



# Making Your Lessons Gender-Inclusive

People have a lot of questions about making lesson plans gender inclusive. These can range from “why should I?” to “how do I know if I’ve accomplished making a gender-inclusive lesson plan?” This packet of worksheets is designed to help you evaluate the need to be inclusive and then how to accomplish it.

## What is Gender Inclusive lesson planning?

For most of us, we grew up learning that gender and biological sex were the same thing. Moreover, we learned there were only two options for humans: male and female. Educational lesson planning has taken a couple of different approaches to gender when it comes to lesson planning.

- A. Male is the universal default.
- B. Gender is irrelevant.
- C. Gender and biological sex only need be addressed in sex education.
- D. We will throw some stuff in for the girls and call it good.
- E. Boys and Girls are so different we need separate education systems.

None of these is inclusive. For most female-identified students, if they wanted to learn about women, women’s history, women’s art, women’s bodies and other female-focused study they had to seek out specialty classes and electives. In mainstream education it has never been the default to assume male-identified people need to learn about anyone else.

Gender-inclusive lesson planning recognizes a couple of important things:

- A. Gender is on a spectrum, and
- B. Gender impacts multiple subjects and therefore teachers need to make an effort to include people from a variety of genders in their teaching.

## I teach something that does not involve human biology. Why should this matter to me?

It is common to think that if you teach a subject which is not explicitly about sex or gender, there is no reason to include any gender information in a lesson plan. However, you are already including gendered information in your lessons and are probably just not aware of it. However, your students are picking up these subtle messages and it impacts their identity and behavior.

Students of all genders tend to perform equally well in STEM subjects until about the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. At that point, the two predominant genders diverge, and male-identified students begin performing better in STEM subjects. Some of this is due to the messaging female-identified students receive in the classroom. The idea that “girls do better in language arts”



and “boys are more tactile learners” along with what subjects are “appropriate” for a gender are subtly imbued in education materials and teacher expectations.

The balance of word problems with male and female representations and what they are doing (*e.g.* “Timmy is trying to figure out how many nails he will need to make a go-cart” or “Sarah is selling cupcakes at \$1.23 each. If she sells 17 cupcakes, how much will she make?”) are subtle ways math can reinforce gender roles and ideas about what type of math the different genders need.

Each subject area is ripe with opportunities to send gender messages and “gender norming” ideas to students. This means even people who do not teach a subject involving biology or gender are still part of the cultural programming children receive about what gender is and what is okay.

### **Does Gender-Inclusive learning “groom” or “prime” children to become transgender?**

No. If a child is cis-gendered (they identify with the gender assigned at birth) talking about alternative gender identities will in no way change their gender identity. In the same way adding information about women’s history to civics class did not make boys transgender, neither do gender-inclusive lessons. What gender-inclusive lessons do is provide a wider representation of genders to students and allow those who don’t fully identify with a sex assigned at birth to explore their own identity.

For older students, it is normal to explore their multiple identities in junior high and high school. Some students will do this by identifying strongly with social groups (*e.g.*, “Goths,” “Stoners,” “Jocks”). Others use music or art or sports or religion to explore parts of their identities. These areas of identity do not become fixed for most students until their 20s. Some will explore gender, sexual orientation, relationship orientations, and more before finding the identity which fits the best.

### **Isn’t this just coddling the ‘woke’ folks?**

No. Attacking pressure to be inclusive by calling people “woke” or acting like they are “forcing their agenda” on students is an attack commonly used by people who are currently served by a White supremacist patriarchy. The attacks are focused on forcing a curriculum which removes anyone but white men with a lot of money from being important.

### **Doesn’t this just confuse kids?**

No. Most children lack language to express what they are feeling about their own identity. What gender-inclusive teaching does is provides all students with language to help them give voice to what they are feeling. This can help students more easily navigate the hard waters of finding out who they are. Additionally, providing a truly inclusive space can positively impact the mental health of students. Seeing that there are other people like



them in the world helps students feel less alone, less ‘weird,’ and in some studies shows it can help reduce bullying, self-harm, and suicidality.

### **How much time is it going to take to re-do all my lesson plans? I’m not paid for all of this!**

Creating a gender-inclusive lesson plan can be quick or take a long time. It will depend on how much gendered teaching you have already been doing (probably subconsciously), and how much gender comes up in your classroom. Unlearning always takes time too. You grew up in the same culture most of us did with two genders, and don’t use ‘they’ as a singular pronoun drummed into our heads. However, if we want to make sure things change, we need to invest the time today.



## Evaluating Your Lesson Plans

### **STEP 1:** Understanding my own biases.

We all have our own understanding of gender. To begin to understand your own thinking on this topic, spend some time thinking about the following questions.

- A. Does the idea of more than two genders make intuitive sense to me?
- B. Am I comfortable using they/them pronouns in conversation with others?
- C. When I think about people who don't identify with their sex assigned at birth, what do I feel in my body?
- D. Do I have nonbinary or trans friends? If less than three, why?
- E. Would I be okay with a student disclosing their nonbinary gender identity in class?
- F. Do I believe there are inherent cognitive, energetic, or emotional differences between men and women?
- G. How important is my own gender identity to me?

It is normal to initially feel bothered by or confused by the idea of “nonbinary” or gender non-conforming if you have not spent much time thinking about gender. The terms have only come into common parlance in the past decade or so.

Understanding where your blind spots are, or your biases is a big part of the battle. Luckily, there are lots of resources out there which can help you understand what different genders they are why these are important to people. The beginnings of these sources are listed at the end of this document.

If you are early in the stages of unlearning gender as a binary, it can be helpful to work with other, more experienced colleagues or a sensitivity reader to help identify gender bias in your lesson plans.

### **STEP 2:** Decoding your current lessons

You have lesson plans already in place for your coursework. Take time and go through these lessons and ask the following questions/

- A. Do you mention gender of an author, a theorist, scientist, prominent person, or other individual in a lesson plan? If so, is it clear they are male or female (this can be by title, name, or other ways of mentioning gender without saying “This person is a male/female).
- B. When you are selecting texts to read, theories to study, individuals, or groups in history, and so forth, what is the balance in gender between these sources. Are any individuals you use nonbinary or transgender?



- C. What gender messages are included in the lessons? Do males always do one type of activity and female others? Are the genders present in equal amounts? Do people who are not gendered male in prominent roles or just background? What images are you choosing?
- D. Is gender and biological sex presented as the same thing?
- E. Is there any use of they/them pronouns? Are names gender-ambiguous?

**Step 3:** How can I appropriately incorporate a variety of genders?

- A. Looking at the way gender is already in my current lesson plans, is there a way to naturally add or swap subjects, resources, experts, or names which will make the lesson gender-inclusive?
- B. If there are already known nonbinary or gender nonconforming people in the lesson plans, are they appropriately gendered and the appropriate pronouns assigned?
- C. What needs to be restructured to make the lesson plan more gender-inclusive?
- D. Is there a need to explicitly address gender identity verse sex assigned at birth?

**Step 4:** Finding resources

It can be overwhelming knowing where to start to find more gender inclusive resources. I have included a list of websites and books for you to begin with, sorted by subject and grade levels. Additionally, contacting your local Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG) chapter or LGBTQ+ center can be a great place to find more locally relevant information and specialists.

**Step 5:** Evaluate your new lesson plan.

This step is important to make sure that the information or approach you included makes the lesson relevant and effective. Simply sprinkling in generic statement about “many gender identities” or a “they/them” on occasion is not necessarily going to make the lesson gender inclusive.



- A. Is the material added about nonbinary people/genders directly related to the lesson?
- B. Is the included material or person/people given a role equal to cis-gendered individuals in the lesson plan?
- C. Does the gender nonconforming information or person exemplify a stereotype (*e.g.*, all nonbinary people are androgynous, all trans femme people are tall) or are they varied?
- D. Is the included material understandable and age-appropriate to the students?
- E. Can you comfortably explain why you decided to include this information in a lesson plan?
- F.

At the end of the day, the goal is to make sure that humanity is represented in its varied, complex, messy form for every gender. Yes, this is a lot to ask. However, you have already been doing it for male-identified people. You may have done it for female-identified people. This is just another variation on what you already know how to do.



## Terminology

*Agender*: Someone with no attachment to any gender identity or expression.

*AFAB*: Assigned Female at Birth

*AMAB*: Assigned Male at Birth

*Biological sex*: Sex as defined by the structure of genitalia and DNA.

*Cis gender*: Someone who identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth.

*External condom*: A prophylactic for a penis.

*Gender*: A complex relationship between a person's physical body and how they see themselves fitting into gender in terms of culture, expression, and identity.

*Gender expression*: How a person uses cultural cues (*e.g.*, clothing, personal grooming, make-up) to express what gender they feel most aligned with.

*Gender identity*: Internally how a person understands their gender.

*Gender Nonconforming*: Someone who does not meet current cultural norms for male or female genders.

*Intersex*: This is a person with physically ambiguous genitalia. This used to be referred to as hermaphroditism.

*Internal condom*: A prophylactic for a vaginal opening.

*Menstrual products*: Products used during menstruation. This de-genders tampons, pads, Diva cups, and other menstrual products.

*Nonbinary*: Anyone identifying as other than cis-male or cis- female.

*Pregnant person*: Someone who is pregnant. This de-genders pregnancy.

*Sex assigned at birth*: The sex (male/female) assigned at birth by a medical professional. This is generally based on visualizing the infant's genitals or amniocentesis testing.

*SWERF*: Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminist. A hate-based ideology focused on harming and shaming sex workers and preventing them from accessing legal protections. Like TERFs, these folks use feminist theory and language and co-opt terms to harm women.

*Transgender*: Someone who does not identify with the sex assigned at birth.

*Trans*: Short for transgender. Someone who identifies with a gender not assigned to them at birth.

*Trans masc*: Someone who was not assigned male at birth but identifies and/or presents as masculine.



*Trans femme*: Someone not assigned female at birth who identifies and/or presents as feminine.

*TERF*: Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist. Individuals who believe that there are only two genders (male and female) and work to prevent the inclusion or recognition of trans and nonbinary people. Many rely on bullying and violence to enforce gender norms they are comfortable with. These hate-based theorist appropriate feminist language to harm women.

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## RESOURCES

[American Psychological Association. "Nonbinary Fact Sheet"](#)

[American Psychological Association. "Students Exploring Gender Identity."](#)

[Department of Education. "Resources for LGBTQAI+ Students."](#)

["Gender Inclusive Biology."](#)

[GLSEN. "Inclusive Sexual Health Education for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender Youth."](#)

[Healthy Teen Network. "Gender, Sexuality, & Sex Education."](#)

[Hadley, et al. "Sex Education for Trans and Nonbinary Youth."](#)

[Human Rights Campaign. "Transgender and Nonbinary FAQ"](#)

[Meadows, Emily. "Sexual Health Equity in Schools."](#)

[National Center for Transgender Equality. "Understanding Nonbinary People"](#)

[National Public Radio. "A Guide to Gender Identity Terms."](#)

[National Public Radio. "The Importance of Inclusive Sex Education."](#)

[Oregon Department of Education. "LGBTQAAI+ Inclusive Materials."](#)

[The Safe Zone list of resources.](#)

[Tordoff, et al. "Talk About Bodies": Recommendations for including trans-inclusive language in sex education."](#)

[Trevor Project. "Guide to Being an Ally for Trans and Nonbinary Youth."](#)

[Vermont Agency of Education. "Educator's Guide to Implementing Inclusive Sex Education."](#)

Your local Planned Parenthood and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays chapters will be able to provide additional, locally relevant information.



## Author Information

**Rebecca E. Blanton (Ph.D.)** (*aka Auntie Vice*) has spent much of their career studying identity and its development. Their dissertation, *Educating Americans: Multicultural Education and Identity Development*, explored the impacts learning about the different cultures which make up the United States has on long-term civic identity. They worked as a Senior Policy Analyst for the state of California, specializing in research on the needs of women veterans. A key finding from that work was that female veterans often do not identify with the term “veteran”, and this reduces self-identification and connection to earned benefits. They was recruited to run the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls where she worked to improve the lives of women and girls in CA until becoming disabled at 40.

For the past decade they have worked as a kink/sexuality educator and writer. She has three non-academic books *Love Letters to a Unicorn: A book about BDSM, kink, and non-monogamy*; *The Big Workbook for Submissives*; and *30 Days of Kinky Self-Discovery*. They also run the podcast “Fat Chicks on Top” which examines how our bodies mediate our experience in the world.

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