

## WHEN IT COUNTS: TALKING ABOUT TRANSGENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER FLUIDITY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By Susan Lee

“It’s like, now I’m just happy I can be who I really am and not what people think I should be... When I put on that dress, I started crying. I felt like for the first time, I was me<sup>1</sup>.”

-- Anthony, 13.

Clambering loudly, children cross the school’s paths, run unabashedly through its woodchips and hug its flawed but charming soul. “1, 2, 3, SCHOOLTIME!” they belt as they rush through the main doorway each morning. This is my school, Park Day School, a school environment that values the development of the child within academic, social and emotional educations. Projects are welcome, experiences encouraged and social responsibility acknowledged. In addition to classroom dialogue, musings upon the classroom curriculum and the unforeseen topics of interest that emerge, the children bring with them an energy and excitement each day that speaks to their comfort as learners within the school environment. It is a school world that strives to embrace the diversity of learners that enter each day. Yet does it?

Although our school is known for its nurturing environment and progressive ideology, we struggle together as we contemplate how to have conversations with children around difficult topics, especially when those challenging conversations occur among a community of parents who have many differing perspectives on any given topic. In our classes, we also take great care in holding difficult conversations with our students, particularly when the issues revolve around self and identity. Our school and staff value each child and the gifts that they bring to our learning environment.

Much of our curriculum is student-centered and sensitive to the developmental needs of the child. The influences of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Howard Gardner, Maria Montessori, John Dewey, and Paolo Freire underscore the way we teach. Our teaching philosophies are also rooted in theories of child development and children’s socioemotional development. Within our classrooms, we emphasize the importance of working together as a community in our shared spaces. From day one, we work together as a community to establish a respectful growing environment. The importance of respecting one another and our individual differences emerges as being valued by all, and all classrooms aim to have students feel included and safe to be who themselves. Often, students will say, “There’s no excluding here at Park Day School.”

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<sup>1</sup>Teen who shared his story with us during our parent education night.

## DISCUSSING GENDER FLUIDITY: STAFF & PARENT EDUCATION:

Although the segment of population that has dared identify itself as transgender is only a small percentage of the population in the U.S., as a school, we felt ready to move our discussions with the students from focusing on gender identity and stereotyping to a more accepting view of gender fluidity along a gender spectrum, provided that the activities and discussion scaffolding the learning was developmentally appropriate. Also, as the school community has grown and as families have joined us, the school has felt it necessary to make it a safe place for all the members of its community. Previous activities and discussions during CARE<sup>2</sup> week around LGBT issues, previous PRIDE day celebrations and ongoing daily work around gender and communication topics with students laid the groundwork for our discussion on gender fluidity.

As a staff, we needed to orient ourselves to the same definitions for transgender, transsexual, homophobia, gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, gender fluidity, gender neutral, gender identity, sexual orientation, gender stereotyping and sex roles<sup>3</sup>. The confusion is not out of line. For example, media images of transgender adults often focus on adults as transsexuals, not necessarily as those who live with the growing pains of grappling with transgender identity issues; *The Crying Game*, *The Adventures of Priscilla*, *Queen of the Desert* and *To Wong Fu, Thanks for Everything*, *Boys Don't Cry* and *Transamerica* do not encompass the young child's perspectives on gender stereotyping in the way that *Ma Vie En Rose (My Life in Pink)* or *Billy Elliot* do. As for me, looking back through my health education materials and multicultural education materials from my graduate classes and credentialing program, it was also clear that I was unprepared to adequately tackle talking to my second grade students about this topic immediately. In my binders, there were many articles on discussing homophobia<sup>4</sup> in the classroom, particularly around the word "fag" and "faggot"<sup>5</sup>. There were other articles on identity and mental health for students that referenced the importance of supporting students' identities. There were also articles referencing components of how to work with LGBT youth, but the materials we read and discussed focused mostly on the LGB portions of the acronym. There was nothing on how to support children who felt they were born into the wrong bodies.

The school was presented with an opportunity to have guests from Gender Spectrum Education and Training<sup>6</sup> who were willing to visit and talk with the students on the topic of transgender identity. Our staff worried. We agreed that it was essential to engage in the discussion because we felt we needed to build a safe community for all children and their identities. However, how could we, as non-experts, enter the conversation? After much discussion, the school agreed to offer the staff two professional development opportunities to support and bolster the staff's knowledge and language around talking to kids about transgender identity issues. These two professional development days were closely coordinated with Stephanie Brill, Co-Director of

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<sup>2</sup> [CARE week at Park Day School; see p. 4]

<sup>3</sup> Find gender-related terminology definitions at: <http://www.genderodysseyfamily.com/terminology.html>

<sup>4</sup> One of the courses required for obtaining a teaching credential involves a health course. During the time of my health course, we spent one afternoon discussing children, resiliency and how to educate kids with regards to sexual orientation (including definitions, statistics about LGB youth and historical cases of violence against LGB people).

<sup>5</sup> See Gordon (1995), for insight into homophobic name-calling among elementary students in "What Do We Say When We Hear 'Faggot'?"

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.genderspectrum.org/>

Gender Spectrum<sup>7</sup>. Stephanie arranged for members from Gender Spectrum to train our staff about how to talk about gender fluidity with children. During our professional development days, we also heard about their experiences and discussed the activities that the students in the various grades would be introduced to when the visitors came.

The school also agreed that arranging a parent education night was crucial to inform parents before the guest presenters were to visit classrooms. Stephanie agreed to facilitate the event and the school administration wrote a letter to the parents informing them of the upcoming evening on Gender Stereotyping and Gender Variance. Before the parent event, teachers also collaborated on different versions of an appropriate letter to send out to parents. In addition to the school's letter to the parents, this was what my second grade parents received regarding the upcoming visit:

The underlying message in the activity for Thursday is: "You can be who you say you are" and the activity focuses on gender stereotyping (which is much more appropriate developmentally for a 7 year old). We are having teachers from Gender Spectrum, a group of educators who visit elementary, middle, and high schools, visit to discuss the rainbow of gender. The message to children is that gender is who one feels to be inside: you are who you say you are. Together we will explore gender stereotypes and the limitations that they impose. The presenters will ask the kids what activities they like to do and will begin to categorize them randomly under "boy" and "girl" categories. This will give rise to a discussion about whether or not soccer is just for girls to play, for example. This is in line with the stories that we have read throughout the year discussing and challenging gender stereotypes (include stories about girls who want to play on little league teams, women who dream of voting such as Sojourner Truth and Susan B. Anthony, or boys who want to play with dolls or learn to dance ballet - such as Alvin Ailey). At least one of the presenters will be a transgender individual, so while we talk about stereotypes, they will introduce that word "transgender" as we discuss. We are talking about transgender from the perspective that sometimes what people feel on inside doesn't match what other people see on the outside. I think that is the extent to which the presenters will delve into as far as appropriate introduction to this topic for this age group of kids. Again, the message is "you can be who you say you are".

We will handle these concepts and the children's questions in age-appropriate and sensitive ways. These are not issues of sexuality, but of gender identity. We are staying the course of GENDER IDENTITY and in no way will bring up sexuality. In general, children who are naturally inquisitive will ask more questions than those who are not. When presented in a factual manner about gender identity, children are not confused by these subjects. As with any new subject, if you do not know enough about gender variance to feel comfortable discussing it with

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<sup>7</sup> Stephanie is an advocate for transgender issues. An excellent starter for parents can be found here at <http://www.helpstartshere.org/Default.aspx?PageID=1114> and at <http://www.genderspectrum.org/>

your child, a fine response is, “This is something I don’t know much about. I would be happy to learn more if it interests you.”

As to why Park Day School is featuring this topic at this time, it is part of our ongoing diversity work. You may have read in the New York Times an article over the summer that Park Day School was mentioned as one of the schools that does not line children up by gender and welcomes transgender people as part of our community. This reflects our ongoing commitment to inclusivity and diversity. In the spring of 2002, Park Day School’s Campaign for Awareness, Respect, and Empathy (CARE) Week was dedicated to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues which were discussed in each classroom as appropriate. This continues to be part of the curriculum in our classes. At Park Day School we respect that people can dress however they feel best reflects them. We are comfortable with any child wearing pants or any child wearing a dress. We are comfortable with any child having any length of hair. In addition, when there are children who let their family know that they are not the gender assigned to them, we support them as well. In every community there are transgender people. Transgenderism or significant gender variance in children occurs in one in every 500 births. We simply may not recognize this because they are living their lives just like most of the rest of the children and adults. We do not identify this as a problem but as part of the natural rainbow of human expression. In the broader society, this has been stigmatized, but it need not be so. In fact, research shows that these children/teens have a 50% chance of attempting suicide and an 80% chance of being the victim of violence while still in school. Through education and understanding we can empower children to be allies and build communities that are safe and nurturing for everyone.

On the night of the parent education event there was a strong turnout of parents. The parent education program featured a panel of seven guests: a mother and her 13-year-old child, Anthony; John Rice; Brenda Chevis and her identical twin Aidan Key; a local child psychologist and a parent member of our school community. After a framing of the topic by Stephanie and a short film on identity<sup>8</sup>, each member of the panel had an opportunity to share his or her story. This was then followed by a question and answer dialogue in grade level groups (K-2, 3-5, 6-8) for a developmentally appropriate discussion. By the end of the presentation, the power of personal experience and words was palpable. From John’s story about his own son, Jesse, a 6-year-old kindergartner who seemed like a girl but was born a boy to Anthony’s story and his mother’s obvious love for Anthony, narrative after narrative illustrated a difficult path for people who identify as being born in the wrong body. “I want you to remember that this is something that the children know to be true about themselves and their identity. Why would someone *choose* this?” said Stephanie. “It’s not an easy path.”

For some parents, the parent education event assuaged their nervousness. Wrote a parent to the group of parents in my classroom:

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<sup>8</sup> [“Out of the Shadows”]

I attended the information night on Tuesday and was also very impressed with the program, with Stephanie and the approach they were taking with the K-2 group.

For other parents, they questioned whether or not their children were ready to discuss such a mature topic.

I am hoping to make it to the panel discussion Tuesday night. I was wondering if you knew what would be discussed on Thursday in the classroom? What are "developmentally appropriate activities" for 2<sup>nd</sup> graders? I am concerned that this is too mature a topic for 7 year olds. Thanks!

On a developmental level, one of our primary goals was to be as clear and explicit in what messages the children might gain from our discussion together. From the teaching staff's perspective, the issues raised for the younger primary students centered around identity, and not sexuality, for transgender youth. The activities we chose framed the question as an identity issue based around gendered categories and gendered stereotyping. We wanted the second graders to identify with instances where they felt injustice or discomfort based on society's perceived gender roles. As the day for the in class guest visit drew nearer, the teachers (myself included) continued to field questions from anxious parents:

My concerns primarily revolve around the following:

1) Addressing gender stereotyping and nurturing thoughtful, considerate children vs. individuals making transgender choices and the low incidence and relevance to the children: More specifically, while gender stereotyping is a common issue that should be addressed and I applaud the efforts in this direction, people who pursue a transgender course are relatively few (1 in 500 or less than 1%) and I worry that the 2nd graders are being presented a complex, difficult issue that will have little impact on their lives. You said "At least one of the presenters will be a transgender individual, so while we talk about stereotypes, they will introduce that word "transgender" as we discuss." I worry that to give it this level of attention will beg many questions that 2nd graders aren't prepared to consider and it raises the apparent incidence of transgender choices out of proportion with its actual occurrence in society.

2) I am also concerned about the relative importance of this subject to our society, our species and our planet and the amount of time and effort PDS is putting into it, relative to the time and effort that could be put towards other topics. For example, issues of class, sharing of resources and rampant consumerism threaten our very existence as a species and I believe the best way we can effect long-term change is through our children. I love the fact that you all are some of the most thoughtful teachers on the planet and you do address these issues, but it concerns me that so much time and effort is being spent on this instead.

"This is such a small portion of the community – why are you teaching identity based on this small piece?" asked one angry parent.

“Are you bringing in other examples of people with gender stereotyped experiences? This is going to skew how our kids perceive things to be!” wrote another.

Earlier in the year, the school had faced reporting from media outlets, outraged letters to the editor and criticism from various religious and pro-values family website groups who were dismayed that a school would support LGB families as well as discuss gender identity as being both a personal choice and a fluid concept<sup>9</sup>. However, the school’s underlying belief that all children deserve a chance to “be who they say they are” was much more compelling. The school continued to reach out in dialogue to assure and reassure parents that they could trust us.

Throughout the e-mail and in person exchanges and explanations for why the school and staff believed in moving forward with this work, I kept one statistic that had been shared with us in mind: studies (both published and unpublished) have found that 50% of teens who identify as transgender attempt to commit suicide because they feel alone and unsupported. No matter how small this slice of the community might be, if we could even save just one life down the road by merely being understanding allies to each other, the discussions would be invaluable. Did this knowledge make the upcoming guest visit and potential array of questions from the kids any easier on us as teachers? Hardly – but via our staff training sessions, we felt more prepared for the possibilities of questions that might emerge from our students during and after the visit.

## VISITING WITH SECOND GRADERS

On the day of the visit from Gender Spectrum, both second grade classes gathered together for the presentation by Brenda and Aidan. Stephanie was also there to introduce the two. She led off the presentation by asking the second graders how they “knew” if someone was a man or a woman. After many enthusiastic responses, Brenda and Aidan shared their family history and pictures with the students. The kids seemed unfazed that two people who once presented as identical twins could now look of opposite gender.

After the guests left, Michelle (the other second grade teacher) and I sat down with the students in circle and asked them if they had any other questions that they might have felt unanswered or uncomfortable asking in front of the guests. When the second graders continued to expound on their own personal experiences with gender stereotyping, we pushed even further by asking if they wanted to know anything more about the story of the identical twins. Even so, despite our leading questions, the second graders chose to focus on the part of discussion most tangible and meaningful to them – which was around gender stereotypes; many hands were raised as children continued to eagerly share their experiences.

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<sup>9</sup> Various articles: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/08/27/MNGL2KQ8H41.DTL>,  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/02/us/02child.html?ex=1189483200&en=39a5574d887b012c&ei=5070>,  
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At the end of the guest visit, Michelle and I composed an e-mail to parents with suggestion about how to follow up, including a reminder about the wait time that children take to process information. We referred parents to the packet handout as well as encouraged them to contact us with any further questions. Darlene, a mother of a second grader who was helping in the classroom at the time of the presentation, also composed a supportive and informative note to the second grade parents offering her own take on the discussion:

Hi Families,

I was working in the classroom today, so I happened to be there for the presentation on gender. I know some parents were apprehensive about it, and most are probably curious, so I thought I'd share a few quick impressions. I was typing student work at the beginning, so I didn't catch all three of the presenters' names, but I did hear the whole presentation.

Leading the presentation was Stephanie. She does a lot of school presentations, and she presented the information in a very age-appropriate way. She began by asking the kids about how they "know" that someone is a man or a woman -- the kids said things like "hair" and "voice" and "clothes." She then told them that sometimes people think she's a man because of how she dresses and carries herself, and that when these people hear her voice they then feel embarrassed or confused. She told them that sometimes when people address her as lady, as in "would you ladies like your check?" she feels confused because she doesn't feel like a \*lady\* she feels like a woman. This led to a discussion of what it means to be a boy or a girl, and how there are lots of different ways to be whatever gender you are -- you can be a boy who likes dresses or a girl who likes baggy clothes.

Also presenting were a woman and a trans-gendered man, whose names I didn't catch. They are identical twins, and the man told them that he started out as a girl, but he had always felt he was a boy, and when he grew up he worked with a doctor to become a man. He told them that he and his twin sister used to look exactly alike, which the children found interesting but not as surprising as most of us would find it. The presenters emphasized that changing gender isn't something that just happens by itself, it's something that a small number of grown-ups do after a lot of thought by working with a doctor. They also made it clear that you don't have to change gender to be able to do things or wear things that aren't typical for your gender, that people choose to change gender when they feel they really ARE a different gender.

The emphasis of the presentation was that gender is something that we get to choose, and that there are lots of ways to be a boy or a girl or a man or a woman. The kids had lots to say on this subject, and mostly they talked about their own experiences and things they do or like or wear that aren't "typical" for their gender. The vast majority of their comments were about these things. They were completely unfazed by the revelation that the male presenter had once been female, and asked none of the questions that adults or older kids might ask about

HOW such a transformation happens. The main message of the presentation was one that our kids have gotten throughout their time at Park Day and which is deeply ingrained in them already -- that they should be kind and accepting of other people, and a good friend and ally to people who might otherwise be teased for being different.

I was really impressed by the presentation and happy to see that information that might seem controversial or surprising to us was taken at face value by the kids.

Her letter was consistent to the summary that Jason, a second grader in my class, later gave of the day's events to his parents:

“We learned that you can be who you say you are and that you should do the things that you like to do. Like Lily (his sister). Just because she wants to like dolls doesn't mean she's a girl. She might just like doing things that people think are girl things....”

Further feedback over the next week seemed to indicate that our worries and parents' worries had been overly anxious, and we shared these observations with the rest of the staff at our next check-in. I was further reassured to hear from one parent her viewpoint that, “Kids are often so much more capable than I first realize.” It seemed we had all managed to talk openly and honestly in a truthful and clear manner about this topic with the children and the parent community!

Afterwards, I wondered if we second grade teachers should have front-loaded the discussion topic by guiding the class's ideas beforehand towards less of a discussion of gender roles and towards more of a discussion around issues that transgender people faced. I wondered if the children understood the other content in the presentation, and I wondered, too, if it was too early to talk about with the kids beyond the importance of being who you say you are. Nevertheless, the staff felt an important seed had been planted in furthering our own knowledge about transgender issues. We certainly felt more confident in knowing how to discuss the topic with the children in an open, honest and non-confusing way. The language that Stephanie and the Gender Spectrum group had taught us was invaluable in helping to support all children's self-esteem, mental health and growth as individuals and as allies.

## REFLECTIONS

Afterwards, the dialogue continued throughout the year as we read William's Doll, Oliver Button is a Sissy and learned about Annie Oakley. We also wanted to continue to give voice to the experience of gender identity among many other experiences. When we had our annual PRIDE celebration at the end of June, we celebrated together with guest speakers and watched the film “That's a Family.” In these moments, my school calls upon the staff and our community to help with the education of the students. I appreciate and respect our school's openness to seek out those who can help to broaden the scope of knowledge base around the tough issues, thus preventing a teacher's narrow or unknown bias from seeping in when we have a common

language as a staff and parent body to use when explaining the hidden agendas of class, race, economics, gender, identity and language to students.

The school also had to face the projection of fear by adults on both the topic of transgender identity and on the fear of the unknown conversation. Not everyone agreed with our choice to introduce the topic of discussion to the students, but fear of conversation and fear of not knowing all the answers was not enough to immobilize our efforts at combating the suppression of identity. In struggling with how to teach the sticky social issues, the dilemma of the teacher to make these learning experiences meaningful without bias, but with intention, remains. When kids ask questions, how much information do we as teachers actually give in our answers? For example, the responses we give to the same question differ enormously based on context. A seven-year-old asking the question of “Where do babies come from?” begs an entirely different conversation than the teen who asks the same question.

How much information *do* we give? At one point, I remember answering, “As much information as what’s developmentally appropriate, of course related to the context and community of the classroom.” Yet, how do I know what’s developmentally appropriate for each topic and each child? When the father of a child in my class counters asking, “How many studies have they done on the effects of this topic for second graders?” he is in essence speaking to the doubt that lingers and essentially asking, “How do you know what’s best for *my* child?” When I am thinking about the heart of the question this father poses, I want to respond indignantly to reference the daily needs of the classroom, the split-second decisions teachers make and the care underlying each of our responses in the classroom – but this does not address the parent’s fear of not knowing the answers. What I am really thinking is that there needs to be some letting go when parents decide to entrust their child to the care of our school. As I share my response with the parent and ask him to consider that all teachers make judgment calls based on their knowledge of the classroom and of their students, I am hoping that the father will see that there is a skill and craft in teaching. I also share with him that it is o.k. to tell his child, “I’m not really sure of the answer to your question, but I’d be happy to go and learn more about it and then share what I find out with you.”

Months later after the visitors, at the end of the year, Selena and Kiomi were in the corner drawing and writing letters to their future third grade teachers. Upon hearing that one of the third grade teachers would be married in the summer, one of the girls drawing paused in her work and came up to me.

“Do you know if she (the third grade teacher) is getting married to a man or a woman?” asked the Selena.

“I’m not sure,” I replied. “Why?”

“Because I’m trying to draw a picture and I want to draw her getting married,” continued Selena.

Out of the corner of the room, Kiomi piped up. “You could just draw whatever you imagine. It doesn’t really matter,” she said. “And also, the person might look one way but be another. You should just draw two happy people in love, because that’s what counts when you are getting married.”

I smiled. While we adults may still have a long way to go, the children certainly understand what matters when it counts.

### Looking Ahead

We continue to look ahead at furthering and sustaining the education and training from previous years of laying ground for a more equitable and safe school environment for all children. From staff discussions about children's privacy rights and unisex bathrooms on campus to sharing anecdotes that come up around the topic of gender, our work is ongoing. Consider these examples of our ongoing work:

- A kindergarten teacher starts the first day of school wearing pants. The second day of school, she is dressed in a skirt. She prompts the class to notice that their friend is wearing a dress today, just as she is wearing a skirt today. She reminds the class to think back to the first day of school and asks them what she was wearing (pants) and what their friend was wearing. Then she asks if it's o.k. for her to wear a skirt one day and pants the next (to which the class says enthusiastically, "yeah, of course!"). The teacher also adds in that historically, it was once frowned upon for women to wear pants. The kindergarteners are incredulous and from there, the class discusses how it is o.k. to wear what you want to because you can be who you want to be at school.

Notice the developmentally appropriate way in which the teacher has decided to normalize the right to choose an outward appearance and way to present oneself. Whether or not the children in her class question their gender or are fluidly exploring gender, each child can feel safe coming to school dressed the way the child feels knowing that the class and teacher will support their choices.

- A second grade teacher shares that during a conversation that arises around judging people based on what they are wearing, her second graders say, "Girls can wear pants and boys can wear a dress" followed up by someone else adding, "Noo - you can be who you want to be so you can wear what you want."

Also consider the example that the children at the school are setting for each other:

- Overhearing younger children speaking and assigning gender roles (i.e., "You're a boy, you're a girl, that's a boy thing, that's a girl thing), a sixth grader helping out adds in that at Park Day School you can do what you want to do and boys don't just do boy things and girls don't just do girl things.

The last example is especially hopeful. When the children begin to teach each other and to teach us again, we realize the sustainability and richness of such a topic. As a school, we also continue to ask ourselves how we can cycle back and revisit the topics in meaningful ways in order to sustain the learning. We wonder aloud how is it that we will teach our students to respect and honor their individualities and differences? More importantly, what *kind* of difference will our students make and how will their choices in behavior change the world? From this experience,

valuable insight into what is developmentally appropriate for discussion among children in the lower primary grades, concerning issues of LGBT identity emerged for myself. These include:

- Creating a safe environment for all students and their identities
- Including in discussions any parents, relatives or friends who identify as LGBT
- Including discussions about family structures, traditional and non-traditional
- Challenging sex role stereotypes in children's play
- Urging children to consider instances of discrimination and struggle in the larger context of human rights
- Questioning gender assumptions and choices in discussions of careers
- Including examples in student's every day school curriculum, text and homework
- Naming LGBT people as they are. That is to say, when discussing Eleanor Roosevelt (bisexual) or reading a poem by Langston Hughes (gay), name them and their contributions to history.
- Holding ongoing classroom dialogue around gender stereotyping and identity formation as appropriate to the age group
- Encouraging all students to become allies to one another, especially when embracing differences
- Upholding the mantra that students can be who they say they are
- Celebrating instances where students have made choices that allow them to be who they are – and celebrate the students who have created a safe atmosphere that allows for those choices to be considered

As responsible educators, we cannot ignore that in recent years, the taboo around discussing transgender identity has opened up. From Oprah to Tyra Banks to news magazines covering transgender issues, the topic is surfacing now more than ever. However, instead of surface level voyeuristic stories that run the gamut between exotic and freak, we are now hearing more about civil rights cases which force us to think about how we as a society treat each other based on identity. These cases offer ethical dilemmas that we should be able to debate in our classrooms – provided that we have taken the responsibility to set the framing and understanding among our students first. Is it right to fire a city employee based on personal identity issues, rather than incompetence?<sup>10</sup> Should prison inmates be assigned to institutions based on their perceived gender, or on the gender they identify with?<sup>11</sup>

Teaching children that every human should be allowed equal rights and the power to self-identify is a necessary responsibility that educators must take on. When these discussions are allowed to happen, we celebrate the accomplishments of both the person and the society that allows for human differences<sup>12</sup>. At the end of each day, we cannot help but be proud that as an institution, we have taken steps forward by sticking to our gut instincts and respecting the needs of all children to feel safe at school. Talking about issues of transgender identity will not magically turn all children towards identifying as transgender, nor will it “confuse” children when

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Stanton was fired as City Manager of Largo, an office she previously held as Steve Stanton. You can read about the vote here: [http://www.sptimes.com/2007/02/28/Tampabay/Largo\\_officials\\_vote\\_.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2007/02/28/Tampabay/Largo_officials_vote_.shtml)

<sup>11</sup> Alex Giralso is currently challenging Folsom State Prison's assignment policy. For background on her case see <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/20/AR2007072001777.html>

<sup>12</sup> In July, 2007, transwoman Jenny Bailey was elected mayor of Cambridge, England, the first transgender mayor in the city's history [http://www.advocate.com/news\\_detail\\_ektid47515.asp](http://www.advocate.com/news_detail_ektid47515.asp)

discussions are led with intentionality and explicitness. Informing our students is the best thing we can hope to do so that they are empowered to act as responsive and courageous citizens.

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