Equity Express

Gender Identity: A Choose Your Own Equitable Adventure

A school data coach, who identifies as cis female and dresses in a masculine-presenting manner, visits a kindergarten room to help students log into their computers for the first time.

As she is helping students log in, one student raises his hand, points at the data coach, and asks his teacher, "Is it a boy or a girl?"

Teacher Response One
The teacher laughs at the student's question and says nothing.
1

Teacher Response 2:
"Jason, we don't ask those kinds of questions, that's rude."
2

Teacher Response 3:
"We don't always know by looking at someone how they feel inside and should approach each person with kindness. Instead of calling someone "it," you can always say "they.""
3

Teacher Response One:
The teacher laughs at the student's question and says nothing.
1
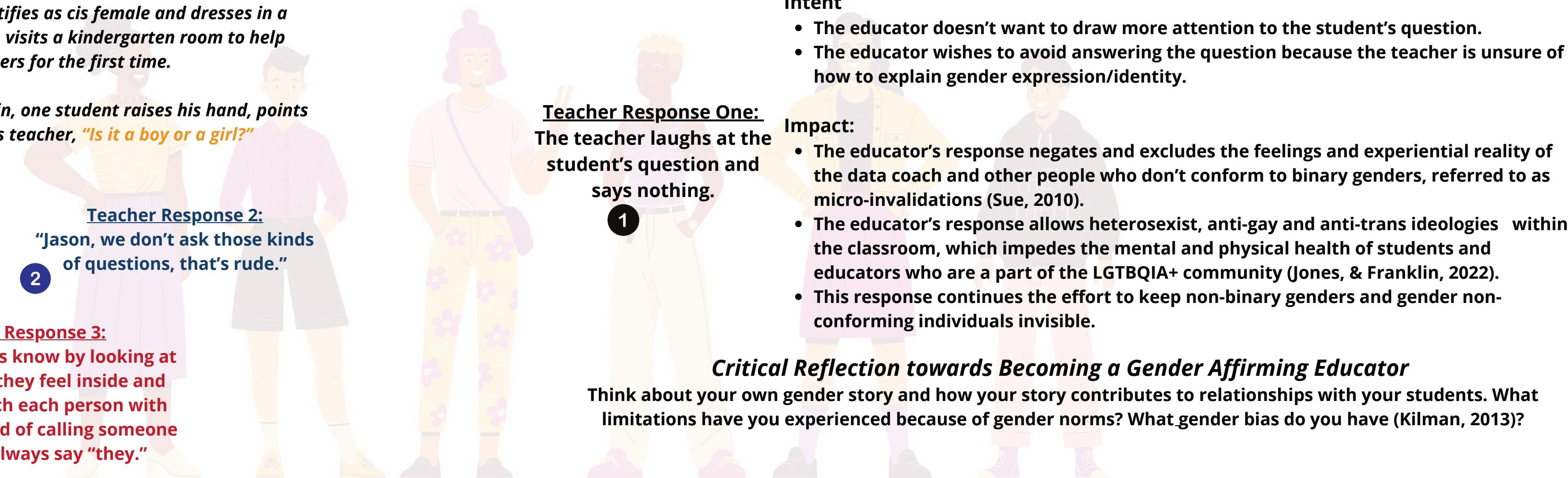
Intent
- The educator doesn't want to draw more attention to the student's question.
- The educator wishes to avoid answering the question because the teacher is unsure of how to explain gender expression/identity.

Impact:
- The educator's response negates and excludes the feelings and experiential reality of the data coach and other people who don't conform to binary genders, referred to as micro-invalidations (Sue, 2010).
- The educator's response allows heterosexist, anti-gay and anti-trans ideologies within the classroom, which impedes the mental and physical health of students and educators who are a part of the LGTBQIA+ community (Jones, & Franklin, 2022).
- This response continues the effort to keep non-binary genders and gender non-conforming individuals invisible.

Critical Reflection towards Becoming a Gender Affirming Educator
Think about your own gender story and how your story contributes to relationships with your students. What limitations have you experienced because of gender norms? What gender bias do you have (Kilman, 2013)?

[Watermark image description: Young people representing varying gender expressions.]

Teacher Response 2:
"Jason, we don't ask those kinds of questions, that's rude."

2

Intent
- The educator wants to divert attention away from addressing the question.
- The educator wishes to avoid teaching about gender and gender identity because of curricula pacing and maintaining the status quo.
- The educator aims to shut down any discussion or exploration of gender diversity, rendering the topic taboo.

Impact
- The educator's response allows the educator to avoid the development of strategies to handle and discuss assumptions of heterosexuality and heteronormativity within the classroom (Guanci & Blackburn, 2022).
- The educator's response negatively impacts school/social/family relationships by indicating the student should assimilate to the norm by not talking about gender (Parker, 2021).
- The educator's response creates a harmful classroom environment where students are fearful of asking questions.
- The educator's response creates shame for those in the community who identify as non-binary.

Critical Reflection towards Becoming a Gender Affirming Educator
Although the student's question was most likely raised out of curiosity, how could this make the educator feel? Consider the different ways you can encourage your students to inquire about someone's gender identity in order to promote gender diversity.

Teacher Response 3:
"We don't always know by looking at someone how they feel inside and should approach each person with kindness. Instead of calling someone "it," you can always say "they."

3

Intent
- The educator recognizes and acknowledges gender diversity and the family differences among students.
- The educator models the various representations of gender to create an inclusive classroom.
- The educator acts with kindness at the forefront of class interactions and does not make assumptions.

Impact:
- The educator's response provides a safe space for students of all identities and families to share out and feel a part of the community.
- The educator's response encourages students to be their full authentic selves.
- The educator's response stimulates curiosity for students to feel welcome exploring gender identity.

Action Steps towards Becoming an Gender Affirming Educator (Adapted from Guanci & Blackburn, 2022)

- Actively create a safe and affirming space for students to present their LGTBQIA+ families.
- Protect students who may be harassed or bullied for their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression by critically examining current school policies and report incidents of discrimination and harassment (GLSEN, 2021).
- Provide equal educational opportunities for extra curriculars like GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances).

- Communicate awareness of gender identity by using inclusive language to avoid categorizing students by gender (Broughton et al., 2021).
- Call students by their preferred names and correct pronouns (Broughton et al., 2021).
- Provide opportunities for students to think/explore/wonder about differences and stereotypes regarding gender and gender identity.
- Actively listen and seek out LGTBQIA+ perspectives.

Meet the Authors

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