Inclusion of Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Students in PE

Created by Dylan Ahmed on behalf of the BAMEPE Collective
INTRODUCTION

This resource aims to educate about gender diversity and provide information which will allow PE teachers to create an inclusive atmosphere in lessons.

Trans youth are more vulnerable to mental health issues than their cisgender counterparts- by providing an accepting and fully inclusive space we can try and combat this risk within the school environment.

Creating an affirmative space, not just one which is tolerant of identity can help in creating a safe space of LGBTQIA+ identifying students (Storr et al 2020).
UNDERSTANDING GENDER

**Gender is more than just “girls and boys”**

Transgender is a term to describe anyone who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth- this is their birth sex.

Gender identity can be **binary or non binary**. Those who identify within the binary would associate their gender within the limits of male and female.

Those who identify as non-binary would not limit their identity to the constraints of male and female. This is valid and throughout history many cultures recognise two-spirit or third gender people.

**Gender expression and gender identity are different**

Gender expression is how someone outwardly presents themselves. Often, gender expression is dictated by stereotypes within society, e.g. pink clothes associated with girls and blue clothes with boys.

Gender expression does not change gender identity- if a transgender male were to wear a skirt (which is often seen as “feminine” in society), this does not disregard their identity as a male.

**Gender Dysphoria**

Many trans individuals will deal with gender dysphoria; this is the distress that someone feels when not being able to present as their true gender identity.

At birth everyone is assigned male or female, however people can be born as intersex meaning that they are born with traits which biologically belong to both sexes. This is not always identified at birth as it may not be obvious (e.g. appearing to be female at birth but later finding out that they have XY chromosomes).
PRONOUNS AND LANGUAGE

Pronouns and language can be vital in allowing a person to feel accepted in their identity.

PRONOUNS

These can hold different meaning to each individual but should always be respected.

Our society puts “he” and “she” as default pronouns. However many people will also go by “they”.

Some examples of how to use “they” when referring to a singular student:
- “Can you be partners with them”
- “Their team won”
- “Please tell them that they need to attend training after school”
- “They forgot their kit again”

Many non-binary identities may use other pronouns such as ze/zir. If you are unsure on how to use a students pronouns then respectfully ask them in a setting which they are comfortable (e.g. don’t ask in front of the whole class).

An example of how to ask:
“Hi (students name) I just wanted to clarify your pronouns and how to use them- I don’t want to use them incorrectly and make you uncomfortable. Could you please give me some examples of how to use them?”

“Choosing one’s own name has positive effects on a trans person’s mental health. The study showed that having even one context in which a chosen name could be used was associated with a 29% decrease in suicidal thoughts” (Russell, et al, 2018).

LANGUAGE

It is important to be respectful toward all students when addressing them, whether individually or collectively.

At the beginning of the year, you can take the opportunity to ask each member of a class to introduce themselves and their pronouns- only if they feel comfortable and willing to do so. This helps to maintain a mutual respect for each other.

When addressing groups of students, avoid using gendered language e.g. boys, girls, ladies, guys. Instead use gender neutral terminology such as:
- Students
- Pupils
- Folx
- Everyone/ everybody
- Class
SAFETY: TACKLING TRANSPHOBIA

Any form of transphobia violates the protected characteristics of the Equalities Act 2010

STEP 1: Recognising transphobia
During PE in school, some forms of transphobia that may arise are:
- Physical or verbal abuse/harassment in the changing rooms (this is a space where people can easily be targeted)
- Comments directed at students during lesson (e.g. while cheering a student on, purposely misnaming and misgendering them)
- Someone being told they shouldn't participate in a sport or activity because 'it isn't for their gender'
- Refusal to participate because a trans student is participating

A teacher should also recognise that the above can also occur during competitions against other schools
SAFETY: TACKLING TRANSPHOBIA

**STEP 2: Addressing transphobia**

Transphobia should be **challenged every single time**—if comments occur during class this may mean quickly telling a student that they can not behave like that and that they need to return after class/lunch/break.

When tackling transphobia it is important that a clear conversation takes place; this should involve:

1. Understand why the student said/did what they did?
2. Encourage staff to adapt to the situation and challenge the student accordingly e.g. ‘why does their identity make that behaviour ok? If it were to be you in their position how would you feel?’
3. Encourage education on gender diversity and the effects of their actions.
4. Reaching an understanding where, even if unable to change the opinion of the student completely, it is understood that their behaviour is unacceptable and that they should respect all identities (use links to school motto or ethos where possible)

**Transphobia at competitions**

If a student reports that they have experience transphobia during a competition with another school the teacher should:

1. Contact the other school teacher and explain the incident
2. Emphasise the importance of dealing with this
3. Ask the teacher to talk to the student about the situation
4. Liaise with the teacher after they have had this conversation to ensure that the student has understood the situation and is being dealt with according to their schools policies
5. If you feel as if it has not been dealt with properly by the other school; you may want to look to senior leadership for support.

**Note:**
Always consider that comments/actions that cause offence to individuals (student or staff) are personal and shouldn’t be disregarded. Remember each individual’s identity is different and should be respected.
SAFETY: THE USE OF CHEST BINDERS

WHAT IS A CHEST BINDER
Chest binders are compression garments used by many trans males and non-binary people. They significantly reduce the appearance of breasts; this is a method used to alleviate dysphoria which is caused as a result of their chest.

IS IT SAFE?
Binding will always pose some risks- the safest method of binding is by wearing a chest binder, however many people can not afford these and resort to more dangerous methods such as using bandages or sports tape.

Accommodating for a student in PE:
For a student to tell a teacher about wearing a binder is a difficult conversation- it can be tricky to explain and they may feel judged. Binding limits the breathing of the wearer. In fact, it is advised that they are not worn at all during exercise, however, many cannot handle the mental distress of not binding in public. Some adaptations should be made so that the student does not feel vulnerable during physical activity, this may be:

- Allowing them small breaks when they signal that they are struggling
- Consider less high intensity lessons which would accommodate all
- In games lessons let them play a position of less movement e.g. handball goalie

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BINDER</th>
<th>BANDAGES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Reduce lung capacity</td>
<td>- Reduce lung capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Some difficulty breathing</td>
<td>- Difficulty breathing</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Bruises</td>
<td>- Bruises</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Heat rash/ irritation</td>
<td>- Heat rash/ irritation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Permanent damage to breast tissue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Broken ribs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Friction burns</td>
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<td>- Very restricted movement</td>
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THE PROBLEM
Changing rooms can be a scary place for any student, trans students have the added feeling of invalidation when having to change in the wrong room. This can worsen gender dysphoria.

WHY IT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED
The mindset that the changing room can cause may have an effect on the rest of the student’s lesson. By being put into a negative headspace before every lesson this can have negative effects on the students learning and attitude towards PE.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM
- Talk to the student about what they want, each student will have different opinions
- If unable to accomodate the student in the changing room of their gender identity due to safeguarding, alternative arrangements should be made
- A single cubicle, separate from others
- Allowing them to get changed before lesson (if lesson is after lunch or break time), allow them to leave lesson 5 minutes earlier to get changed back into uniform
- Allow them to change in the toilets

“Changing rooms are one of the most traumatic spaces within the built environment of schools for queer and trans students” (Sykes 2011)
Some schools may differentiate between boys and girls PE kit; e.g. the boys wear shorts but the girls wear sports skirts.

Although it is fine to have options when it comes to kit, there should not be a restriction on who wears what. Regardless of gender identity, a person should be free to wear whatever they are comfortable in.

When in competitions that have quite gendered kits (e.g. netball) try and find alternatives; it is unlikely that kit rules are very strict unless playing at national levels.

For example, instead of netball dresses, netball vests could be used with shorts instead.

This should be spoken about with the student to see what would make them most comfortable.
CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT IN LESSON

MIXED GENDER LESSONS/ACTIVITIES
Many schools will still split lessons by gender; this can put a trans student in a position where they are;
- Forced to participate according to their birth sex
- Allowed to participate with their gender identity, but are forced to ‘come out’ to all as they move class
- Made to feel disregarded when they have a non-binary identity and are forced within the “Male and female” labels

Implementing mixed gender activities can help in creating a more inclusive environment; although this may be tricky, here are some ideas:
- Creating a mixed class, so that those who want to stay separated (for religious or other reasons) still have the option of single sex classes
- Student voice: allowing students to choose from a set of activities at the start of term and basing classes on this
- Looking into sports where it can be mixed gender
  - Kinball
  - Baseball 5
  - Korfball
  - Chinlone

DECONSTRUCTING STEREOTYPES
School sports still play a big part in emphasising stereotypes in sport. This ranges from what sport is made for which gender to the characteristics expected of participants of different sports. These all need to be challenged consistently to change the sports rhetoric and help inspire and ingrain a love of movement.

HOW:
- Curriculum based on intent for students; not based on gender- e.g. if netball is planned for the girls but not for the boys, ask yourself why; what is the purpose and goal of netball lessons? Why can all students not reach these outcomes in the same type of lesson?
- Use a diverse range of role models as examples

SPORTING EXAMPLES
Highlighting trans athletes can help to:
- Make trans students feel valid and seen
- Give role models to trans students
- Normalise the conversation around trans identities

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CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT: SINGLE SEX SCHOOLS

Cisnormativity is the assumption that a person’s gender identity matches their biological sex, in single sex schools, the default is often to assume that all students are of the same gender. This can make inclusion of trans students more challenging due to presets of language and gendered curricular activities. For example, some all-girls schools may put a priority on the netball team rather than a basketball team due to societal stereotypes. Whereas most boys schools will not even have the option of netball.

PROVIDING A RANGE OF OPPORTUNITIES IN LESSON

Lessons in single sex schools should provide all types of activities that would also be provided in mixed sex schools. This helps in deconstructing stereotypes and preventing the feeling of a heavily gendered curriculum being imposed on any student, especially trans students.

COMPETITIONS

Gender identity should not prevent a student from being part of school teams or competitions. In single sex schools, as there tends to only be one team for each sport, exclusion from this due to identity can cause a negative attitude towards physical activity. Depending on the school and area, there may be some circumstances in which a student can compete as their gender identity in individual competitions e.g. a trans male from an all girls school is able to compete in the male category at a badminton competition against other schools.

CHALLENGING CISNORMATIVE THOUGHTS

Gendered language such as “girls” or “boys” is more likely when addressing a whole class in single sex schools. The importance of language (pg.4) should be considered as although they may not make it known, any student in the class could be trans. Challenging cisnormative thoughts are essential in always creating an inclusive environment.
A transgender mental health study showed that 88% of transgender people had experienced depression and 84% had thought of ending their life.

In the UK, more than one in three trans young people have experienced major depression.

LGBTQI+ students often do not find physical education to be a safe and welcoming space, (Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009)

Almost three in four (70%) trans people avoid certain places and situations for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed.

Almost three in five (60%) have experienced threats and intimidation; and more than a third (35 per cent) of trans young people have experienced physical assault.

More than four in five (83%) trans young people have experienced name-calling or verbal abuse; three in five (60%) have experienced threats and intimidation; and more than a third (35 per cent) of trans young people have experienced physical assault.

In the UK, more than one in three trans young people have experienced depression.

More support, resources and guidance:

Well Played; campaign by twenty10: short video highlighting the importance of inclusion in sport for LGBTQI+ youth.
https://www.wellplayed.org.au/

Shape America:
https://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/guidelines/Transgender/?hkey=241d34b2-5445-4914-b863-cd4e68314e8b

Mermaids Trans inclusion kit for schools:

Gendered Intelligence, work in education:
http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/education/overview

GLSEN changing the game:
https://www.glsen.org/programs/changing-game

Stonewall, the truth about trans:
https://www.stonewall.org.uk/truth-about-trans