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Implementing LGBTQ+ Curriculum in Early Education Classrooms

Mahri Walker

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies

Introduction

Many elementary schools have LGBTQ+ content missing from the curriculum, with gender identity and expression and diverse family structures notably absent. The issue that arises is children from LGBTQ+ families, or who may be LGBTQ+ themselves, do not feel represented in the curriculum. If children are provided with the knowledge of what it means to be LGBTQ+, then they are more likely to have a healthy relationship with themselves and their peers who may be included in that community. In order to address this issue, I created a three-day lesson for Kindergarten through first graders at San Lorenzo Valley Elementary School in Felton, California.

Needs Statement

LGBTQ+ content is increasingly being implemented in schools, given changes in California laws mandating instruction of LGBTQ+ issues. While this change is positive and focused on 7th to 12th grade curriculum, there is a gap when it comes to this content in elementary school. While about 80% of teachers who teach 7th-12th grade express their comfort with teaching Gender and Sexual diversity curriculum, only 45% of Kindergarten teachers expressed their comfort (Meyer et al., 2019, p. 8). Studies have shown that 38% of elementary educators grades PreK-4th reported that they feel that their students are “too young” to discuss LGBTQ+ content (Meyer et al., 2019, p. 8). These findings may show why there is a disparity between high school and elementary school regarding LGBTQ+ content in the curriculum. Many strides have been made in the recognition of the LGBTQ+ community, including legislation in some states. Denying young people access to this material ignores this development, as well as denying children the ability to gain a new viewpoint on the world and themselves. Once we

implement this content into early elementary curriculum, it will give the younger generation a chance to understand themselves, and those around them in a more healthy and realistic view.

In 2011, Governor Jerry Brown signed the California Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Act, which required the roles and contributions of LGBTQ+ people to be a part of their social studies curriculum. Then, in 2016, “after multiple challenges to the law, the California State Board of Education approved a statewide social studies curriculum framework that included among required topics the evolution of gay rights and the contributions of lesbian and gay figures in history” (Moorhead, 2018, p. 23). Yet, years after this FAIR act passed, teachers are still showing their concern with teaching their students these important and inclusive topics (Meyer et al., 2019).

Having an inclusive curriculum enables students to relate to, and see themselves represented in the content and will allow for these students, and LGBTQ+ topics not to be preceived as “abnormal”, while also helping students to feel a sense of belonging in their classrooms (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012). The key outcomes of incorporating LGBTQ+ material in the curriculum for young children are the following: learning that there is no “normal” for how families should look, that being different from the gender standard is accepted, and learning how to be an ally to others.

The diversity of family structures is often not portrayed in curriculum for young children, especially LGBTQ+. When children from LGBTQ+ families do not see themselves represented in the classroom, their family structure is not validated. (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012). Because these types of families are not discussed in the classroom, children from these families can internalize the feeling that they are shameful or “not normal.” When children feel that they are “not normal” they begin to feel isolated from others in their community. This is an issue because these children

then do not have a strong net of adults and friends to learn from and confide in as they grow older. (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012). Similarly, when heteronormativity dominates the curriculum, schools tend to make school events reflecting that, such as a Father Daughter dance, or a Mothers Day activity that further alienate children from LGBTQ+ families and make them feel like they are not important (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012). Inclusion of LGBTQ+ curriculum helps not only those families, but also the children not a part of that community. They will have a chance at an early age to learn how to include their peers and help them when it is needed.

Without the inclusion of diverse family structures such as LGBTQ+, some children may develop gender stereotypes and not realize how harmful they can be. These stereotypes restrict children from being who they want to be or doing what they want to do. Although preschool and elementary classrooms can be great spaces for children to explore and break gender stereotypes through dress-up spaces and imaginative play, many schools do not carry this exploration into the curriculum (Meyer et al., 2019). Playing around with gender roles is very normal for young children to explore at a young age. Sometimes this is simply a normal part of development, or sometimes this can grow into children discovering their sexual identity. Most adults who are LGBTQ+ said that as children they had feelings of “differentness” and as they grew older they recognized this as early signs of their sexual identity (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012). Experiencing a conflict between sex and gender can cause great distress, also known as dysphoria. Unsupportive social experiences and interactions can encourage dysphoria. This can lead to humiliation, self-hatred, and depression. To decrease this sense of dysphoria, people may choose to transition from their assigned gender at birth to their preferred gender, either socially or medically. With that being said, there is an increasing level of visibility for transgender children in elementary

schools (Mangin, 2020). The only way to decrease dysphoria in children at such a young age in schools is to increase our levels of support and resources for them.

Children need to learn the importance of being an ally and the impact it can have on the person you are helping. Studies show that among LGBTQ+ youth, social support from school, peers, and family is connected with higher levels of health and educational outcomes. Among the research done on allyship, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) have proven to be a huge factor in reducing bullying in schools. These programs have resulted in less reports of victimization of LGBTQ+ youth who are in schools with GSA's. Another outcome from GSA's would be that school employees intervene more when there is a homophobic disruption than schools without GSA's. Finally, youth who belong to the LGBTQ+ community report less mental health issues and higher school positivity when schools implement GSA programs (Day et al., 2019). Actual GSA programs are not necessarily needed for such young children, however, the same concept still applies. When a child shows their allyship to another child when an issue arises, the same positive outcomes occur. Similarly, LGBTQ+ families have reported a greater feeling of acceptance when the schools made an effort to show their support for the LGBTQ+ community (Fisher & Kennedy, 2012).

Given that diverse family structures and LGBTQ+ issues are greatly underrepresented in primary education, I have created a three-day lesson for Kindergarten to 1st graders at San Lorenzo Valley Elementary School in Felton, California.

Development

A child's gender identity develops in phases as they age. Studies have shown that children start to understand that there are differences between men and women, as well as gender stereotyped objects such as a purse or a hammer, from three to four months all the way to ten

months (Martin & Ruble, 2009). As children grow, they show an understanding of gender stereotypes between the ages of two and three. Finally, most children have a sense of their personal gender identity by age four (Martin & Ruble, 2009). Children express and explore their gender identity through play, how they dress, and even the gender of their friends can determine if a child is exploring their gender identity (Martin & Ruble, 2009). Once the children reach age eight, the range of stereotypes expands and they make more gender stereotyped associations. For example, when an eight year old child is told about this other child, (who they do not know the gender of) and that they like trucks, the eight year old will assume that they also like tools (Rafferty, 2018). A child's gender expression is influenced by their surroundings which can be family, peers, and exposure to stereotypes. When it comes to a child's gender identity, however, it cannot be changed by those same external factors (Rafferty, 2018).

Consideration of Diversity

I will conduct my project at San Lorenzo Valley Elementary School in one of the Kindergarten and First grade classrooms. From the School Accountability Report Card 2019-2020, 78.3% of the school's enrollment is White, 11.6% Hispanic, .07% Asian, and .02% Black. From this data, I can say that the K-1 class is reflective of the overall population of the school. The percentage of students with disabilities in SLE is 8.7% in the entire elementary school, so there is a lack of mental and physical disabilities in the classroom. I am not sure if this is due to population or lack of resources at the school for those that need them. In order for the students to participate in my project, they need to be English proficient because I will be teaching all of the lessons in English only. Which, after looking at the population data, suggests there will be no issue. My project is geared towards kindergarten and first grade students, therefore, the content may be too simple for older students. To adapt for older students, I would

need to increase the amount of information I am providing and alter the language for it to be age appropriate.

Learning Outcomes

I will teach three 45 minute lessons to Kindergarten and First grade students enrolled in SLV elementary.

By the end of my project, participants will be able to

1. Show two different family types
 - a. As measured by a drawing activity
2. Correct three gender stereotypes
 - a. As measured by responses to worksheet activity
3. Describe three characteristics of an ally
 - a. As measured by responses to after lesson discussion

Method

Day 1

On the first day, I will introduce myself to the class and explain that this is for my capstone project for school. Then, I will ask them if they know what LGBTQ+ means. Once they give their definitions, I will explain the abbreviation and that it is about a person's gender and who they love. I will say that there are many things to learn about the LGBTQ+ community, and that we are focusing on different family types, gender stereotypes, and what it means to be an ally.

My first lesson connects to my first learning outcome about different families. I will begin by reading *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman, focusing on the pages about gender identity and expression. As we go through the pages, I will ask them questions regarding the different families and if they are familiar, such as, do you see your family on this page? How about this page? etc. To conclude the lesson, after we finish reading I will hand each student a worksheet and ask them to draw their family on one half, a family that is different from theirs on

the other half, and then at the bottom explain what one difference is between the two families.

See Appendix A.

Day 2

This lesson is reflected in the learning outcomes by learning outcome two, gender stereotypes. On the second day, I will start by asking the kids to give examples of girls' toys and boys' toys. Once I see their answers I will ask them why they chose them for boys or girls. Following this discussion, I will proceed to read the book, *Sparkle Boy* by Lesléa Newman. I will explain that Casey in the book was being defined by gender roles and stereotypes by those around him. Then I will show them this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=St6t1WvbysU> which explains stereotypes in a way children can understand. After the video, I will ask them questions about stereotypes, for example, was it okay for Casey to wear sparkly skirts? Once our discussion is over, I will conclude by giving them a worksheet to complete about gender stereotypes. See Appendix B.

Day 3

On the last day of the lessons and the third learning outcome, I will read the students *I Am Jazz* by Jazz Jennings and Jessica Herthel. This book talks about a real story of a girl who is transgender and her life when she was young. First, I will ask them if they have any questions, and then go on to explain the definition of ally, and that ally's help those around them when they need it. I will tell them who the allies were in Jazz's life and what they did to be an ally. Then I will connect it back to *Sparkle Boy* and ask the students who Casey's allies were and ask them what they did to be an ally. Finally, I will ask them to tell me three things they can do to be an ally themselves and write their answers on the board.

Results

Not completed due to covid-19.

Discussion

Not completed due to covid-19.

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Appendix A

Name: _____
Date: _____

Diverse Families

Draw your family:

Draw a family that looks different from yours:

Name one difference between your family and the other family:






Appendix B

Name: _____

Date: _____

Gender Stereotypes

Instructions: Cut out the ideals on the right and paste over the stereotype they are correcting.

	Gender Stereotypes:
	Boys have short hair girls have long hair
	Girls play with dolls
	Boys don't like pink
	Boys are Firefighters and girls are Nurses
	Boys like skateboarding girls like dancing

Correct Realities
Boys and girls can like pink
Everyone can like dancing and skateboarding
Girls and boys can play with dolls
Boys and girls can have long or short hair
People can grow up to be whatever they want

Appendix C

Presentation for Capstone Festival



**Implementing
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in Early Education
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Need Statement

Why early education needs this topic

- Inclusive curriculum
- LGBTQ+ not be "abnormal"
- Sense of belonging

Three key outcomes

- No "normal" looking families
- Harmful Stereotypes
- How to be an ally



Legislation

2011 - FAIR Act

- Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful
- LGBTQ+ people in curriculum

2016 - California State Board of Education

- Statewide social studies curriculum
- LGBTQ+ history required



Studies of Teachers

7th-12th Grade Teachers



(Meyer, E. J., Quantz, M., Taylor, C., & Peter, T., 2019, p. 8)

Studies of Teachers cont.

Kindergarten Teachers



(Meyer, E. J., Quantz, M., Taylor, C., & Peter, T., 2019, p. 8)

Development

Stages of Gender Development:






- 3-10 months: understand differences in men & women, also objects
- 2-3 years: understand gender stereotypes
- 4 years: gains a sense of personal gender identity
- 8 years: range of stereotypes expands to more gender associations

Gender Expression & Identity



- Gender expression is influenced by surroundings i.e. family, friends, stereotypes
- Gender identity cannot be changed by external factors

Exploring Gender Identity



- Play
- Dress
- Gender of friends

Participants

- 3 day lesson plan
- Kindergarten - 1st grade
- San Lorenzo Valley Elementary school in Felton, CA



Learning Outcomes

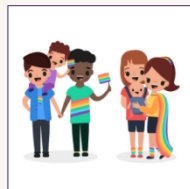
By the end of my project, participants will be able to:

1. Show two different family types
2. Correct three gender stereotypes
3. Describe three characteristics of an ally



Method Day 1

- Define LGBTQ+
 - It is about a person's gender and who they love
- Our focus is
 - different family types
 - gender stereotypes
 - what it means to be an ally



Method Day 1 cont.

- Read *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman
 - About many different family types
 - Focus on gender identity and expression
 - Do you see your family on this page?



Method Day 1 cont.

- After lesson worksheet
 - Draw your family
 - Draw a family that is different from yours
 - Tell me one difference between the two

Name: _____ Date: _____

Draw your family

Draw a family that looks different from yours

Name one difference between your family and the other family:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Diverse Families

Draw your family:

Draw a family that looks different from yours:

Name one difference between your family and the other family:

Method Day 2

- Discussion
 - What are girls toys and what are boys toys?
- Read *Sparkle Boy* by Lesléa Newman
 - About a little boy who likes sparkly and pretty things



Method Day 2 cont.

- Discussion
 - What are stereotypes?
 - Gender roles
- Stereotypes cartoon



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5t6G1WdyuU>

Method Day 2 cont.

- After lesson worksheet
 - Cut out gender realities
 - Paste over matching gender stereotype

Name: _____ Date: _____

Gender Stereotypes



Instructions: Cut out the gender realities and paste over the matching gender stereotype.




Gender Stereotype	Gender Reality
Boys love to play with dolls.	Boys and girls can play with dolls.
Girls play with dolls.	Boys and girls can play with dolls.
Boys don't play with dolls.	Boys and girls can play with dolls.
Boys are strong and girls are weak.	Boys and girls can be strong and weak.
Boys like playing with dolls.	Boys and girls can play with dolls.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Gender Stereotypes

Instructions: Cut out the ideals on the right and paste over the stereotype they are correcting.

	Gender Stereotypes:	Correct Realities
	Boys have short hair girls have long hair	Boys and girls can like pink
	Girls play with dolls	Everyone can like dancing and skateboarding

	Boys don't like pink	Girls and boys can play with dolls
	Boys are Firefighters and girls are Nurses	Boys and girls can have long or short hair
	Boys like skateboarding girls like dancing	People can grow up to be whatever they want

Method Day 3

- Read *I Am Jazz* by Jazz Jennings and Jessica Herthel
 - Real story of a girl who is transgender
- Define Ally
 - Who are Jazz's allies?
- Sparkle Boy*
 - Who are Casey's allies?



Method Day 3 cont.

Three things you can do to be an ally

- _____
- _____
- _____



Results

Not completed due to COVID-19

Discussion

Not completed due to COVID-19

