


Chapter 2

From Me to We: Humanizing Classrooms for LGBTQ+ Youth Through an EC–6 Teacher Preparation Program

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ABSTRACT

While the heterogeneity of public school students continues to grow, the demographics of classroom educators remain the same: Many students identify as part of traditionally marginalized groups according to their race, class, religious beliefs, gender identity, and sexual orientation, but teachers often identify as traditionally dominant groups of white, middle class, Christian, straight, and cis-gender. Thus, in order to effectively prepare elementary educators to work with diverse, marginalized students, there is a great gap that must be bridged. This chapter details how teacher preparations programs may be uniquely positioned to develop teachers' understanding and pedagogy for pluralistic and inclusive classrooms by exploring the multi-year, qualitative action research of one EC-6 teacher preparation program in the southern United States.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1404-7.ch002

INTRODUCTION

Ale's Story

The journey from “me to we” started over two years ago in the fall of 2017. It was an early Thursday morning when I (Ale) received a friend request on Facebook. Having taught bilingual elementary school for 11 years at the time, I was accustomed to getting these requests from past students. Sometimes I had to squint and look sideways to see their once child-like faces stretched out and developed into the young adults they now were. This time, it took a little bit longer. As I read and re-read the name, I thought I recognized the face. But it was only after scrolling through uploaded photos that I realized why this time it was especially challenging to place this student. I had known *her* as *him*.

Almost instantly, my memory flashed warp-speed to the past three years, searching for clues—instances that could have foreshadowed her transition when I was her bilingual gifted and talented teacher. My heart ached, remembering her fifth-grade year, with the one-on-ones, counseling appointments, and meetings with other teachers. Soon after accepting her friend request, Jazmín¹ messaged me and shared her transition experiences. I shared my support of and encouragement for her, thankful (and surprised) for her mother's stalwart presence and her middle school teachers' guidance. When I had taught Jazmín, we were in a majority first-generation Mexican American community. Most (but not all) of my students and families identified as Catholic and generally held traditional values toward sex and gender. Up until that point, my work with elementary students and elementary preservice teachers primarily focused on the linguistic and cultural rights of culturally and linguistically diverse students; LGBTQ+ people and rights were generally subaltern topics in these spaces. Furthermore, as a white, second generation Mexican American, I was accustomed to navigating the privilege similarities and differences between my students and myself. Moreover, as a cis-gender, heterosexual female and person of faith, I both had little experience in partnering with LGBTQ+ students and was/is deeply committed to all human flourishing—especially for those historically marginalized. I started to process in increasingly more complex ways of how my social identities and those of my students interacted and affected our work for thriving in the classroom and beyond.

Later that day, as I prepared to teach my preservice elementary literacy teachers, Jazmín was still on my heart and my mind. I was immensely grateful for her positive experiences, but wondered what more responsibility I had in preparing other teachers

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