

Playing with Gender Expression

Gender is a person's internal experience of being a boy, a girl, neither, both, or something else entirely. It's a very personal identity, so you can never know for sure what someone's gender is by how they look on the outside. There are so many ways that people express their gender. Even two people of the same gender may dress, act, and speak very differently. Some people are sure of their gender from an early age, while others may spend a long time experimenting with gender before figuring out what feels right. What matters is making choices about how to express your gender in ways that make you happy and comfortable, even if you might be expressing it in ways that others might not expect.

In this Invitation to Play, we give some suggestions about creating opportunities for children to get creative and play with gender and explore diverse ways gender is expressed.

Planning

Summary: In this Invitation to play, the room will be divided into stations with activities themed around gender expression. After the educator briefly introduces the topic and the stations, learners will be able to move between and engage with stations however they like.

Materials Needed

- Dress up station
- Clothes & costumes
 - Wigs
 - Accessories
- Picture book station
- Books
- Name sign station
- Paper
 - Pencils
 - Markers or crayons
 - Letter stencils
- Collaging station
- Paper
 - Glue
 - Scissors
 - Old magazines
 - Printed stock images

Preparing the Space

- Arrange tables and chairs to create 4 stations:
- A dress up station, where learners can experiment with different outfits
 - A picture book station, where learners can read stories independently or to each other about characters of different genders
 - A name sign making stations, where learners can decorate a sign that celebrates their own name (or nickname!), or that represents a public figure or fictional character's name
 - A collaging station, where learners can create collages that express how they see their gender

Connecting with Community

Talk to local drag performers or queer organizations about sourcing a variety of fun, colourful, gender creative clothing and accessory options.

Talk to your local library or queer organizations about gathering collaging materials that represent a range of gender expressions.

Make a call out to community to help build your classroom's costume closet.

Expanding

Children may engage with the stations in ways we might not expect. They might combine activities from different stations in creative ways or find ways to play in the space that are completely different from what we imagined. Children's inventiveness and suggestions for play can inspire our reflections on the activities and inform how we set up future learning spaces.

Engaging	
Supporting	Extending
Educators may circulate among different tables and join some of the activities. Educators can be curious and ask their learners to tell them more about how they are experimenting with the idea of gender expression.	Encourage conversations between learners about what they like about their gender. Ask learners if there are types of toys, clothes, or other gendered experiences they are curious to experiment with differently than they normally would. Invite learners who are interested to share something they've made or something they learned in front of the group. Ask learners if they would like to display their artwork in the classroom.
Noticing and Recording	
As you have conversations with your learners, summarize some of their ideas on a whiteboard. Take photos of the learners while they are doing the activities. Remember to ask learners if it is okay to take photos, and offer the option to not have their face in the photo	

Reflecting
Documenting
Take photos of the stations before and during the activities. Ask learners if there is anything they would like added to the whiteboard where you've been keeping notes. Document the whiteboard notes by either taking a photo or writing them down. Write down your observations about what the learners enjoyed about the activities, how they engaged with the activities in ways you didn't expect, and any ideas you have for changes you'd like to make for next time.
Initiating Community Reflection
Share photos of the activities and the children's artwork on the school website and/or in the hallway outside the classroom If you invited a guest, ask them how the experience was for them and if there is anyone they would recommend inviting as a future guest.
Reviewing
How did the learners respond to the invitations to play? What can we add to foster curiosity and creativity?