

TRANSFORMATION

ADDRESSING GENDER ISSUES IN SCHOOL

***Trans/formation: Addressing Gender Issues in School* Educational Supplement: How to use the script in a classroom setting**

Please review all materials prior to distributing them to students to make certain that they are appropriate for your organization.

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Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to your Trans/formation transformative experience. Congratulations on taking the steps to educate your school on transgender and gender non-conforming experiences! As you may know, many youth experience discrimination and bullying around trans* and gender non-conforming identities. In fact, in a recent survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, findings showed that those who expressed a transgender identity or gender non-conformity while in grades K-12 reported alarming rates of harassment (78%), physical assault (35%) and sexual violence (12%); harassment was so severe that it led almost one-sixth (15%) to leave a school in K-12 settings or in higher education (NCTE Survey, 2011). Teacher education on transgender issues is also very important, the survey also found that Respondents who have been harassed and abused by teachers in K-12 settings showed dramatically worse health and other outcomes than those who did not experience such abuse (NCTE Survey, 2011).

The following suggestions are intended to help you use the script and facilitate an educational dialogue about the themes in the play. You may cast and use the script in the manner that fits your setting best, however, you may find it helpful to follow some of the suggestions in this document. Good luck, and happy educating!

Ideas for Casting and Directing

The purpose of *Trans/formation* is to educate youth about gender and specifically trans* youth experiences. Youth do not have to be transgender or gender non-conforming identified to perform in the play; in fact, it may be helpful to have non trans-identified students perform.

Be thoughtful about including a diverse range of gender presentations if possible in the cast. Encourage students to explore presenting their gender in different ways in their role. Cast should be encouraged to explore their ideas of gender and sexuality and what it means to be male, female, feminine, masculine, and everything in between. This can help them empathize and challenge them to explore their own experiences of gender identity and expression.

One thing to consider may be that it may be difficult for a trans* identified student to perform in the play because of fears of stigma or outing themselves, and non trans identified students can learn through the experience of performing the themes included in the play, providing perspective.

When casting the play other aspects of diversity should be considered. Trans* people come from every racial and ethnic background, every socio-economic strata, and all different ranges of experiences. It is important to address different aspects of experience that may come from different racial, ethnic, or economic backgrounds and how that may impact youth experiences. This can also be a good place to explore how difference is handled overall by the cast members and can be a good starting place for the discussions about transgender experiences.

Preparation of School and Audience

You may find it helpful prior to the play to distribute the educational materials included in this packet, or to show a video, assign a chapter in a book from the resource list, or to engage in a discussion with students in the classroom. Stigma can be reduced through familiarity and making the topic “real” to those unfamiliar with transgender issues.

A point to emphasize would be the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity (see definitions and components of sexual identity). Every individual has a sexual orientation and a gender identity, and making this concept real to students and teachers can help people relate to the concepts. A useful exercise may be the components of sexual identity definitions and continuum (see exercises). This exercise can engage others in a visceral way to the concepts and introduce the idea of the gender continuum that each of us exist on.

If you are producing the play because gender harassment or bullying has occurred, it may be important to have administrators and teachers emphasize anti bullying policies and the intention to a create safe learning atmosphere. You may find students need extra support in talking about these issues, and having the school counselor, the GSA advisor, or other identified safe staff to contact will be helpful.

Rehearsal Process and Cast Support

Having a counselor or other staff member present to address any issues that may come up can be helpful.

In preparation for the play, the cast may want to do additional reading, or bring in books, articles, YouTube videos, or definitions that may be helpful to discuss with the group.

Some ideas for before rehearsal check in and after rehearsal debriefing with cast members

- How are you feeling today?
- Any issues you need to discuss about experiences around the play?
- “Roses and thorns” share highlights and lowlights of your experience.
- Share one thought or feeling experienced specifically around gender.
- Scaling yourself on a scale of 1-10 about where are your feelings?

It is important to have a debriefing after the completion of the play production. Scheduling a cast party and a cast debriefing session may prove to be helpful in providing closure and processing the play experience. Check in with the cast about how they felt about the process and see if they had any afterthoughts about the experience.

Exercise for Cast

1. Review “**Components of Sexual Identity**” PowerPoint. The purpose of this presentation is to understand help explain the difference between natal sex, social role, gender identity, and sexual orientation.
2. **Gender Norms Exercise** The purpose of this exercise is to identify and discuss gender norms of US culture. Do this exercise after the circles of sexual identity PowerPoint has been completed.

Materials: whiteboard, markers, butcher paper

Gather the cast together in one large group. As a facilitator, using a whiteboard or chalkboard, write “man,” “woman,” “feminine,” and “masculine,” on the board in four columns.

Man

Woman

Feminine

Masculine

Brainstorm

Now have the group “brainstorm” by shouting out qualities that represent what it means to be a man. (physical signifiers, dress, role, etc) encourage them by asking, “how do you know someone is a man?” “what does it mean to be a man?” write down all responses, there is no right or wrong answer. Then have the group do the same for each of the remaining categories. When you get to feminine, ask “what are the things, behaviors, clothes, people, that are feminine?” and the same for masculine.

You should end up with four distinct categories that identify the clear gender norms of US culture.

Discussion

Ask the group what their initial reactions are to seeing the lists they generated. Point out how the man and masculine lists probably overlap and the women and feminine lists overlap. Ask if they feel this is true for them in their experience.

Suggested questions include:

- Do they know anyone who does not fit this overlap?
- What does it mean when someone is a feminine man or a masculine woman?
- Why do they think there is an assumption about someone’s sexual orientation based on their gender expression?
- What are reactions you have about feminine men and masculine women?

Draw the circles of sexual identity on the board again (from PowerPoint presentation). Review the circles with the group and have them think of celebrities they know that embody feminine or masculine traits and have them fill out the circles for each of the celebrities they brainstorm. You may want to break the group into smaller subgroups and have them complete this part of the exercise in their small group by drawing out the circles of sexual identity on butcher paper and thinking of two celebrities and filling out how they fit into each of the circles. Then bring the group back together as a large group and have them present their circles to the larger group. Allow the group to ask questions.

As a facilitator, take time to point out the difference between sexual orientation, gender identity, gender norms, and gender expression.

Then ask the group to explore how these terms relate to the play and the characters in the play.

Finally, ask the group to think about how these terms impact them in their lives, and to take the time to think about the circles of sexual identity over the next few days.

Post Play Audience Discussion

The play is intended to be performed and then have a 30-minute discussion with the cast, directors, and audience. You can do this as a large group, and then follow up in class with a smaller group discussion, or appoint group facilitators and have people break out into smaller groups to ask questions and process their reactions to the play. It is recommended that classroom follow up with educational materials (see resources and exercises) to bring home the themes of the play and provide additional context. Some questions for discussion are included in the packet to stimulate possible format for the after play discussion.

Questions for Audience Discussion:

Below are some suggested questions for discussion for processing the play. Feel free to go through the questions, or to choose several to use to discuss the play after the show.

Identify the main themes of the play:

- Dating
- Coming out as transgender
- Bathrooms
- Family acceptance
- Gender identity/expression, gender “binary”
- Dealing with stigma

In the first scene, several people are sharing their different experiences of their gender. What are your reactions to some of their comments? Do you resonate with any of their sentiments? Were there any comments that did or did not make sense to you? Which ones?

In the second scene, the characters introduce gender-neutral pronouns “ze” and “hir” and talk about the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. What are other ways of not using he and she pronouns? How can you be sure of what pronoun people want to use? What are your preferred pronouns?

In the third scene, the character is panicked about having to use the bathroom? What are some of the issues that may come up in using the bathroom if someone thinks you are in the wrong bathroom? What are the cues you use to decide if someone is in the right bathroom? What feelings come up for you if someone who is androgynous or transgender is in the bathroom with you?

In the fourth scene Kris turns down a date with a boy she likes after the teacher calls her birth assigned sex out to the entire class. What feelings do you think Kris was dealing with in that scene? Why do you think Kris decided to not go on the date? Why might she be nervous to go out with her classmate? How would you feel in this situation?

In the box dance, the characters are all trying on different labels and trying to find one that fits. What labels are you familiar with when it comes to gender? What label fits for you? Have you heard some of the terms on the boxes in the scene? If not which ones?

In the next few scenes, the characters are expressing feelings of being alone, feeling misunderstood. Have you ever felt alone? Misunderstood? How do you think your experiences might relate to the characters in the play?

Joe and Greg are hanging out in class when Greg asks Joe “what’s in his pants”. Why might this question be offensive to ask a transgender person? What are other things Greg could have said in this scene?

What might it feel like to have to pretend at your gender? What would it be like for you if you felt your body did not match the gender you were assigned at birth? How are boys and girls expected to act and how is this different?

What does “genderqueer” mean to you? When feeling neither male or female or both, how does that change the way you might walk in the world? What are challenges that may come up for someone who is genderqueer?

What are some of the challenges that may come up for trans* teens in dating issues? What are some of the issues you deal with in dating? How are these similar or different for trans* teens?

Alex’s mother does not want him home for Thanksgiving. How do you think Alex feels about being asked to leave? What are issues that may come up for trans* teens whose parents are not supportive?

The last two scenes deal with Liam coming out and others reactions to his coming out as trans*. What are some of your reactions to the play? What are some of the things you have learned about being transgender through the play? Any new terms? How have trans* people been treated in your life? Do you know any transgender people? How would you handle if someone came out as trans* to you?

Resources

Transformations: Addressing Gender Issues in School (play script)

<http://z.umn.edu/transformationsscript>

Educational Supplement: how to use the script in the classroom setting (this document)

<http://z.umn.edu/transformationused>

Components of Sexual Identity (PowerPoint)

<http://z.umn.edu/componentsofsexualid>

“Transgender Terminology,” by National Center for Transgender Equality

http://transequality.org/Resources/NCTE_TransTerminology.pdf

“Injustice at Every Turn,” A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

http://transequality.org/PDFs/Executive_Summary.pdf

“Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation’s Schools,” by Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) documents the school experiences of 295 transgender middle and high school students and finds that these students face extremely high levels of victimization, even more so than their non-transgender lesbian, gay and bisexual peers.

<http://glsen.org/learn/research/national/report-harsh-realities>

“Fact Sheet: Transgender & Gender Nonconforming Youth in Schools,” by the Sylvia Rivera Law Project – includes definitions

<http://srlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/youth-rights-color.pdf>

Books for Trans Teens, a book list compiled by a user of the Hennepin County Library

<http://www.hclib.org/pub/bookspace/myBooklists/ShowList.cfm?ListID=2252>

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) Transgender Student Rights

<http://glsen.org/students/tsr>

GLADD’S Transgender Resources

<http://www.glaad.org/transgender?gclid=CLSDrpmcgbQCFbKiPAodKFgAbg>

I AM: Trans People Speak Video Series by MTPC and GLADD

<http://www.glaad.org/transpeoplespeak>

The Genderbread Person v2.0 by Sam Killerman from website It’s Pronounced Metrosexual; a graphic that describes the gender spectrum

<http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/03/the-genderbread-person-v2-0/>