

Teaching About Gender Diversity: Teacher-Tested Lesson Plans for K-12 Classrooms

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Teaching About Gender Diversity: Teacher-Tested Lesson Plans for K-12 Classrooms
edited by Susan W. Woolley and Lee Airton
Canadian Scholars, 2020, 334 pages
ISBN: 9781773381664 (print)

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Within current schooling contexts, more nuanced conversations regarding gender, gender identity, and gender expression are required to ensure educators and school policies are appropriately informed and safer school environments are established for gender diverse students (Airton et al., 2019; Davies et al., 2019). *Teaching About Gender Diversity: Teacher-Tested Lesson Plans for K-12 Classrooms*, edited by Susan W. Woolley and Lee Airton, addresses the need for accessible lesson plans for educators to become prepared to openly encourage a classroom climate that is supportive of gender diversity. Featuring lesson plans written by a range of experts involved in the K-12 school system – from teachers to higher education researchers – Woolley and Airton do an excellent job of providing educators with the tools to unpack their own biases and encourage supportive classrooms for students of all gender identities.

Bridging theory and practice is often described as a challenge by practitioners. Yet, Woolley and Airton are clear in laying out the theoretical frameworks that inspire their text in accessible language (queer theory, transgender studies, postcolonial theory, and black feminist thought). The book follows a sequential order that is positioned in three sections for different grade areas: Elementary (K-5), Middle Years (6-9), and Secondary Education (10-12). Another strength of this text is its recommendation to “assume that there is always gender diversity in the room” (p. 18). Addressing important provocations for educators in their introduction, reading the beginning portion of this text already leaves educators of all levels (early childhood education, elementary, secondary, higher education) with many wonderful questions and provocations that can immediately be put into their professional practices.

Each of the three sections (K-5, 6-9, and 10-12) are split into English Language Arts; Social Studies; STEM; and, Health and Physical Education, Advisory, and Homeroom, with lessons providing recommendations for additional pedagogical materials in the form of texts or literature to scaffold discussions with students. For example, Ashleigh Talbott and Sonja Mackenzie's, "Gender Diversity: Me in HD" lesson for Health & Physical Education, Advisory, and Homeroom for Grades K-5, discusses how to use the text *Who Are You? The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity* by Brook Pessin-Whedbee (2016) pedagogically with younger students to explore a "gender continuum." Talbott and Mackenzie's lesson encourages students to design their own "HD Me" where they can express their gendered self by stylizing their representation of themselves. Educators are also encouraged in this lesson to bring out the notion that individuals change and grow in how they present and identify themselves and that shifts and changes in self-presentation are natural. Another strength of Woolley and Airton's text is how they have incorporated conversations of gender diversity with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) – a field that has traditionally been stereotyped as lacking in social justice approaches and pedagogies.

The book begins with the introduction section where Woolley and Airton situate themselves, the theories that frame their work, and define their ideas regarding welcoming gender diversity and gender diversity curricula to move between any simple binary between transgender and cisgender (p. 8). There is also a helpful "School Climate Chart" (pp. 14-15) that locates each of the lessons on a continuum from little tolerance of gender diversity to full inclusion and integration of gender nonconformity and fluidity. This chart will be helpful for educators in terms of positioning their respective school climates and which lessons might be the most appropriate to begin with in terms of their own students. The first section of the book (K-5) features some standout lesson plans for elementary years, including "Using Read-Alouds to Promote a Gender-Inclusive Learning Environment" by Alisha Sarang-Sieminski and "All I Want to Be Is Me": Interrogating the Gender Dualism in Early Learning" by Jessica Prioletta. Prioletta's lesson plan stands out as a much-needed intervention into the heteronormative and cisnormative ideas that percolate within early childhood education. Prioletta's lesson deconstructs how gender norms and binaries are entrenched in ideas of preferred toys and activities. The second section of the book (6-9), holds all excellent lessons for the middle years, including Karleen Pendleton Jiménez's, "Gender Fanzines: Developing Gender Literacy through Popular Culture," and Benjamin Lee Hicks' "The Festival of Puberty." The last section of the collection (10-12) offers some more advanced lessons for high school students, including notably Armen Shahnazarian's "What is Drag." The end of this text also has a helpful glossary that is accessible for educators in various stages of understandings of gender diversity and that can assist educators if they encounter terms that are unfamiliar to them in any lesson plans.

Woolley and Airton's (2020) work is truly revolutionary and provides incredible depth and diversity of perspectives for lesson plans of all ages in the K-12 spectrum that can be taken up in classrooms. Given the still incredibly Conservative current climate to-

wards gender diversity in schools – illustrated in the populist reaction to the introduction of gender identity in the Ontario curricula in younger years (see Bialystok et al., 2020) – Woolley and Airton’s text is truly a sparkling guidebook that can provide educators with the tools to continue to unpack their own biases while working effectively with their students. The personal narratives and stories each contributor provide at the start of each lesson are gorgeous for the reader to engage with and assist with situating the contributor and their interest and passion for gender diversity. Indeed, any social-justice oriented (or any educator) should pick up this book and start to be moved by the stories and lessons within this text that emphasize the beauty and triumphs of human diversity and the power of education to cultivate a more inclusive societal politic. I would recommend this text to anyone who teaches in the K-12 school system, as well as notably to pre-service teacher educators who can recommend lessons to their student teachers to use in their respective practicum placements and introduce the text to other educators in their personal circles.

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