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### Critical Literacy and Transgender Topics in an Upper Elementary Classroom: A Portrait of Possibility

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we explore the intersection of critical literacy pedagogy, queer pedagogy, and transgender topics by turning our attention to the learning that supported the writing of an acrostic poem about Title IX and transgender students. We examine how this writing, in turn, created additional content and context that spurred others' learning. We examine this particular poem because of the ways it demonstrates how a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student drew on three overarching components of the classroom's instructional context to support its production: the critical literacy pedagogy present in the class, exposure to transgender topics, and the importance of situating students as expert teachers for an authentic audience.

**Keywords:** critical literacy, queer theory, elementary language arts, transgender



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**Title Nine**

By Brandon<sup>1</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> grade

Transgender people are people too.

Identities will be told by the person.

Trans people can go to the bathroom that matches their gender identity.

Lots of people disagree with Obama because they want more personal power for themselves, and they don't want trans people to have the same rights as them.

Everyone is treated fairly no matter what their gender identity is.

Needed for transgender people.

I agree with Obama, trans people are just the same as me.

No person in the U.S.A. will be excluded for being transgender.

Exclusion is finished.

We begin with this poem to demonstrate what is possible when critical literacy pedagogy expands to include transgender topics. As scholars in the practice of asking teachers and teacher educators to bring LGBTQ topics into elementary classrooms (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2013, 2015; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013), we want to draw readers in with a portrait of the possible, a counter story to the homophobia and heteronormativity present in elementary schools (Blaise, 2005; DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). As teachers, however, we know that presenting an outcome of learning without sharing the sometimes-messy journey that leads up to it simplifies reality. In this case, Brandon's writing didn't just happen. It isn't the direct result of Rose, a

White, cisgender, 4th/5th grade teacher, reading a single LGBTQ-inclusive book to her<sup>2</sup> class, although she and Jill, a White, cisgender, university professor who regularly co-taught with her, did read Gino's (2015) *George* aloud to the students. It is not the result of a single mention of LGBTQ topics or ideas, although Rose and Jill often mentioned the sexual orientation of writers they were studying, and they also challenged the ways students used gender to make fun of someone. It does not stem from a single discussion of an historic moment in LGBTQ history, although the 2015 United States Supreme Court's decision regarding same sex marriage did come up when the class discussed the ways that power shapes our culture. It isn't even the result of Jill's story to the 4th/5th graders about one of her university students who used transphobic language in response to the inclusion of transgender topics in her college course, although the poem was written with this audience of college students in mind. Instead, we share Brandon's poem here as an illustration of one moment in a yearlong process of learning about power, literacy, and the ways students can use language to create change relating to LGBTQ topics.

In this paper, we—two university professors (Jill and Caitlin) and Rose, a veteran 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher—explore the intersection of critical literacy pedagogy and transgender topics by turning our attention to the learning that supported the kind of writing Brandon produced. We examine Brandon's poem here certainly because of its power but also because of the ways it demonstrates how he drew on three overarching components of the classroom's instructional context to support its production: queerly informed (Britzman, 1995) critical literacy pedagogy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) (explained below in our theoretical frame), exposure to information about transgender topics, and the importance of situating students as expert teachers

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<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, we honor the pronouns used by the people to whom we refer.

for an authentic audience. We find that the convergence of these three strands traces a possibility for other teachers who already look through the lenses of critical literacy and authentic audience but might need a push to move toward including transgender topics in their own classrooms.

### Theoretical Framework

This work draws on critical literacy frameworks (Freire, 1993; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) to help us consider how power circulates with regard to the negotiation of multiple and intersecting identities. Specifically, our analysis focuses on how components of the critical literacy framework that Rose brought to her classroom also served to shape student engagement with and understanding of a wide range of identities. Critical literacy pedagogy directs attention to how language, power, and social institutions interact with and affect each other. Critical literacy often includes elements such as “1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, 3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and 4) taking action and promoting social justice” (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 382).

Simultaneously, we use a lens of queer theory. While the word “queer” can be used to label an identity category, as an umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual or cisgender, it is also used to describe a theoretical approach to deconstructing and critiquing such identity categories (Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1993). In particular, queer theory highlights the culturally understood non-normativity involved in transgender and non-heterosexual identities, particularly as these identities relate to what is known as the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1999), the interlocking associations between genders,

sexualities, bodies, and desires. Queerly informed pedagogy (Britzman, 1995) rejects the notion that there is a singular view of normal with regard to gender or sexuality. This means that when discussing LGBTQ identities, students and teachers are challenged to interrogate their own culturally formed beliefs about these identities and challenge the ways that language and texts normalize specific ways of being gendered, or specific kinds of sexuality. When teachers and students make use of teachable moments about sexuality and gender in all texts, students have opportunities to explore how all people are gendered and all people have sexuality—in other words, that LGBTQ people are not any less normative than non-LGBTQ people. Caitlin and Jill (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013) have called this “reading through a queer lens” (p. 149). Rose, Jill,

and the upper elementary students explored this approach to texts long before they read *George* (Gino, 2015).

### Setting the Stage

The classroom described in this paper is a part of a K-8 independent school in the Midwest with progressive roots. The class consisted of 15 students. Eight of the students identified as male and seven identified as female. Three students identified as people of color (specifically African American and biracial) and 12 identified as White. All students were native English speakers. Facilitated by her relationship with Jill, a university professor, Rose began to integrate LGBTQ literature into her ELA curriculum during the 2013-14 school year. In 2015, Jill became a co-teacher and researcher three afternoons a week; it was then that queerly informed pedagogy became a part of the critical literacy related to LGBTQ inclusion. Jill and Rose co-taught a single book with LGBTQ characters during each of the first 2 years of their partnership, but their collaboration expanded over the summer of 2015 when they co-planned a humanities

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curriculum that Jill would help deliver. Rose and Jill had clear support from the head of school for their work around social justice issues.

While Rose had always brought a social justice lens to her work, she wanted to be explicit with her students that the humanities curriculum would consistently explore issues of power. We began the school year by asking students to consider multiple identities that people might claim. We made an identities list on the board and together interrogated both the ways we see the world and the ways that particular identities, actions, and ideas are seen as normal and get treated as powerful. Students called out various identities: Black, White, Person of Color, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Not Religious, Male, Female, Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Immigrant, Native to the US, Child, and Adult. We then talked about the word “binary,” starting with what it means in math class and expanding to what it might mean with regard to identities. After we lined up identities as binary pairs on the board, students circled the identities that have more power in our society.

This led to additional conversation about the terms. For example, Brandon, who is biracial, pointed out that the binary around race is hard for him to navigate because the stark division doesn’t capture the realities of his life. As Jill defined “gay” and “lesbian” for students who weren’t sure about the meanings of those terms, another student inserted an additional identity into the discussion when she asked, “What is ‘transgender’?” While these fourth and fifth graders had heard the words “transgender” and “non-binary” because they have an afterschool teacher who claims both of those identities, their level of understanding about what those words meant was superficial and attached to one person. This student’s question points to the importance of visibility and discussion: when students talk about the people in their lives—and they are heard by the teacher and their peers—those people can become a part of the curriculum. Adding “transgender” to our

list of identities on the board gave us the opportunity to both define that term and connect it to a transgender-identified person the students knew. It also provided a chance to discuss the term “cisgender” and add that to the board as well.

Overall, these student experiences and questions helped us consider how binaries are often false, misleading, or limiting. We also considered that some of us claim identities that were circled, signifying power, while other of our identities were not circled. This helped students think about how intersectionality works. We asked students to think of their identities as lenses through which they see and experience the world and other people and then asked them to write the identities they claim onto pieces of paper with the outline of a pair of glasses. These activities helped students explore the question, “What identities create the lenses through which you see the world?” Such conversations provided both students and teachers the language to question each other about taken-for-granted notions of what people with specific identity labels experience or are expected to do.

Within the context of this learning, the class read Woodson’s (2001) *The Other Side* in September. In the tradition of Britzman (1995), Jill and Rose worked with their students to consider how binaries work with regard to gender and sexuality in our reading. Tying together critical literacy and queer pedagogies, the teachers used a queer lens (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013) to ask students to consider “the way things have always been” (Woodson, 2001, unpagged) with regard to not only ideas about race and power but also friendship and love relationships among girls and boys and how girls and boys have been conditioned to like certain activities, wear certain clothes, and play with certain toys. This reading and rereading that occurred in September had a lasting impact on the students. In the weeks and months that followed, they would frequently refer to “the way things have always

been” when discussing a wide range of topics. Students began using air quotes whenever talking about “boy things” or “girl things” and often checked to be sure their classmates and teachers knew that they did not really believe that there was such a thing as a boy or girl thing.

When we asked them to compare “girl” things to “boy” things using a T-chart in small groups, for example, students complied but also rebelled. It was not difficult for them to come up with lists, but one group put a huge “X” over the T-chart paper we’d passed out (and that they’d filled out) and turned the paper over and made a list of the common things that the kids in their group liked to do, regardless of gender identity. Connecting to our reading of *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), students claimed that gendering activities was “the way things have always been” but rejected that kind of normalizing behavior.

By February, students in this 4th/5th grade humanities class had researched, read, and written about a wide range of topics from classism to the Confederate flag—along with the issues surrounding its removal from a government building in South Carolina—to the Flint water crisis. They had explored these topics by reading poetry, questioning texts, looking at images, writing and sharing responses, and reading from multiple perspectives.

When Jill suggested including a class read aloud of Alex Gino’s (2015) *George*, a children’s literature novel for children about a transgender fourth grader, she and Rose planned multiple ways for students to engage with the text and designed a concluding multigenre project that would allow students to use their creativity to show what they’d learned. What they did not plan for was how the read aloud of *George* and the accompanying lesson plans would overlap with both the issuance of the Dear Colleague Letter from the United States Departments of Justice and Education (Lhamon &

Gupta, 2016), clarifying Title IX’s application and resulting protections with regard to transgender students, and an episode of transphobia expressed by one of Jill’s university students. These two events, which were external to the classroom and certainly not planned by the teachers, provided the direct catalyst for Brandon to write his poem. The slow building of understanding around power, social justice, and lesbian and gay people set the stage for the students’ deeper and intentional work around transgender topics. Much of student thinking about gender up to this point in the school year had been related to gender performance and construction as opposed to gender identity. Their most common thinking related to the kinds of things they and their friends liked to do or wear or read and how those things could be performed by boys or girls. In other words, their talk generally expanded their sense of how boys and girls could express their gender. What they had more trouble articulating—and what they did not discuss nearly as much—is how a person’s gender identity might not be tied to the gender identity that they were assigned at birth, especially since none of them identified differently than how they’d been assigned. The introduction of the book *George* (Gino, 2015) not only helped give them language (like “gender assigned at birth” and “gender identity”) but also helped them really think about what it might mean to be transgender.

### **Tying Together a Book, an Author, and Current Events**

To prepare for more direct discussions of gender identity as we read *George* (Gino, 2015), we did a few additional activities to help students explore how our culture expects girls and boys to act in specific ways and how challenging it can be to try to change those norms. In addition to the “boy things” and “girl things” activity, for example, we set up a scene where male-identified students were asked to role play female-identified characters and vice versa to help students think about assumptions made about

gender and how those assumptions situate our understandings of gender (McWilliams, 2016). Afterwards, we discussed the ways that students used stereotypes about men and women to convey the gender of the person they were portraying. Brandon, for example, primly crossed his legs and used a high-pitched voice as he acted out Queen Elizabeth. When Rose pointed out that both she and Jill have voices lower than the “female” voice Brandon used, the class chuckled, but the point was made: stereotypes about gender are limiting and not always true. We then asked students to think about how it might feel to know they were supposed to fit into one gender box while all along knowing that they either belonged in another, found comfort in both gender boxes, or did not fit into any gender box at all.

Once our read aloud of *George* (Gino, 2015) began, students engaged much more deeply in the definitions of transgender and cisgender and considered what it might be like to be transgender through

*George*/Melissa’s character. The character, who is called George but self-identifies as Melissa (privately at first and with a select group of people by the end of the book), is a fourth grader who is in the process of coming out as transgender—first to her best friend, then to her family, and finally at school. In these ways, *George* is a book that makes Melissa’s life visible, tracing the process of how she navigates her coming out as transgender to herself, her family, her friends, and the larger community. Both at home and at school, she experiences a mix of misunderstanding, bullying, and ally-ship. It is only when she tries out for the role of Charlotte in her class production of *Charlotte’s Web* that Melissa’s best friend, her teacher, her family, and her classmates begin the process of seeing Melissa instead of George. Throughout the book, Melissa’s

own understanding of who she is—a girl—is never in question. The nuance of the story is in how others accept or refuse this same understanding. As we read, students were asked to write about their ideas and feelings, act out scenes, and predict how other characters might respond to learning about Melissa’s identity.

Just as we were about to finish reading the book, Alex Gino, the author of *George*, did a reading at a bookstore in a town a few hours away. Rose and Jill decided to attend. Students excitedly wrote letters to Gino and drafted questions they wanted us to ask if we were able. In order to write the letters, we spent time reading Gino’s website and learned that Gino uses gender neutral pronouns. At first, students were confused. “How do we write...them?... a letter if we can’t say Ms. or Mr?” they asked.

**“At first, students were confused. ‘How do we write ... them?... a letter if we can’t say Ms. or Mr?’ they asked.”**

Learning about gender neutral pronouns and how to use them in authentic instances of spoken and written communication provided another opportunity to rely on queer pedagogy’s push to rethink what students

considered normal while simultaneously employing our commitment to critical literacy pedagogy to include and consider how power is at work when encountering transgender identities. Faced with that question, we consulted a source written by a trans and non-binary scholar to learn more (Airton, n.d.), and we shared this source with students.

Subsequently, teachers and students thought through the experiences of these writers and of *George*/Melissa’s feelings when called by the wrong pronoun. These lessons related to an authentic audience, for their writing moved students toward comfort with using “they” as a singular for Gino and others who identify as non-binary and use that pronoun. The students were thrilled to see our photos of Gino receiving their letters and even more excited to watch a video of Gino answering some of

the students' questions. Gino used the term "gender queer" in one of these responses which gave Rose and Jill the opportunity to teach students about additional words used by some in the LGBTQ community. Just as we planned to segue this work into a final project about *George*, the third strand that led to Brandon's work came into play.

### **Situating Students as Experts for an Authentic Audience**

As we planned the read aloud of *George*, we imagined that the culminating activity would be for each student to create a multigenre project that would both highlight genres the class had studied over the year and provide multiple perspectives on the text when the class' work was looked at as a whole. Certainly, there would be value in concluding a literature unit in this way but plans changed after Jill approached the class following a challenging moment in her own university course. Rose and Jill already knew that an authentic audience mattered for these students. Because they had seen the genuine interest and dedicated effort the students had shown when writing letters to Alex Gino, they wondered what might happen if they knew that their audience were university students, and if they, the elementary-aged students, were positioned as the expert teachers.

At Rose's invitation, Jill explained to the class that, as a part of a current events discussion in her graduate-level social foundations of education course, several students brought up the Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students from the Departments of Justice and Education (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016) that had just been released. She explained how her university class had talked about how this letter provided "significant guidance" on ways that schools might comply with legal obligations to help keep transgender students safe. She then shared that during this discussion, one graduate student in her class used transphobic

language about the mental capacity of transgender people, questioned the authenticity of the identity category, claimed that President Obama was trying to change laws without applying the democratic process, and claimed that transgender identities had nothing to do with schools and teaching. When the 4th/5th grade students heard about this graduate student's response, their shock was palpable. "These are grown ups?" one student asked. "In college?" followed another.

After Jill told the elementary students this story and about how she had found it difficult to respond to this student's misinformation, we asked if the students would be interested in helping Jill teach these and future college students by creating PSAs that she could use in her classroom. They agreed wholeheartedly and dove deep into research on the topic. First, students read the Dear Colleague Letter and several responses of politicians who both agreed and disagreed with the stance taken in the letter and by President Obama (McCrorry, Berger respond, 2016). They then held small group discussions and came up with questions they still had. Rose and Jill invited a community member who does LGBTQ policy work at the state level to class to help answer their questions and give further context about what they'd been reading about. Along with writing the words, "transgender people are people," on the board, he shared his experiences of talking with state politicians who had already been discussing many of the ideas put forth in the Dear Colleague Letter (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). Students looked at websites from policy groups (e.g., Transgender Ally, n.d.) to better understand the needs of transgender students. All the while, students remembered *George/Melissa*. As we talked through both the Dear Colleague Letter and the politicians' responses, we continually asked the question, "How would these policies help her?"

### **The Strands Converge for Brandon**

As Jill peeked over Brandon's shoulder on the first day of PSA drafting, he had several tabs open on his laptop. Like most of the students in this class, Brandon was highly engaged in reading *George*. Brandon's voice always joined or led the chorus of "Nooooooooo!" when we would close the book after reading a chapter or two. He was an active participant in whole group discussions and shared his written responses to the text with the class regularly. If we acted out a scene from the book, Brandon's hand was in the air begging to volunteer. Because he was such an engaged student, Jill was curious to see how he would respond to this assignment. Rose was surprised that he had chosen

to write an acrostic poem rather than, like some of the other students, write a script and act out an advertisement style PSA or create a website with multiple tabs containing a wide range of information. "I think he thought it would be easier," she said regarding his choice. However, to create the poem, Brandon, like the other students, had to conduct research and was tabbing back and forth from the Dear Colleague Letter to a Google document where he had begun his acrostic poem (see Figure 1). When Jill sat down next to him, the following conversation ensued:

*Jill [noting the cursor blinking by the "t" in "Exclut"]: What word are you trying here?*

*Brandon: Exclutation?*

*Jill: That's not a word.*

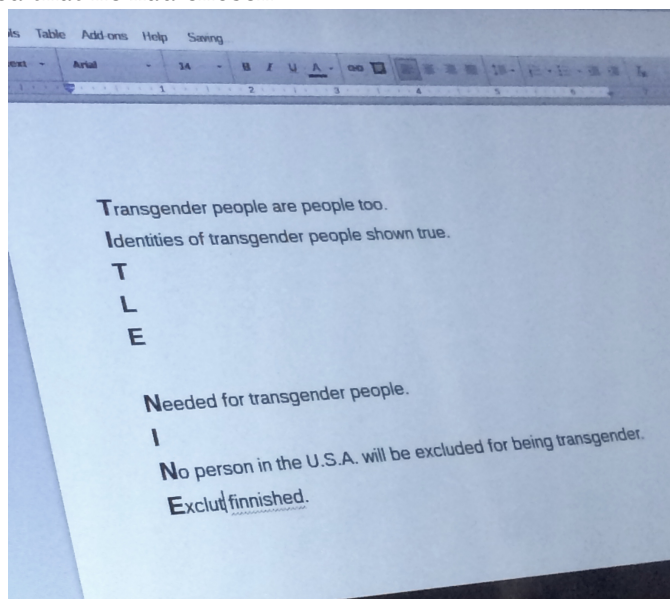
*Brandon: Oh.*

*Jill: Exclusion?*

*Brandon: Ex cluuuu ...Could I start with "Transgender people are people"?*

*Jill: [reading over Brandon's shoulder] "Transgender people are people!" That sounds great! What is it that you want people to know from your acrostic poem?*

*Brandon: Um ... pretty much showing that Obama is correct in what Title IX really means and that Obama's not trying to make a new law.*



*Figure 1: Snapshot of Brandon's screen.*

*Jill: OK. ... what is Obama saying that Title IX really means?*

*Brandon: That it means not that only transgender people are getting the treated the same, treated like other people ... they have to be shown in, like, other ways in like who they really are like in the bathrooms.*

*Jill: Like going in the bathroom that matches*

*Brandon: That matches their identity.*

*Jill: OK. So, so since it's Title Nine [spelled out for the acrostic poem], saying "Transgender people are people, too. Identities of transgender people shown true." What does that mean?*

*Brandon: That they are showing the true way, not the way that people think they are.*

*Jill: OK! So, identities of transgender people are ... OK, so I love it what you just said, so*



*what do people think that transgender people are?*

*Brandon: Um, a lot of people think they're freaks. A lot of people think that they're just wrong and shouldn't get known the way, they should just keep the way at birth that they were named.*

*Jill: OK, so identities of transgender people ... so Title IX is saying we should trust transgender people to know who they are. Is that right?*

*Brandon: Mmm hmm.*

*Jill: Is that what you ...? So what if you say "identities of transgender people ..." That "shown true" part is confusing. What if you say "should be trusted"? Or maybe not that, but we should believe the identity that people say that they are instead of questioning them. Because it sounds to me like that is what you're saying ... we should trust people who, we should trust the identities that people say that they are, right...?*

*Brandon: Um... [long pause for Brandon to blow his nose]*

*Jill: So one of the things that you just said to me is that people think they're freaks, or that people don't think they should be transgender, they think they should be the*

*Brandon: [types more on the computer into his poem]*

*Jill: Oh my gosh, that's beautiful.*

*Brandon [reading]: Identities will be told by the person.*

looking at the computer screen, moving back and forth from his poem to the results of his internet search, or watching the wall a few feet in front of him, deep in thought.

Between the lines of this poem were the conversations and texts we'd explored as a class. Students had been moved by George/Melissa's experiences of going to the bathroom at school, where she was required to use the facility labeled "boy" and celebrated with her when she got to use the girls' bathroom at the end of the novel (Gino, 2015). The class had debated about transgender students needing the President of the United States and his administration to step in on their behalf to create safe spaces for them when our 4th/5th graders saw transgender students as strong and capable on their own. These conversations helped us think about how people with power can use it in supportive ways. Brandon began his poem with the words that our class visitor wrote on the board, and one could see that visitor's insistence that the words of transgender students had the most impact on policy makers at the state level. "The kids know what it's like," he'd said, explaining how transgender kids were effective advocates for trans-inclusive legislation. And finally, you could see Brandon's challenge to Jill's graduate student, "Obama's not trying to make a new law." He synthesized the stress associated with bathrooms for George/Melissa written about by Gino (2015), the words of the Dear Colleague Letter (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016) with regard to transgender student rights, the ideas presented by a community member who came in as a guest speaker, and the resistance of Jill's graduate student together. Through his poem, he listened as an ally to the incidents of discrimination experienced by members of a marginalized group, heard those realities, and wanted others to have this same conviction. He fully engaged in the writing conference, taking Jill's questions and prodding as a way to enhance his writing so that he could make

In this four-minute exchange (including a nose blowing interlude), Brandon's eyes were either

his ideas and perspectives more clear. He considered his audience, and how his word choice will help them understand the importance of Title IX for transgender students.

Throughout the exchange, Brandon drew on his experiences with critical literacy, his knowledge of transgender topics, and his role of teaching an authentic audience to create his poem. Brandon was successfully engaging in critically literate behaviors: he was questioning the power of those who do not believe that transgender people have a right to name their own identities, much less who decide where transgender people can go to the bathroom. And, he was thinking about language.

As ELA teachers, this excites us—language play, creative writing, and engagement in the writing process, all skills he is expected to grapple with in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, were symbiotically developed alongside his development around transgender topics. He knew that people were being excluded, and he was trusting enough in the writing process to try out a word, “exclutation” that might help him make a point. He was actively using texts and ideas by and about transgender people. The teachers in his class initiated the inclusion of transgender topics by reading *George*, but student voice and interest created space for further investigation. Brandon was able to take what he had learned in class and deepen his understanding through continued research. And, audience authenticity mattered. Brandon felt a responsibility to teach through his poem. His words had to convey meaning, so his writing process reflected that intentionality.

### Conclusion

As the school year and our unit of inquiry came to an end, students presented their PSAs to the class. Standing in front of his poem projected on the screen in the class’ meeting area, Brandon walked through each line he had written. He took on the persona of a professor, perhaps imagining himself already in front of his intended audience of university students. Analyzing his own writing, he explained his reasoning for using particular words in particular lines. As is the custom in this class, students clapped for Brandon’s performance, and Rose asked, “Questions or comments?”

The discussion that ensued brings us back to the beginning of this paper. The reading of the poem was not an outcome moment, but a part of a larger learning process. One student challenged Brandon’s use of the word “needed,” comparing the Title IX recommendations to what he saw as bigger, more pressing needs like food and water. “It’s not NEEDED but it’s going to make it better.” Another student countered,

I actually disagree. I think it IS needed because transgender people, if they don’t feel comfortable with using the bathroom, then that’s just ... you should be able to use the bathroom, like, freely. You shouldn’t ... I feel like it IS needed for transgender people because you, like, NEED to go to the bathroom.

Brandon’s poetry sparked a conversation among his peers about a hierarchy of needs that spoke to the very real experience of wanting agency over going to the bathroom. This audience, in the microcosm of his own classroom, took up his poem as a learning moment even before the intended audience would

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have the opportunity to. The opportunity to teach college students also helped him teach his classmates and helped his classmates teach him. Everyone served as teacher and student. And, the teaching offered through Brandon's poem continued. Not only did Jill share his poem with the graduate class she was teaching at the time (where responses ranged from stony silence to knowing smiles and applause), but she has continued to share it as an example of what might be possible with undergraduates who are unsure about the ability of elementary-aged students to understand LGBTQ topics. Further, while the federal guidelines regarding transgender students during the last months of the presidential administration of Barack Obama have been revoked in the first months of the presidential administration of Donald Trump (Trump administration rolls back, 2017), this does not erase either the power of Brandon's work or the need for the kind of teaching around transgender topics that happened in Rose's classroom or the importance of reading books that have transgender characters with elementary-aged students. Regardless of federal policy or practice, there will still be transgender people in our schools and communities, and our students have the ability to read critically, expand or enhance their knowledge, and enjoy stories from and about members of the transgender community and all LGBTQ people. Brandon's is but one example from this classroom, and we are hopeful that there are many examples from classrooms across the country.

Poetry like Brandon's is possible for students in classrooms where teachers already bring a critical literacy lens to their curriculum. When LGBTQ identities aren't isolated as "special" or apart from the other kinds of work that many already do around race, gender, or class with their students but as a part of a diverse picture of identities that exist in the communities where students live, teachers might see ways to make space for outcomes like Brandon's. Brandon's opportunity to teach and to learn through interaction with authentic audiences, situated within a classroom where the curriculum was intentionally centered in critical literacy pedagogy with a focus transgender topics, offers a portrait of how elementary aged students can use literacy to make the world a more just and equitable place for transgender people.

**Suggested Books with Transgender, Gender Nonconforming, or Gender Creative Characters for Elementary Readers**

Baldacchino, C. (2014). *Morris Micklewhite and the tangerine dress*. Toronto, ON: Goundwood Books.

Bergman, S. (2012). *The adventures of Tulip*. Toronto, ON: Flamingo Rampant.

Carr, J. (2010). *Be who you are!* Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

Davids, S. (2015) *Annie's plaid shirt*. Miami, FL: Upswing Press.

Gino, A. (2015). *George*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Ewert, M. (2008). *10,000 dresses*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.

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