

10 Best Practices for Trans and Non-Binary (TNB) Inclusion, Affirmation, & Justice in the World Language Classroom

These guidelines are derived from survey research with high school students across the United States who identify outside of the gender binary. Each guideline is followed by several action examples, which can be adapted across age levels and institutional, political, and social contexts. They are not a solution for transphobia in language classrooms, but can provide a useful starting point for continued learning, action, and advocacy.

1. Affirm the legitimacy of TNB identities and language.
 - Treat gender as a spectrum, not a binary, recognizing self-identification as supreme
 - Affirm the reality of language variation and evolution
 - Include students as legitimate users of the target language community and emphasize individuals' ability to make choices about how they use language in different contexts
 - Teach grammatical gender as distinct from social gender and biological sex
2. Teach ALL students how to refer to TNB people.
 - Teach vocabulary to describe gender beyond a binary
 - Teach neopronouns and agreements as part of official lessons and materials (not as extra credit or a footnote) for all students
 - Emphasize the necessity of appropriate and respectful use of non-binary forms to refer to those who use them
3. Integrate queer, trans, and non-binary representation into the curriculum.
 - Research and acknowledge the presence of LGBTQ+ communities within target cultures
 - Include LGBTQ+ people in language practice and examples, including those from target language communities
 - Integrate texts and media by LGBTQ+ people, but not as a subject of debate or a "special" lesson

4. Ask for and respect students' names and pronouns.
 - Don't assume students' pronouns or gender from their name, gender expression, or gender designation in school records. Avoid gendering students without explicit knowledge.
 - Introductory/periodic survey with chosen name and write-in pronoun options, including in class/with school adults/with home adults and for each language spoken
 - Provide access to pronoun buttons, name tags, or other nonverbal systems for students whose pronouns may change from day to day
 - Practice and use the pronouns students choose, correct yourself if you make a mistake, and accept feedback with gratitude
 - Check in individually with students to clarify their preferences if necessary and respect their wishes

5. Give students choice about how and to what extent they talk about their gender.
 - Don't assign gendered roles (unless these are completely random)
 - Don't nominate students as examples of a particular gender
 - Give students the option of describing themselves or others
 - Offer students choice to talk about issues that they care about

6. Grade equitably, especially participation and corrective feedback.
 - Don't grade student participation or writing on students' willingness to talk about themselves or on tasks implicating their gender
 - Consider asking students to specify on writing assignments how they are gendering themselves or others for the assignment
 - To assess students' mastery of grammatical gender and agreement, have students write/speak about people of known gender or inanimate objects rather than about themselves
 - Allow students space to explore innovative or alternative ways of using grammatical gender on non-graded activities (e.g., the freedom to mix different grammatically gendered forms to describe themselves)

7. Interrupt queerphobia and bullying in the classroom.
 - Listen to students' interactions including during instructional and transition times, and enforce the use of respectful language and chosen names and pronouns
 - Set clear and explicit boundaries
 - Interrupt harmful words and behaviors in front of the full class
8. Foster supportive relationships for and with TNB students.
 - Assign (or give TNB students the choice) to sit next to and partner with friends and allies
 - Demonstrate care and support to TNB students in and out of the classroom by asking about their weekends, pets, extracurriculars, etc.
9. Educate yourself and invite input from students – without burdening them with the labor.
 - Commit to doing the work. Start by googling “non-binary gender in [language]” and learning about TNB celebrities and activists
 - Continually increase your own vocabulary and knowledge base about gender diversity
 - Consume media by and for TNB people in the target culture
 - Be honest with students about what you do and don't know
 - Ask for feedback and accept corrections with gratitude
 - Partner with students and follow their lead
10. Advocate for queer, trans and non-binary rights & representation outside of the language classroom.
 - Interrupt misgendering and deadnaming among school adults
 - Collect and share resources with colleagues and administrators
 - Support student GSAs and school-based LGBTQ+ activism
 - Attend and publicize protests and political actions
 - Donate to TNB-led organizations and initiatives for justice.

For more resources, publications, consulting, and professional development, contact Julia Donnelly Spiegelman at UMass Boston.

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