom practice due to feeling overwhelmed and uncertain at the beginning of my teaching career.

After a few successful years of teaching completed, I began to purposefully incorporate more thoughtful approaches to gender difference within my classroom practice. Everything I did was just based on my own instinct and interest of my students. For example, I made sure we read works by female authors that featured female protagonists, I provided them with articles and examples on gender stereotyping and gender inequality, and I led the class in Socratic style discussions on these topics.

I noticed that the students, and in particular the female students, were extremely interested and motivated to discuss and debate all of the nuances of issues regarding gender. Incorporating this topic into my classroom practice allowed my students to find their voices, and stay informed on current events that they directly connect with. This practice was successful for a few years, but it was during my final two years of teaching 8th grade language arts that I realized that I was approaching gender from a binary perspective. The students themselves brought this to my attention. Having students on my 8th grade team who identified as either transgender or gender questioning, and having students specifically request to incorporate transgender issues into our weekly Socratic style discussions, left me wondering how to address this somewhat controversial topic and related nuances in my classroom.

While beginning to research the topic of non-binary gender and education I quickly realized that information on these topics was not readily available. Most of the research available on non-binary gender adolescents is available under the field of psychology, not education. Also, as someone who has been in the field of education for about 10 years, another question that I also wanted to explore was how teachers can best

experience professional development in an effective manner. As an educator it seemed to me that often professional development is ineffective and is often complained about as a waste of time. These two issues are ones I hope to explore in this paper.

Literature Review: Gender Variance as Gender Trouble in Schools

The diagnostic approach and qualifications by which gender variance is defined is outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5). It is important to note that the DSM-5 recently replaced “Gender Identity Disorder” with “Gender Dysphoria”. This change signifies that gender variant children are no longer identified as having a disorder, but as people whose gender identity and expression do not match societal expectations, (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Publishing 2013) and the distress this causes them by being bullied or harassed by people around them. Changing this label encourages others to realize that there is not something “wrong” with a child who does not identify as a gender binary, and the intervention and therapy needs to address other’s reactions, not their difference.

Use of inconsistent terminology in regards to gender variance often leads to confusion amongst public and professionals alike (de Jong, 2014). For example, confusion between the terms “gender identity” and “sexual identity” can mistakenly cause labeling of a students’ sexual preference. Most of the current literature available about gender variance expresses the need to define the terminology in order to avoid confusion or misrepresentation. Rio et al. (2014) define words such as “biological sex”,

“gender”, “gender identity”, “gender roles”, “gender expression”, and “gender variant”, as these terms are commonly confused and misinterpreted. “Biological sex” refers to a person’s reproductive structure that a person is born with. “Gender” refers to the societal constructs that are typically applied to a person’s biological sex. “Gender identity” is a person’s self-described identification. “Gender roles” are the expectations and norms expected of a person based on the binary model of gender, for example the stereotype norm that girls should like the color pink and boys should like the color blue. “Gender expression” is the way a person projects their gender to the outside world, through clothing and personal style. “Gender variant” defines a person who does not subscribe to a typical gender binary. Gender and sexual identity are the two terms that are most often confused. Specifically, the confusion between gender and sexual identity is the idea that the two are always connected. The two can be related, but not always. Gender identity refers to the way a person describes themselves in regards to gender, and sexual identity refers to a person’s sexual preference (de Jong, 2014). Just because an adolescent identifies as gender variant, does not mean that they also identify as a homosexual, and vice versa.

There are some assumptions regarding gender that are often made in classrooms. For instance, “gender variance confronts widely held assumptions that children born as males will act like boys and children born as females will act like girls” (Riley et al., 2013, p. 644). Riley’s research defines gender variance as non-conforming gendered behavior in children (Riley et al 2013). This article reviews research that shows that pressuring children to conform to pre-conceived notions of gender based on societal

models is not only detrimental during childhood, but has long term effects into adolescence and adulthood, such as confusion and depression regarding identity.(Grant et al. 2010). Pre-conceived societal notions can include pressuring children to a certain style of dress that correlates with biological gender, or to choose a toy that is stereotypically seen as appropriate for only boys or only girls.

Children and adolescents who identify as gender variant are a population that is particularly vulnerable to harassment and bullying in the school system (Rio, et al. 2014). It is only in recent years that children with gender variance have become recognized in schools as a population that need special attention, and this is largely due to popular culture, for instance on a 20/20 special (Walters, 2007), and on television shows, *I am Jazz* (TLC, 2015). It has been identified that the one of the most stressful periods for gender variant children occur when they enter school, due to bullying and harassment they face from their peers (Drescher & Byne, 2012). Details of specific types of oppression, bullying and harassment are listed below.

The oppression that gender variant adolescents face can be both internal and external (Israel & Tarver, 1997). Internalized oppressions include poor self-esteem, self-mutilation, suicide attempts, and drug use. Suicide attempts for gender variant teens are greater than even those of lesbian, bisexual, and gay teens (Creighton & Kivel, 1992; Remafedi, 1994). Externalized oppression includes humiliation, multiple kinds of abuse, lack of role models, and coercive mental health or religious practice that attempt to change an adolescent's gender identity and practice (Israel & Tarver, 1997). Research shows that pressuring children to conform to a gender they do not identify with creates

suffering in childhood that lasts throughout adolescence and adulthood (Grant et al. 2010; Gray, Carter, and Levitt 2012; Grossman & D'Augelli 2006). Support from parents, teachers, and other members of educational communities foster improved mental health in gender variant children (Bowes et al. 2010; Ryan et al. 2009; Wyman et al. 2000).

With the many challenges that gender variant adolescents face that are listed above, it is imperative that members of the school community come together to best serve their needs. The next section of the literature review focuses on the specific role members of an educational community can play in assisting students with gender variance.

Literature Review: How specific members of a school community can provide support for gender variant students

Parents, teachers, school counselors, and school social workers can all help gender variant children feel comfortable and graduate successfully from school. In 2013, Riley conducted a study that attempted to analyze the needs of gender variant students and their parents in order to better inform educational programs. The study specifically aimed to determine what parents and their children need from an educational community in order to best serve the diverse set of needs of their student with gender variance.

This study was conducted using an Internet survey that targeted three distinct groups: parents of gender variant children, transgender adults, and clinical professionals that work with the transgender community. All of the questions asked were voluntary, and allowed participants to skip questions as desired. The questions in the survey were both closed and open ended. The closed-ended questions focused on demographics, while the open-ended allowed respondents to detail personal experiences and feelings. Some of

the open ended questions included probes that asked parents about specific challenges their gender variant children faced, and transgender adults were asked to detail childhood experiences. Based on the results the researchers developed an acronym (HAPPINESS) to express the needs of gender variant children uncovered in the study. HAPPINESS represents the needs “to be Heard; to be Accepted; to have Professional access and support; to have Peer contact; to have access to current Information; Not to be bullied, blamed, punished or otherwise discriminated against; to have freedom of Expression; to feel Safe and to have Support.” (Riley, et al., p. 646)

The first member of an educational community that can help better serve students with gender variance is the school psychologist. School psychologists are often used to collect data and progress monitor in school settings, but also serve as a resource for students who are dealing with a variety of issues. Rio et. al (2014) recognized that school psychologists often are under equipped to deal with students that identify as gender variant, and sometimes the implications of this can be severe; such as suicide attempts or dropping out of school. There is a lack of resources available to school psychologists as to how to best serve this population of students. This study implies that school psychologists need to be better equipped to deal with a population that is especially vulnerable to harassment and bullying. The article acknowledges that while the visibility of GV students has increased over the past several years, the general population (and the school population) is still uncertain how to understand these students. The article also recognizes that school psychologists are expected to serve as advocates for this population, and may not be equipped to do so due to lack of communication and

resources. The article aims to increase the awareness and competencies of school psychologists when working with GV students (Rio et al, 2013), for example, by providing school psychologists information and research conducted by those in a clinical setting who have expertise dealing with gender variant issues.

The article states that, “in order to be successful, school psychologists have to be committed to the principles of social justice, marked by the charge to ensure that all children deserve safe and affirming spaces in which to reach their educational goals” (Shirber, Song, Miranda, & Radliff, 2013, p. 46) Creating safe spaces and policies that disallow harassment due to gender identity is important. Educating school counselors through professional development and empowering them to educate students regarding gender complexity is imperative to creating safe spaces in schools. Other ways outlined in the article that school counselors can support students that identify as gender variant is to intervene directly with perpetrators, provide intervention and support for those students targeted for harassment and intimidation and those exploring their sexuality or gender identity, promote societal and familial attitudes and behaviors that affirm the dignity and rights within education environments of LGBTQ youth, initiate and support school initiatives designed to promote dignity and rights of GV students, and recognize strengths and resilience (Rio et. al 2014). Once counselors are adequately informed on the issues surrounding gender variance, they can provide training and information for school administrators, educators, parents, and students. Their role can serve as an advocate for inclusive policy within a school community.

Another member of an educational community is the school social worker. School social workers often are the primary contact and support for students who identify as gender variant in schools that have a social worker on staff (de Jong, 2014). De Jong's study uncovered the willingness of school social workers to help these students, but also unveiled common misperceptions that are prevalent in school environments (de Jong, 2014). The experience and perceptions of social workers are detailed below.

Jong's study sought to answer the question as to whether school social workers were adequately equipped to assist students who are dealing with issues related to gender variance. Although considered a relatively new phenomenon all of the social workers that participated in this qualitative interview study cited knowing at least one gender variant student at their school site. These interviews were conducted with 14 social workers (all of whom identified as female, undisclosed race, and between the ages of 35-44). The social workers worked at 13 different schools, spanning elementary school through high school. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

Findings confirmed that prior socialization regarding gender binarism (gender existing only as male/female) affected the social workers' abilities to properly assist their students. Most of the social workers interviewed stated the belief that gender is biologically innate, meaning that it occurs naturally, and is not brought about by outside forces.

However, several social workers expressed the opinion that gender variance could be caused by abuse, a notion that research literature contradicts. The idea that gender variance is in anyway caused by abuse has been disproven by research. The research

shows absolutely no correlation between gender variance and past experiences of abuse. (American Psychological Association, 2016). The idea that abuse could be a cause of gender variance could lead to harmful actions by social workers, like attempting to treat a student for an issue that does not exist. Religious beliefs often contradict with the notion that gender variance is acceptable. One social worker admitted gender variance conflicted with her personal religious beliefs; however she still stressed her willingness to be an advocate for all students (de Jong, 2014). The study revealed that all of the social workers felt that a student who began transitioning to the opposite assigned gender would be very complicated in a school setting. All of the studies' participants expressed that more training was desired, but whether this training was appropriate at just the secondary level, or at the elementary was not consistently agreed upon.

Outside of the school environment professional counselors can provide insight and direction for school personal and families as to how to accommodate gender variance in the classroom. Both school and family counselors have acted as advocates against gender oppression and violence and can promote safe and affirming spaces for students and children who identify as gender variant (Chen-Hayes 2000). This can be accomplished through methods listed below.

Research by Israel & Tarvery (1997) and Remafedi (1994) claim that the rigid gender expectations expected in most school environments lead to the victimization of gender variant students, in both emotional and physical assault. Counselors can act to counteract this victimization. School Counselors should examine their personal beliefs in regards to gender identity and expression as the first step to be able to serve gender

variant students. Chen-Hayes (2000) provides helpful recommendations for school counselors following the reflection process. The use of correct gender pronouns is essential in building a sense of safety with the students counselors are working with. Asking individuals for their preference on which pronouns to use rather than making assumptions is the best way to provide support. The need of proper gender and sexuality education is imperative to all school staff, families, and students in order to provide consistent terminology and information to an entire school community (Chen-Hayes 2000).

In addition to school psychologists, social workers and counselors, teachers also have a responsibility to assist students who identify as gender variant to feel safe within their classroom space. Disrupting heteronormative classroom practices is one way teachers can accommodate students who identify as gender variant within the school community (Slesaranksy-Poe & Garcia, 2009). Heteronormative practices refer to classroom practices that reinforce the societal perception that heterosexual relationships and “traditional” gender roles are superior to homosexual relationships and gender variant identification and behavior. This often occurs through language and curriculum choice. Curriculum in mainstream classrooms often focuses on male dominated literature and Eurocentric culture and norms are prominent. The authors recognize that classrooms not only are places that “traditional” gender roles can easily be re-enforced, but also places that these gender roles can be questioned and disrupted.

Research has found that teachers’ attitudes and classroom behaviors are greatly influenced by their own personal beliefs (for instance religious beliefs) regarding gender

and homosexuality (Cahill & Adams, 1997). Research concludes that the way to motivate educators to engage in critical teaching practice or pedagogy begins with asking them to question their own backgrounds and pre-conceived assumptions (Slesaranksy-Poe & Garcia, 2009). For example, educators could be engaged in thought provoking discussions and encouraging journaling and critical thought can motivate critical pedagogy. Educators can journal about their own personal experiences on gender, and this can lead to self-reflection of classroom practices.

Teachers who wish to disrupt gender roles in their classroom, but who are uncertain as to how are encouraged to develop “catch phrases” such as there is no such a thing as a boy’s or girl’s toy/job/color/etc. (Lamb, et al. 2007). Educators often are intimidated to discuss issues of gender difference within their classroom, and have the misinformed notion that gender identity is explicitly linked to sexual identity (Slesaranksy-Poe & Garcia, 2009). Proper training and professional development could be helpful in clearing up this misconception, and allow educators to become more comfortable in disrupting the heteronormative narrative prevalent in most classrooms today. Sexual Identity can also be discussed thoughtfully in the classroom, with additional resources and information.

Literature Review: Effective Professional Development for Teachers

There is little to no research on effective professional development to assist teachers about how to better accommodate students who identify as gender variant in their classrooms. Because of this, this review will focus on elements of ineffective and effective professional development in gender, and then will seek to provide

recommendations by combining research on gender variance with research on effective professional development. There is much debate surrounding the effectiveness of professional development for educators, and there is a large demand for improvement in professional development practices (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner 2010; Desimone 2009).

Three qualities have been deemed necessary in order to constitute effective professional development. First, it must contain practical aspects that directly affect teachers' classrooms. Second, it should be individual to schools, and lastly it must use follow up technique and procedure (Bull & Buechler 1997) and (Desimone 2009).

Desimone's (2009) research found that the best professional development occurs within a teachers' classroom and involves a multitude of self-reflection opportunities, for example through journaling. Journaling can allow teachers to immediately reflect on specific classroom experiences, and then compare future experiences for more informed practice. Desimone also stresses the need for all professional development experiences to be highly accessible to allow participation of all participants, for example research language that educators may not be familiar with should be paraphrased to allow full comprehension. Roach (1996) found that school site-based professional development allowed school communities to focus specifically on their own individual school needs, and these needs can be dependent on student population, for instance race and socio-economic status. Catering professional development to specific schools or classrooms is rarely used because it tends to be much more time consuming (Roach 1995). However, schools can make the choice to prioritize effective professional development for their staff. Kennedy and Shiel (2010) found that ongoing feedback and peer support are

essential to the success of professional development, and suggests that the most effective way to do this is through informal conversation and observation. For example, a more experienced teacher can observe a novice teacher several times throughout the year as they practice different techniques taught in professional development, and vice versa. Through this observation, conversation between the two professionals can emerge and lead to improved classroom practice.

Burbank and Kauchak (2003) found that professional development is most effective when sustained over time. In order to be effective, a significant number of contact hours must be accrued. Length and contact hours that an effective professional development program needs vary, and are not specific. What is effective to one school community or educator, may not work for another. In addition to this, “Graduated experiences, including instruction, modeling, practice, feedback, and opportunities to adapt newly acquired skills into natural classroom contexts, are also necessary to achieve desired experiential and learning outcomes” (Glover et al., 2003, p. 3). Professional development must be linked explicitly to teacher practice, and also include ties to standards and curriculum. Focusing on content knowledge is helpful in promoting teacher buy in (Porter et al., 2003).

Research suggests that developing professional development experiences that allow teachers to create their own curriculum materials based on research partnerships can be a successful way for educators to incorporate professional development into their classroom practice. Combining research with practical classroom experience and

techniques seems to be the best way for teachers to effectively incorporate professional development into their classrooms (Callahan, Saye & Brush 2016).

Looking at how teachers grow in their development, as teacher professionals, can be an effective method in assessing what professional development could be most beneficial. The area of cognitive psychology has provided us with different models on the way teachers develop skill in their profession (Sternberg & Ben-Zeev 2001). It is widely thought that teachers progress in stages of skill as they develop meaning through experience. The stages are described below in detail.

Feiman-Nemser and Remillard (1996) assert that teacher development occurs in three stages: survival and discovery, experimentations and consolidation, and finally mastery and stabilization. More recently a model has been proposed that suggests teachers proceed through five distinct stages of skill acquisition: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1986). Berliner (1994) argues that the developmental differences of teachers at different stages in their career should be considered when creating professional development. For example, a pre service teacher should not be expected to learn advanced techniques, as they are still in the novice/survival and discovery stage. If administrators do not respect that their teachers may be at different stages, and plan professional development accordingly, the development can be ineffective and/or lead to poor classroom practices (Antoniou, 2013).

The rapid growth of technology in the last 20 plus years has allowed for teacher professional development to become web-based. Virtual professional development can save time and money in the educational world. Since the mid 1990's webquests have

been used in K-12 classrooms. (Dodge 1995). Dodge defines a webquest as an inquiry oriented activity in which most or all the information used by learners is drawn from the web. While in the past webquests have mostly been used for students to research and gain knowledge, recently studies have examined whether or not webquests would be an effective form of professional development for classroom and pre-service teachers (Hassanien 2006; Zehn et al 2005). A study concluded that webquests can be an effective medium of professional development, due to a preference towards digital learning from some educators (Haralson, et. all (2014)). This study concluded that teachers were able to retain more information from a webquest than they were from a traditional paper and pencil approach. The study also suggested that using technology for professional development purposes encouraged teachers to use technology more in their own classrooms. (Harlson, et. all (2014)).

Another 21st century approach to professional development has been the exploration on whether blogging could be an effective form of professional development that can span throughout all grade levels and content areas. Ciampa & Gallagher (2015) conducted a study in which they assessed whether or not blogging was a suitable tool for teacher professional learning. Their study found that blogging could support professional development if conducted alongside face-to-face learning. The teachers that benefited most from the study were those who identified as introverted and less willing to engage in a more collaborative environment (Ciampa & Gallagher 2015). The study also found that a positive outcome from blogging was the ability for teachers to share and offer feedback with other professionals. The primary purpose of blogging is self-reflection; a

practice that has shown to have positive effects on an educators teaching practice.

Educators who blog can easily access their former entries, reflect on them, and then self-monitor growth (Ciampa & Gallagher 2015).

While research gives insight into effective professional development, it also is helpful in pointing out professional development that has proven to be ineffective. Some teacher professional development approaches are used often, even though they have not been found to be very effective. For example, McLeskey & Weldron (2002) describe the “sit and get” approach that most professional development programs emulate. This approach is usually a one-time seminar in which knowledge is passed on to seated teachers through minimal participation, and research shows this practice only has the propensity to effect individual teachers, not the school system as a whole.

In an era where high stakes testing often defines the “effectiveness” of educators, professional development that encourages thoughtful pedagogical practice is not always given top priority (Borko et al. 2010). Van Hoover (2008) suggests that a large problem with modern day professional development is that the effectiveness is not measured by whether or not changes are made into teacher’s classrooms or practice.

Ball and Cohen define the workshop problem as a problem within professional development in which professional development occurs for a one-day period and exists in isolation from the day to day life at school. Their research stresses the need for ongoing teacher support and collaboration in order for professional development to be a success.

Another common failure in professional development programs stems from the poor delivery of the material itself. Desimone (2009) attributes passive learning, rather

than active, as a component of poor delivery in professional development programs. Desimone's (2009) research also states that professional development programs often fail by delivering curriculum that is not aligned with state and local standards, thus not allowing complete teacher buy-in, because it is not necessarily thought to be applicable within all classrooms.

Evaluation and Review of Existing Professional Development and Training Programs on Diversity and Gender

Different organizations provide professional development in areas of need for educators. A professional development program, titled Gender Equity in Model Sites (GEMS), aims to raise teachers' awareness in regards to gender inequities present in their school systems (Towery 2007). This program, directed by Peggy McIntosh, Ph.D., attempted to change multiple schools' cultures in regards to gender inequity within a three-year time span, and is an outgrowth of SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity). This program recognized that gender bias and confusion regarding gender variance in schools is very well documented (American Association of University Women, 1992) and schools are places that this bias could be dismantled.

Teachers who go through the GEMS program commit to multiple years of professional development. This program is for entire schools, not just individual teachers. This particular professional development program is geared toward middle and high school educators. The professional development is described as being long term, led by

educators' peers, and contains self-reflection and conscious-raising exercises to discuss inequities within the school system (McIntosh & Style, 1994).

Schools that participate in this professional development send teacher-leaders to be trained. These teachers then conduct monthly seminars in their school communities. These seminars focus on reflective learning, and frame lessons on gender in context with systems of power and hierarchy. For instance, not just focusing on superficial issues that exist related to gender, but focusing on the why and delving deeply into systemic institutions of discrimination. An imperative part of the process is for teachers to think about their own life context in relationship to their classroom practice. More specifically, this program seeks to empower teachers to be thoughtful about how their life experience influences their classroom practice in regards to gender. Another specific goal of the program is to make the voice and perspective of the teachers central in the professional development program.

Participants in the program report that they make significant personal transformation in the way that they think about gender and sexuality, more than the way they think about race. These seminars also encourage teachers through anonymous exercises to confront their own biases in the classroom, for example, by keeping a log of how many boys they call on vs. how many girls they call on. The seminars also instruct and empower teachers to create safe spaces within their classrooms where students who identify as LGBT can feel assured that they will not be bullied or harassed for who they are. The SEED/GEMS seminars give teachers specific tools and language to stop gender harassment within their classrooms. For example, teachers are instructed to use the words

“you don’t use a group term that way” when dealing with a situation in which a student uses a derogatory term towards a person or group (Towery, 2007, p. 15).

The GEMS program has many positive aspects that have the real potential to bring about real change based on the findings from the literature review. Research suggests that professional development is most effective when it contains practical aspects that directly inform teacher classroom practice (Desimone 2009). Providing teachers with direct examples (and even direct language) for how to confront derogatory comments made in their classrooms is a direct way to inform classroom practice. The research by Burbank and Kauchak (2003) found that effective professional development must be sustained over time. The GEMS program lasts for three years, and thus will allow teachers ample experience in contrast to the “sit and get approach” described by McLeskey & Weldron (2002). Peer support is also found to be necessary in transformative professional development (Kennedy & Shiel 2010). The GEMS seminars are led by teachers within the school community that the professional development is taking place, so this ensures peer support through the multi-year program.

While many of the components of the GEMS program facilitate effective professional development in a way that has potential to bring about real changes in a teacher’s classroom in regards to gender difference, there are flaws within the program. While gender is discussed heavily throughout the program, it is only discussed as “boy, girl” with no respect for gender as a non-binary concept. The program calls for categorization of groups by gender, for example, when teachers are told to keep track of how many boys vs. girls they call on. This presumes that every student identifies in either

of those two binary categories. The seminar should also provide teachers with examples that will allow students who may not identify as binary to feel comfortable within their classroom space. Organizations that purposely provide gender training can be consulted to add aspects of all gender difference (not just binary difference) into training programs.

Diversity organizations often provide guidance for educators in regards to dimensions of difference in their classroom space. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) is pronounced “glisten” and is an organization founded by teachers in Massachusetts. This organization seeks to make improvements to the education system in regards to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning students’ rights and experiences. In addition to conducting research, GLSEN also provides educators with resources to better understand and empower LGBTQ students.

GLSEN partnered with the New York Department of Education to create an initiative for educational communities titled “Respect for All”. Part of this initiative included faculty and staff professional development for all members of school communities under the initiative. Other parts of the initiative include: notifying parents and students on district policies regarding bullying and harassment and designating staff members to serve as a person students can report bullying and harassment. (GLSEN.org)

The professional development portion of the initiative is a two-day program for secondary educators. This program specifically addresses bullying and harassment of students due to sexual identity, gender identity, and gender expression (GLSEN.org). The training during the two-day program was provided to educators by trainers from GLSEN, The Anti-Defamation League (a Jewish organization that protects rights for all people),

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility (an organization that works with school districts to create safe spaces for all students), Youth Enrichment Services (an organization that provides educational and employment opportunities to youth ages 16-24), and Operation Respect (an organization that works to make schools places that are free from bullying). According to GLSEN.org there are five goals of the training program.

First, their goal is to increase the capacity of school personal to actively promote a community of inclusion. Next, is the goal to increase the likelihood of intervention by staff members when a student is being bullied or harassed. Third is to build the capacity of school personnel to act as a resource for students who may identify as LGBTQ. Next is to build the capacity for school personnel to become resources for other school personnel regarding LGBTQ issues. The last goal is to decrease exclusionary language practices that might not represent all students. The program seeks to raise awareness, knowledge and beliefs of faculty and staff, and then provide behaviors that create an inclusive school community. The training program consists of group discussions, lectures, videos, and role-plays. For example, a group a teacher may role play that she or he is a student asking for help regarding gender identity, and other teachers would play out scenarios in which the student could be responded to. Afterward, seminar leaders would lead the group in discussions in which the scenarios are discussed and deconstructed. Materials were provided to educators to use in their classrooms including activities for students, and posters to display.

The “Respect for All” program has many aspects that demonstrate effective professional development in creating gender awareness in classroom practice. The program very purposefully does not refer to gender as a binary concept, and provides educators with consistent terminology to address gender issues. The program also challenges members of the school community to confront personal bias, and provides educators with direct resources and activities for classroom use. Both of these aspects have been proven to lead to effective change. (GLSEN.org)

However, there are still aspects of the program that may not lead to effective professional development. The length of the program (only two days) is not long enough to be considered “sustained over time”. According to research by Burbank and Kauchak (2003) professional development is most effective when it is ongoing, rather than temporary. Development that lasts throughout the school year and beyond is most effective. Another issue with the “Respect for All” professional development is that it is led by outside trainers from organizations, and not from people within the school community. Research shows that the most effective professional development occurs when peer leaders facilitate the seminars/workshops/etc. (Desimone, 2009). In the case of the “Respect for All” program all the training is led by an expert from outside of the school community. Faculty and staff may not be as trusting with outside sources as they would be with someone who knows their own community and its unique issues and situation. Teachers begin receiving professional development before they are hired to teach in schools. This first experience of effective teaching practice comes in training programs for pre-service teachers. Syllabi for several courses are reviewed next.

Review of Teacher Preparation Syllabi on Diversity Courses

In addition to professional development programs for practicing teachers, pre-service teachers also receive professional development in the form of credentialing classes. Looking at syllabi from different teacher credentialing programs can be a way to evaluate how teachers are being educated on topics of diversity and dimensions of difference. It was not possible to find any pre-services teacher preparation courses that focused solely on gender difference, so I focused on three syllabuses that focused on many dimensions of diversity.

For this section I have reviewed and evaluated three different syllabi from teacher preparation courses. The syllabi were chosen from three distinct regions of the country. The first, from Laverne University in Southern, California, is for a course titled, “Diversity, Interaction, and the Learning Process”. It is described as a course that will prepare a teacher credential candidate for multicultural teaching experiences with a focus on social and emotional interaction (Laverne.edu). The course goal gives insight to the overall purpose of the course:

To provide the teacher credential candidate with an overview of psycho- social developmental tasks, contemporary schooling practices, essential communication skills, preparation for multi-cultural education, and an appreciation for linguistic, cultural, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity. The primary emphasis is on social and emotional interaction, the development of motivation and self-esteem, mastering practical interpersonal skills, a critical analysis of education in society, development of critical thinking skills, and evaluating attitudes toward diverse

cultural and socio-economic groups (Laverne.edu).

In order to achieve this understanding the syllabus states the teacher candidate will read texts, participate in whole class and small group discussions, observe people from different backgrounds in different settings, and study classroom practices that promote equity for all students. The readings for the course include, *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher*, by Harry K. Wong and Rosemary Wong (4 Edition) and *Classroom Management: A California Resource Guide*, by the L.A. County Office of Education. The class is divided into 14 sessions spanning over the course of one semester. Each session centers on a particular topic, such as: poverty, diversity, multiculturalism, anxiety, and bias in literature.

The next syllabus is from a different geographical location in the country. It is from Fayetteville State University in North Carolina. This course is titled, “Foundations of Multicultural Education & Diversity”. It is specifically for teachers who are seeking certification in middle or high school. The course is predominantly online; however, there are seminar meetings for one hour per month. Students primarily interact with one another through discussion board posts. The semester is from August-November. The course is described as examining,

The historical development of multicultural education and its efforts to help students understand social and educational issues faced by our diverse nation. The instructor/facilitator will help guide students to think critically and reflectively regarding decisions that need to be made, as a classroom teacher to meet the

academic, social, cultural, and emotional needs of all students. Intercultural conflicts and philosophical viewpoints will be addressed to guide discussions relating to the applicability and implementation of principles and practices guiding multicultural education in the 21st century (www.unctfsu.edu).

The textbook being used to facilitate this course is: C. Bennet (2011)

Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice 7th or 8th Ed. Boston: Pearson Education. The class is centered on the book chapters and includes the topics of: Multicultural Schools, Multicultural Teaching, Race Relations and Prejudice, Latino Perspectives, Asian, Muslim, and Arab American Perspectives, Culturally Competent Teaching, Perspectives on Gender, Class, and Special Needs, and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms.

The final syllabus for review is from Southern Illinois University. The course is titled, “Diversity, Culture, and Education in a Pluralist Setting”. The course is described as exploring

The intersections between education, democracy and diversity in American schooling. It introduces students to key philosophical, sociological and political questions in education and asks students to critically examine the role of education in a diverse and pluralistic democracy. Students will examine the relationship between democracy and education, including how educational institutions and practices might be structured democratically. Students will develop an awareness of race, ethnicity, class, gender and other lines of

difference, and explore how schooling might be structured in ways that build equity and justice (siu.edu).

A primary question the course seeks to answer is: “How do issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and class impact educational practices?” (siu.edu) The course reading used for the course is Johnson, Allan G. (2006). *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, 2nd Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill. The class is arranged into discussions, essays and a final project.

The three syllabi were purposely chosen from three distinct places in the country. All of the syllabuses are diversity-focused classes that are specifically designed for teacher preparation programs for pre-service teachers. I did not find any pre-services teacher preparation courses that focused solely on gender difference. Gender is only included in the diversity courses in two of the three syllabuses analyzed. The Diversity course at Laverne University makes no mention of gender in the syllabus, instead only focusing on multiculturalism. The texts that are chosen for the course also do not mention gender as a dimension of diversity. The other two courses, from Southern Illinois University and Fayetteville State University do mention gender. The text used for the course at Fayetteville State University has one chapter on gender, but it is grouped with class and special needs. At Southern Illinois University gender is mentioned in the primary course question: “How do issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and class impact educational practice?” (siu.edu). The text used for this course has a chapter that discusses gender within the context of capitalism and privilege. Of the three syllabi reviewed, none

discuss gender in any way other than as a binary. This is problematic as based on the research from the literature review that educators do not understand the needs of students who identify as non-binary gendered (Riley et al 2013). If pre-service teachers are only being taught that gender exists within a binary idea, then they will not be prepared in their future classrooms when confronted with a student who does not identify as such. The notion that gender diversity is not a large portion of any class on diversity in preparing pre-service teachers does not prepare teachers to address the unique needs of students they are serving within their classroom space.

Based on the effective professional development literature review, in the next section I will address whether teacher preparation courses deliver effective professional development to pre service teachers. Desimone (2009) defines effective professional development as one that contains significant self-reflection. Comparing the three syllabi reviewed above, all courses allow ample time for self-reflection questioning and activities. In regards to understanding dimensions of difference, these self-reflection questions will allow future educators to confront bias they may have, and recognizing personal bias can lead to improve future classroom practice. Professional development has been found to be most effective when sustained over time (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). The length of a teacher education course in a university setting is usually set, without much flexibility. The courses did last much longer (usually several months) than the traditional educator professional development model of just a few days. The lengths of the courses pre-service teachers take are a benefit to the self-reflection process.

Another component to keep in mind is the stages of teacher development described by

Feiman-Nemser and Remillard (1996) and Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986). Pre-service teachers would fall into the novice or survival/discovery stage. This stage necessitates practical approaches to development, and not research-heavy ones. At this stage pre-service teachers are not yet equipped to dissect complex education research, and some teacher preparation courses delve into that, and forget practical approaches that are more useful at this stage.

Recommendations for Effective Professional Development for Gender Variant Students

Based on the literature review, and the review of existing professional development and teacher training courses, I will make several recommendations in order to better serve students who identify as gender variant in the classroom space. Training on gender variance should be made available to everyone in the school community. Educators, administrators, and school staff should all receive training on this complex issue. The training should be differentiated by role if possible, because the information necessary for a social worker is different than the training for an educator and different still for an administrator. Training should occur within the school community, so it can be as specific as possible, so the school population of the site can be considered when presenting information. The training should be done by members of the school community, because research shows that professional developed is most effective when presented by peers, rather than by outside organizations. (Kennedy and Sheil 2010) Outside organizations (Such as GLSEN) should be consulted, and perhaps hired to train

teacher leaders. The training should be ongoing throughout a school year (and beyond). It should not exist in a workshop format, and should have both group and individual aspects.

There are specific aspects of gender variance that should be included in all trainings on gender variance. The literature suggests that the terminology used to define gender variance is inconsistent, and can lead to confusion amongst educators (Jong, 2014; Rio et al. 2014). My recommendation is that any type of professional development on gender variance must begin with a review of key terminology in order to avoid confusion within the professional development program. Specifically, the difference between “sexual identity” and “gender identity” must be clearly defined in order to mitigate the common confusion that these terms are synonymous. As a reminder, “gender identity” refers to how a person describes their gender, where “sexual identity” refers to how they define their sexual preferences. Professional development programs are deemed to be most successful when discussion occurs, so these terms should be discussed amongst the educators present; not just presented to them in a sit and get approach (McLerskey & Weldron, 2002). If teachers are given the space to discuss their own definitions of these terms, and common misconceptions they have or may have experienced in relation to them, rather than just being presented with the definitions, the professional development will become more individually effective and meaningful. In addition to presenting key terms like “gender identity” and “sexual identity”, the definition and diagnosis of gender variant must also be clearly discussed and analyzed.

Members of the school community should be presented with the information from the DSM-5, that gender variance is no longer identified as any sort of disorder; rather it is diagnosed after levels of stress are found to be detrimental to a child due to not conforming to societal expectations of gender. As defined by the American Psychiatric Organization,

“Gender dysphoria involves a conflict between a person's physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify. People with gender dysphoria may be very uncomfortable with the gender they were assigned, sometimes described as being uncomfortable with their body (particularly developments during puberty) or being uncomfortable with the expected roles of their assigned gender. People with gender dysphoria may often experience significant distress and/or problems functioning associated with this conflict between the way they feel and think of themselves (referred to as experienced or expressed gender) and their physical or assigned gender” (APA.org, 2016).

It is important that the often incorrect assumptions as to why children are gender variant be discussed by educators, because the causes of gender variance are often thought to be from abuse or sexual preference, and there is not any research to support that claim (APA.org, 2016).

It is also important that members of the school community be presented with legislation regarding students who identify as gender variant or transgender. At this time, legislation is in progress in many states, and in the Supreme Court, as to whether students

can use the bathroom that correlates with the gender that they identify with (CNN.com, 2017). Because laws regarding the protection of transgender individuals vary from state to state professional development should include state regulations specific to the location of the professional development. As of March, 2017 19 states have laws that allow transgender people to use the bathroom of their choice, under anti-discrimination protection (CNN.com). Further adding to the complexity of the issue, certain school districts also have different standards, regardless of state legislation. At the moment (March 2017) President Donald Trump is attempting to revoke the order that allows transgender students to use the bathroom of their choice (CNN.com). Because this legislation is very current, school districts presenting professional development on gender variance must encourage their educators and staff to keep up to date on these changes, and make new information readily available. Based on the literature review of gender variance, it is my recommendation that students who identify as gender variant or transgender be allowed to use the bathroom of their choice.

Title IX is often used to defend transgender students and their right to not be discriminated against on the basis of gender. While Title IX does not explicitly use the word “transgender” in the past the department of education has made it clear that the law does in fact protect transgender students (GLSEN.org, 2014). However, it is important to note that the new administration may not interpret this legislation the same way as it has been in the past, so educators and school administrators need to make provisions to protect all of their students.

Included in professional development on gender variance should be a clear picture of the bullying and harassment students who identify as gender variant go through in school systems. Educators and other members of the school community must know that students who identify as gender variant are more prone to suicide than any other group of students (Creighton & Kivel, 1992), and should also be educated as to the warning signs of self-harm and suicide, like extreme changes in mood or behavior, increased dialogue about death or dying, and changes in appearance (APA.org). If they know the statistic that students with gender variance are prone to suicide at a high rate, they will be able to recommend counseling and/or other forms of support when confronted with the warning signs.

In addition to receiving information about bullying and harassment, educators should also be presented with the research that pressuring children to conform to an identity that they do not identify with will cause lasting damage throughout adolescence and adulthood such as low self-esteem, suicide attempts, and depression. Constantly feeling as though you are being taught to conform to a stereotype that is not natural to you, can be very damaging. (Grant et al. 2010). This information is vital for educators because they interact with children on a daily basis, and could (even inadvertently) be pressuring stereotypical gender roles and identity in their classrooms.

Research shows that professional development is most effective when it specifically relates to classroom practice, so educators should be presented with specific ways that they can combat stereotypical ideas of gender and gender identity in their

classroom spaces. For instance, educators can choose literature that presents characters eschewing “traditional” gender roles, educating students about gender as a non-binary concept through non-fiction pieces, and not separating students by male and female categories with seating arrangements.

Because professional development is most effective when specifically applicable to individual practice, professional development on gender variance should be relatable to whatever school personnel it is being presented to. Educational administrators must take care to differentiate instruction based on what school personal is present. For example, when providing a professional development seminar on gender variance or other dimensions of difference, the specific school personnel that are present should be taken into account. The literature review discussed social workers, educators, and school counselors and the specific roles they play in working with students who identify as gender variant.

Some school districts may choose to have development for their population of school social workers. If the seminar is for social workers, it would focus on the research that explains the best practice for speaking with students regarding gender variance, and the way to communicate with parents and other school personal regarding gender variance. School social workers often deal with more personal information than any other school personnel. The study by Rio, et. All (2013) uncovered that personal bias among social workers regarding gender variance did influence some social workers’ opinion and thought process when assisting students who identify as gender variant. Because of this it

is important to provide professional development that will allow social workers to confront their own biases regarding gender variance. This can be done through open discussion and self-reflection.

School Psychologists also may be given professional development regarding gender variance. The school psychologist often deals with data and testing, but also meets with individual students. Because school psychologists are used to working with educational research, they should be provided with many of the studies that are discussed in the literature review regarding gender variance. In order for the development to be effective, they should also be allowed self-reflection and open discussion time with their peers.

If the professional development is for educators, it should focus on two primary tasks: how to best accommodate students who identify as gender variant in their classroom space, and how to best create a classroom environment that disrupts the narrative that supports gender stereotyping. Because the research shows that the most successful professional development for teachers contains practical aspects that inform specific practice (Bull & Buechler 1997), teachers should be given specific tasks and curriculum materials that they can use in their classroom to disrupt this narrative. For example, educators can be provided with children's literature featuring characters defying gender stereotypes. A quick Google search can provide educators many examples of children's literature that does not prescribe to "traditional" gender roles. An example of this literature is, *Not all Princesses Dress in Pink*, by Jane Yolen and Heidi Stemple.

Secondary school educators can also use literature that will disrupt the “traditional” gender narrative amongst their students, for example, *Luna* by Julie Anne Peters, a novel about a boy who is Liam during day and Luna when the moon rises. Educators of all grades can be advised not separate students by perceived gender. Educators of all levels can have Socratic style discussions their class on gender binaries. These Socratic style discussions can occur using articles, books, or film clips. The website “Upworthy” can be a great resource to educators when looking for articles that confront gender binaries and stereotypes. Most importantly, educators, and all school personnel need to be provided with the research based information on gender variance, and the harm that comes with not validating students who identify as such in order to create a more inclusive community for all.

Conclusion

Gender variance in school-aged children is a topic that has only recently started to be discussed amongst educators and educational administrators (del Rio et al. 2014). While the unique needs of children who do not identify as one specific gender or another are plentiful, there is little information and research on how schools can best accommodate these children and young adults (Riley et al 2013). Effective and thoughtful professional development is key in addressing some of these unique needs. Members of school communities must be provided with ample information in how to accommodate students who identify as gender variant in order to create inclusive communities in which all students can succeed.

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