

SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Educational Leadership.

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Disquisition Description

The disquisition is formal, problem-based discourse. The disquisition is closely aligned with the scholar-practitioner role of Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) students and thus takes on a practical focus rather than the theoretical focus of traditional Ph.D. dissertations. The purpose of the disquisition is “to document the scholarly development of leadership expertise in organizational improvement” (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5). The Ed.D. program at WCU nurtures and matures students as both scholars and practitioners who are trained to understand systems and institutional challenges and opportunities through a lens of research and scholarship. Students apply their knowledge, using their institutional access and positionality, directly to the educational institutions where they lead. The Ed.D. is an applied degree, and the disquisition is similarly an applied capstone experience for doctoral work. The disquisition at WCU specifically utilizes an Improvement Science methodology, is shaped by critical theory and scholarly research, and engages the candidate in the application of the concepts in an applied manner through the development and implementation of an intervention within their local institution, focused on improvement of equity within that system. Ultimately, the disquisition serves as documentation and assessment of an improvement initiative that “contributes to a concrete good to the larger community and the dissemination of new relevant knowledge” (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5).

Abstract

Trans people make up about 0.53% of the population or more. Many of these individuals, particularly in the higher education classroom setting, do not feel supported and are subject to discrimination and oppression. Many faculty are not up to date on terminology or ways to be trans-inclusive in the classroom. Studies show that professional development can be a useful technique in the learning and development (PD) of faculty in being more trans-inclusive in their classrooms. Utilizing Queer Theory, this disquisition examines faculty at Southeastern Valley Community College and their trans-inclusiveness before and after a PD that was developed based on the Transgender Inclusive Behavior Scale (TIBS) and the experiences of trans graduates of the institution. This research showed an improvement in the TIBS scores after the PD, as well as increased trans-inclusive behaviors in the classroom as a result.

Keywords: trans, transgender, higher education, TIBS, trans-inclusiveness, professional development

Introduction

Transgender (or trans) people make up about 0.53% of the population (Crissman et al., 2017). According to census.gov (2022), the current US population is 332,543,000 which means approximately 1,762,478 individuals (or more) are transgender in the US. A large majority of people who identify as trans do not feel supported or safe in many of their day-to-day contexts (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019; Miller & Grollman, 2015; McGuire et al., 2010). Reasons include harassment, discrimination, and microaggressions¹ including the use of pronouns that do not align with the person's gender identity. Other harms include the invasion of bodily privacy, the erroneous assumption that trans individuals are sexual predators or deviants, and exoticization² (Miller & Grollman, 2015). The rates of discrimination are higher for individuals who are trans/gender non-conforming as compared to those who identify as cisgender³ (or cis) (Miller & Grollman, 2015).

Trans people also experience discrimination in medical care; difficulty in accessing legal documents due to differences between current and past names that appear on their identification documents; and the inability to access safe restrooms in public spaces (Rabasco & Andover, 2021). Trans people also report higher rates of suicidal ideation, self-harm, depression, anxiety, and stress (Lloyd et al., 2019; Price-Feeney et al., 2021; Rabasco & Andover, 2021) because of

¹ *Microaggressions* are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward people” of an underserved population (Sue, et. al., 2007, p. 271).

² *Exoticization* is when one is caused to “feel objectified or dehumanized because of their” identity (Nadal, et. al., 2015, p. 152).

³ *Cisgender or cis* “A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

higher levels of discrimination and victimization associated with the trans identity (Lloyd et al., 2019; Price-Feeney et al., 2021; Rabasco & Andover, 2021).

Despite these serious challenges, trans individuals and their allies have been working to create safer and more just spaces across settings. For the purpose of this disquisition, I will focus on the experiences of trans students in college classrooms. Before exploring the classroom context in the literature review below, I present three subsections for contextual understanding: a) terminology related to transgender people; b) a brief history of the exclusion of trans people in society; and 3) a summary of the literature relating to the experiences of trans students on college campuses.

Literature Review of the Problem

Terminology

It is important to use accurate, supportive, and academically informed terminology when referencing personal identity. Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991) would suggest these terms and definitions are ever evolving; this terminology is a snapshot in time based on our current understanding (see Queer Theory Framework below).

- *Gender* “is used to denote the public (and usually legally recognized) lived role as boy or girl, man or woman, but, in contrast to certain social constructionist theories, biological factors are seen as contributing, in interaction with social and psychological factors, to gender development” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 451). Gender is “historical and performative” meaning gender identities and the way they are shaped vary depending on culture and the historical time. Gender is also socially constructed, not innate (Butler, 2004). This means gender is not fixed and can change over time

depending on several factors, including a society's expectations of gender identity and the establishment of new gender identities.

- *Sex* refers “to the biological indicators of male and female (understood in the context of reproductive capacity), such as in sex chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, and non-ambiguous internal and external genitalia” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 451).
- *Gender dysphoria* “refers to the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 451)
- *Gender euphoria* “has been mobilized by some LGBTQ people to describe the powerfully positive emotions that can come from one's gender/sex” (Beischel et al., 2022, p. 274).
- *Transgender or trans* “refers to the broad spectrum of individuals who transiently or persistently identify with a gender different from their natal gender” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 451).
- *Cisgender or cis* “A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).
- *Cisnormativity* “describes a societal mindset wherein cis...is presumed to be the norm, while trans...people and experiences are deemed ‘abnormal’ by comparison (if they are even considered at all)” (Zamani-Gallaher et al, 2020).
- *Gender reassignment* “denotes an official (and usually legal) change of gender” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 451).

- *Gender identity* “is a category of social identity and refers to an individual's identification as male, female, or, occasionally, some category other than male or female” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 451).

A Brief History of Exclusion and Harm

From the beginning of human history, trans people have existed. In the United States in particular, documentation of trans individuals started around the early nineteenth century (Beemyn, 2013). During this time, anyone who had a gender that did not conform with their sex assigned at birth was considered mentally disturbed or suffering from psychosis (Beemyn, 2013). In the late 1960s and 70s, trans people began writing their own histories turning the tide on the mostly negative discourse surrounding the trans community (Beemyn, 2013).

Until 2013, “gender identity disorder” was listed as a mental illness in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). With the newest version, DSM-5, this term has been replaced with “gender dysphoria.” The manual suggests several possible treatments including medical transition to the gender for which one identifies (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This is of vital importance as “gender identity disorder” implied that there was something pathologically wrong with the individual or with one’s gender identity. The recent framing of “gender dysphoria” asserts that the diagnosis is associated with the person’s related distress. That distress (not the identity or the individual) is the reason they seek treatment. While this may be a step in the right direction, many trans people do not believe that “gender dysphoria” should be included in the DSM. According to Butler (2004), “this imposes a model of coherent gendered life that demeans the complex ways in which gendered lives are crafted and lived” (p. 85). The inclusion of gender dysphoria in the DSM can, however, be helpful in the process of seeking out

assistance including hormone replacement therapy, surgeries, and legal status change (Butler, 2004).

Trans Students on College Campuses

A high number of trans students express safety concerns on campus due to their identity/presentation (Goldberg et al., 2019). Trans students experience more discrimination and harassment on campus, as well as a significantly lower sense of belonging (Dugan et al., 2012; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). They also feel more isolated on campus than their cis peers (Dugan et al., 2012; Nicolazzo, 2017). In the *2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender People*, it was stated that 31% of trans/gender nonconforming students experienced harassment which is more than their cis peers reported (20% cisgender men and 19% cisgender women) (Rankin et al., 2010). Garvey and Rankin (2015) explored the differences between “level of outness” and campus climate conditions. See Table 1 below.

Table 1

Differences Among Cisgender GBQ Men, Cisgender LGBQ Women, and Trans-Spectrum Students

Differences Among Cisgender GBQ Men, Cisgender LGBTQ Women, and Trans-Spectrum Students

	Total		Cisgender GBQ Men (1)		Cisgender LGBTQ Women (2)		Trans-Spectrum Students (3)		Post hoc
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Level of Outness	10.50	4.40	9.96	4.15	11.06	4.55	9.72	4.19	2 > 1, 3
Campus Climate	0.00	0.96	-0.04	0.97	-0.01	0.93	0.23	1.04	1, 2 > 3
Classroom Climate	0.00	0.96	-0.06	0.95	0.00	0.94	0.23	1.03	1, 2 > 3
Curricular Issues	0.00	0.98	0.12	0.96	-0.03	0.97	-0.30	1.04	1 > 2 > 3
Campus Responses	0.00	0.97	0.01	0.96	-0.03	0.96	0.08	1.04	1 = 2 = 3
Campus Resource Importance	0.00	0.99	0.11	1.03	-0.06	0.95	-0.15	0.93	1 = 2 = 3
Campus Resource Use	0.00	0.97	0.03	0.97	-0.12	0.93	0.60	1.01	3 > 1 > 2

Note. The numbers in parentheses in column heads refer to the numbers used for illustrating significant differences in the “Post hoc” column.

Note: From Garvey & Rankin, 2015, p. 392

The table shows a significant relationship between level of outness for “trans- and queer-spectrum students” and negative campus climate or perceptions of the importance of campus resources (Garvey & Rankin, 2015, p. 384). This shows that trans (and queer) students who are more open about their identities perceive the campus climate as more negative than those who are not as open to community members (Garvey & Rankin, 2015).

Trans Students in College Classrooms

Eighty percent of trans students have stated that they feel unsafe in the college classroom due to their gender identity (Kosciw et al., 2011). Trans individuals often experience negativity in their interactions with faculty (Austin et al., 2016; Goldberg et al., 2019; Pryor, 2015). A high percentage of trans students perceive that their faculty express transphobia and bias toward them (Austin et al., 2016; Goldberg et al., 2019). Studies have shown that college professors are influenced by their personal biases which can negatively or positively impact student

performance (Messman & Leslie, 2019). According to The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, only 51% of trans or nonbinary youth felt school was a gender-affirming space, which leaves nearly half feeling that their schools are not gender-affirming at all.

This disquisition examines the lack of faculty support for trans students in college classrooms and proposes a remedy that may better serve the needs of trans students. Lack of faculty support can range from faculty who are unaware of the best ways to show support for their trans students, to faculty who express negative attitudes towards their trans students.

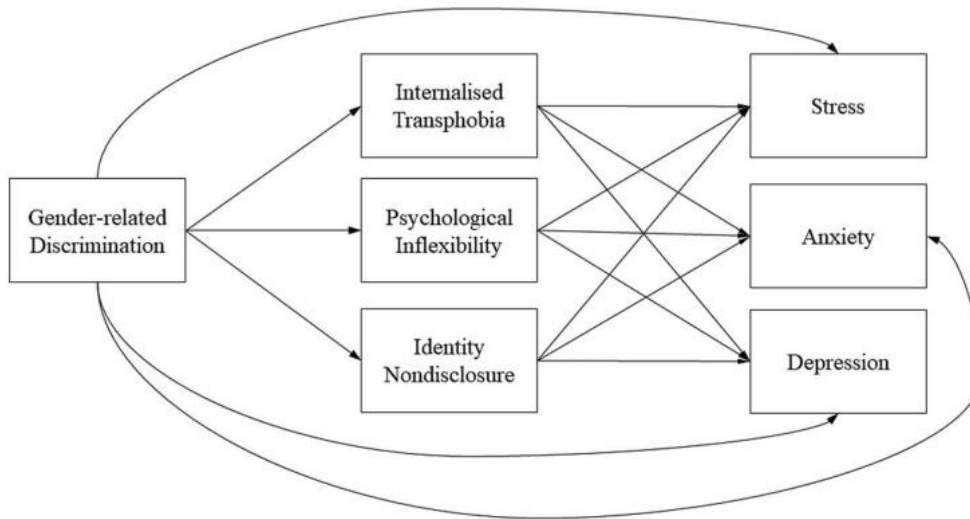
The impact of Feeling Unsafe, Isolated, and Discriminated Against on Campus

Negative experiences on college campuses and in the classrooms can adversely affect the experiences of trans students academically, professionally, and personally (Asquith, et. al., 2018; The Trevor Project, 2022). Conversely, "Gender affirmation on a structural and interpersonal level was significantly associated with outcomes on the individual level: higher odds of past-year healthcare engagement and HIV-testing, and lower odds of past-year suicidal ideation and psychological distress" (Lelutiu-Weinberger, English, and Sandanapitchai, 2020, p. 181).

Trans individuals experience higher rates of suicide ideation and other negative mental health effects such as depression and anxiety. These mental challenges have been associated with high rates of discrimination from others, threats of violence that follow this population on a daily basis, and a lack of support from friends and family (Harper & Schneider, 2003; Lloyd, Chalklin, & Bond, 2019; Price-Feeney, et. al., 2020; Rabasco & Andover, 2021; The Trevor Project, 2022). The figure below proposes that rates of gender-related discrimination can predict higher levels of internalized transphobia, psychological inflexibility, and identity nondisclosure, which can all lead to higher rates of stress, anxiety, and depression (Lloyd, Chalklin, & Bond, 2019).

Figure 1

Conceptual Model by Lloyd, Chalklin, and Bond, 2019



Note: From Lloyd, Chalklin, & Bond, 2019, p. 553

Lloyd, Chalklin, and Bond (2019) determined through an eight-item scale the “internalization of negative societal views about...gender identity or expression, and the transgender community,” or internalized transphobia (p. 554). Psychological inflexibility refers to a seven-item scale that measured the “rigid dominance of internal psychological experiences (e.g., thoughts, feelings memories) over chosen values and contingencies in guiding people’s actions” (Lloyd, Chalklin, & Bond, 2019, p. 554). Identity nondisclosure, a five-item scale, assessed trans and gender nonconforming people’s efforts to “conceal their gender identity/history through modifying aspects of their appearance and/or behavior” (Lloyd, Chalklin, & Bond, 2019, p. 554).

It goes without saying that higher rates of stress, anxiety, and depression would cause a lower sense of belonging in the classroom. While retention data for the trans population is

severely lacking, students who experience discrimination in the classroom may choose to leave college altogether due to having a negative experience, which could lead to fewer job opportunities and lower job satisfaction (Legg, Cofino, & Sanlo, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

To frame the problem and this improvement initiative, it is helpful to understand Queer Theory (Butler, 2003; De Lauretis, 1995). Queer Theory works to “radically subvert the dominant, heteronormative discourses and to (re)consider the construction of non-normative subjectivities” (Gulley, 2022, p.25). Within Queer Theory, there is a focus on avoiding categories and tenets. “It is antithetical to the spirit of the theory to tie it down to a single meaning” (McCann & Monaghan, 2020, p.1).

This theoretical framework was developed in the 1990s and has roots in poststructuralist and feminist theoretical frameworks (Gulley, 2022). The word “queer” has a “historically pejorative use” and has been reclaimed as a term to encompass the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in a political manner. LGBTQ+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning. The plus sign encompasses all other identities that are a part of this community. Sometimes the abbreviation differs from one person to another, with some examples including: LGBT and 2SLGBTQIA+ (other identities not mentioned above: two-spirit—an identity held solely by Native Americans who are part of the community, intersex, asexual/agender). Queer is purposefully ambiguous, fluid, and defies categorization (Thompson, 2014, p. 581).

Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991) provides an impetus to dismantle current systems of oppression in order to recreate a new system where people are free to express themselves in any manner they feel drawn to without feeling the need to fit into the gender categories our society

has established, through advocacy for a dismantling of our current performative gender system. This benefits trans people as it allows for freedom of expression more readily and without judgement. Through my problem of practice, working to help faculty provide support for trans students requires a certain amount of knowledge about trans people in general. Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991) helps to provide some of this knowledge, by contextualizing transness in relation to our current cis normative society.

The word transgender was first used as early as the 1960s (McCann & Monaghan, 2020). It has been used in the past as a term to describe individuals whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth, with or without surgery or hormonal therapy, with the term transsexual being used to describe those who permanently change their genitalia in addition to a social transition to a different gender from their sex assigned at birth (McCann & Monaghan, 2020). Most recently, however, transgender (or trans) is used as an umbrella term to include anyone whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth, regardless of medical or surgical status (McCann & Monaghan, 2020).

Many theorists conclude that the trans experience has many parallels and can share a political stance with those who are queer regarding sexuality (McCann & Monaghan, 2020). In fact, that is an explanation as to why the T was added to the LGBTQ+ acronym, showing the parallels between the gender and sexuality communities (McCann & Monaghan, 2020). In the 1990s, the term gender queer was coined as a way of the trans community claiming the word queer for their purposes, as the trans community was, and is, often “sidelined or actively marginalised” (McCann & Monaghan, 2020, p. 168).

There are many who see trans identities as opposite to queer identity, as there can be a focus on determining a specific identity within the trans community, whereas within the queer

identity, the focus is on identifying as queer as a collective (McCann & Monaghan, 2020). There can also be a utilization of the gender binary in framing a trans person's transition or narrative of "why" they are trans, including "born in the wrong body" discourse, which does not follow a queer theory framework (de Laetis, 1991; McCann & Monaghan, 2020). However, many theorists working within trans studies are working towards critically examining the current limiting perspectives of gender as "biologist essentialist and simple social constructivist" (McCann & Monaghan, 2020, p. 170).

There is a tension between Queer Theory and trans identity in that trans identity can often work towards acceptance in mainstream society, especially when related to access to medical and surgical interventions (McCann & Monaghan, 2020). McCann and Monaghan (2020) in their book *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures*, point out the double standards trans people face, specifically related to surgical intervention. For cis women, breast augmentation is seen as acceptable, if not actively encouraged, whereas for trans women, breast augmentation is a procedure that involves jumping through many hoops including psychological, social, and medical (McCann & Monaghan, 2020).

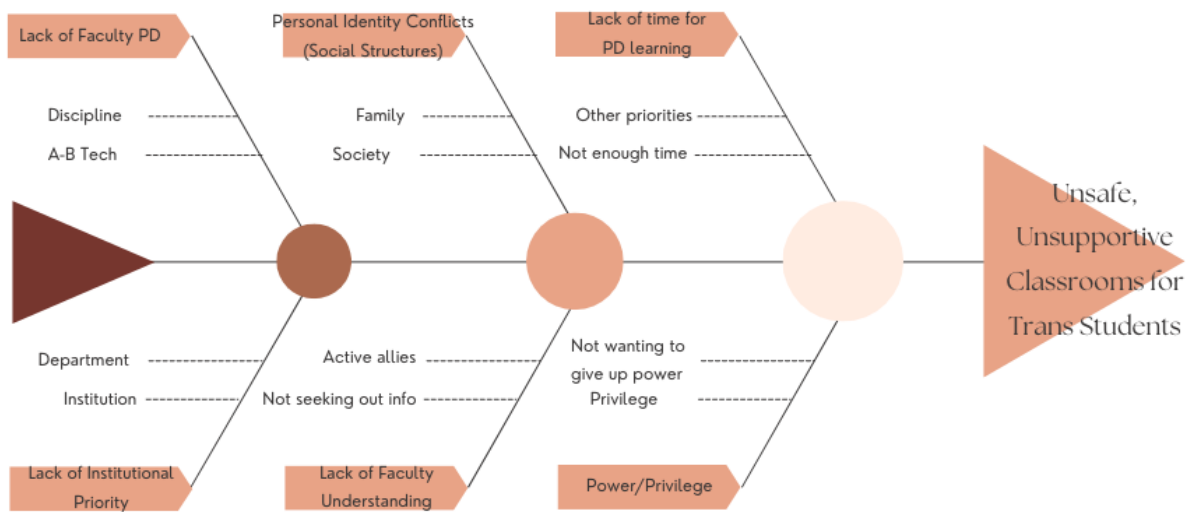
Queer Theory often overlooks the experiences of queer and gender queer individuals, instead focusing on deconstruction (McCann & Monaghan, 2020). This approach is one that is incorporated into this disquisition, as it allows me to collect the voices and experiences of trans individuals who have attended SE Valley either currently or in the past, but also in helping to explain the theory behind the causes of the problem, most specifically the transphobia inherent throughout higher education in general that faculty must work to overcome both in and out of their classrooms in order to provide a welcoming and safe space for trans students to learn and thrive.

A Causal Analysis

In this section, I provide a causal analysis of the problem (many faculty do not create safe, supportive classrooms for trans students) including a figure that identifies six primary causes and supporting literature that describes them. A causal analysis is a method to evaluate the causes of a phenomenon or hypothesis and to “clearly define a problem of practice” (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 49). Causal analyses are conducted to look past the problem itself and determine underlying causes of the problem (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Figure 2 is a fishbone diagram (Ishikawa, 1976). A fishbone diagram is also known as a cause-and-effect diagram and is used “to illuminate the diversity and categories of root causes that could impact” a problem (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 53; Langley et al., 2009).

Figure 2

Fishbone Diagram: Contributing Causes to Unsupportive Classrooms for Trans Students



In the above diagram (Figure 2), the six primary causes are identified as: lack of faculty professional development, personal identity conflicts (social structures), lack of time for

professional development learning, lack of institutional priority, lack of faculty understanding, and power/privilege. I will describe each of the six primary causes outlined in the diagram.

Lack of Faculty Professional Development

Lack of professional development (PD) about trans individuals is a common problem across disciplines (García-Acosta et.al, 2010). This could be for many reasons, including transphobia and lack of awareness of trans issues. Although PD to help people understand their own identity development (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, etc.), the identities of others, and the relationship between the two is increasing, this learning is relatively new and is facing political resistance from those who oppose diversity, equity, and inclusion (Lange & Lee, 2024; Rogers & Gregston, 2023).

Professional development should be offered across disciplines, both specifically and broadly, as well as include general best teaching practices (Mundy et al., 2012). Professional development can also be utilized to assist educators with learning how to best engage and support students from underrepresented populations (Mundy et al., 2012). According to McMillan and Gordan (2017), there are five critical areas for professional development on campus: “(a) communities of practice; (b) academic freedom; (c) position statements; (d) development opportunities; and (e) a supportive environment” (p. 777). The last item seems pertinent to the problem I have presented.

Personal Identity Conflicts (Social Structures)

Demographic variables, individual difference variables, and attitudes also impact this problem (Hatch et al., 2022). Demographic variables, including sex and sexual orientation, can lead to higher rates of transphobia (Hatch et al., 2022). This is especially true for heterosexual cis males (Hatch et al., 2022). One’s individual difference variables, which include political

ideology, gender essentialism (the belief that gender is immutable and binary), and religious beliefs, can impact one's feelings and beliefs about the trans community, and one may continue to perpetuate the messages they receive from these variables about the trans community being "bad" or "wrong" (Hatch et al., 2022; Lombardi, 2009). Certain socio-cultural institutions (e.g., religious, political) may directly state ideology to their members asserting that trans people are abnormal, mentally ill, or do not exist (Norton & Herek, 2013; Strassfeld, 2018). This can mean faculty who are members of these groups may not even believe that trans individuals exist or are worthy of respect. They may disregard a student's chosen name, gender, and pronouns as a result of this. This can make the classroom an unsafe/unsupportive space for trans students. Faculty may also not prioritize learning about this population due to implicit or explicit biases against the trans community. Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991) supports the idea that heteronormativity and cisnormativity are prevalent in society, and therefore individuals are inundated with these messages from birth, which makes overcoming them a conscious, intentional process. One simple way to combat these messages is to gain exposure to trans individuals, through media or one-on-one interactions (Hatch et al., 2022; Lombardi, 2009).

Lack of Time for Professional Development

Faculty members often lack the time to participate in learning opportunities because of other job-related responsibilities. Community college faculty are often contingent, or part-time/adjunct, hires (Aguilar-Smith & Gonzalez, 2019). This does not mean, however, they do not engage in activities outside of the classroom. Many community college faculty are not only responsible for teaching, but are heavily encouraged, if not required, to spend time understanding students on a deeper level and their needs (Aguilar-Smith & Gonzalez, 2019). Faculty often need to know the on-campus and community resources for their students and may spend a significant

amount of time advising students in their courses (Aguilar-Smith & Gonzalez, 2019). Some community college faculty are required to attend professional development and have a cohort of advisees to meet with to discuss their academic goals (Aguilar-Smith & Gonzalez, 2019). Moreover, many faculty spend time on service to the college as well as scholarship (Aguilar-Smith & Gonzalez, 2019).

Many faculty, particularly new faculty, go into the field of instruction without having any concrete professional development on best practices and pedagogy in the classroom (Mundy et al., 2012). According to Berg and Haung (2004), areas in which professional development should touch on include instructional practices that are proven, as well as how to incorporate these proven practices into their courses to enhance learning, engagement, success, and retention.

Some barriers faculty face when accessing professional development include a) time, b) monetary restrictions/lack of support, and c) competing interests between faculty and their administrators (Hott & Tietjen-Smith, 2018). A lack of outside motivation (i.e., salary benefits, promotion, etc.), may cause faculty non-engagement with professional development (Botham, 2018). Other factors that may influence faculty participation in professional development include a) unsupportive management, b) lack of funding and accessibility (including leave availability), c) apprehension to be seen as a beginner/novice, and d) work-life balance (Burrow et al., 2016).

Lack of Institutional Priority

Thus far, I have applied a causal link to professors; however, we must examine how their employers (institutes of higher education and their leaders) prioritize this type of learning for their employees/faculty members and themselves. Accountability, or lack of institutional priority, is also a factor in this problem. Institutions do not prioritize time or resources for PD,

and instead prioritize scholarship, teaching duties, service to the institution, and advising (Baker et al., 2017).

Accountability, or lack thereof, also impacts this problem. Faculty attitudes towards trans students are typically handled in a reactive way, and very rarely do we see a proactive approach. Without policies and procedures relating to this population, faculty are the ones in power in the classroom and if they do not have anyone to hold them accountable, this can often result in transphobia or tokenizing of trans individuals (Siegel, 2019).

Lack of Faculty Understanding

Lack of faculty understanding surrounding the trans community is another root cause. Faculty may not have been prepared to understand the unique needs of trans students or the impact of being their ally. Faculty therefore may not understand that being an active ally and going through the effort to learn more about specific populations, including trans students, will benefit themselves as well as their students (Rostosky et.al, 2015). Being an ally to students can help faculty become more supportive of trans students in the classroom, or at least more willing to learn methods of how to be more supportive. Faculty who are also allies may be more likely to attend professional development opportunities or to research trans students and their challenges in the classroom.

In utilizing solutions to some, if not all, of these problems related to faculty support of trans students in the classroom, faculty can create a more trans-inclusive environment in their classrooms. By creating a trans-inclusive atmosphere, faculty can show their support for their trans students, which can lead to positive outcomes for the faculty and the students. Trans students deserve classrooms where they feel safe and welcome so that they can thrive and learn. This requires faculty who are willing and prepared to provide a supportive classroom space.

Before addressing how to potentially build the capacity of faculty to create safe, supportive classrooms, it is important to understand the context of the college where this improvement work will occur.

A Local Context: Southeastern Valley Community College

In this section, I describe a context in which this problem exists and where my proposed improvement initiative will take place. I present a description of the college, the surrounding community, key campus partners, a history and review of the problem within the context, and my role and positionality at Southeastern Valley Community College (SE Valley)

Southeastern Valley Community College

There is currently little professional development at Southeastern Valley Community College on working with the trans population, aside from some terminology and pronoun practice within the Safe Zone training curriculum. Safe Zone is a widely utilized LGBTQ+ ally training meant to bring about awareness and knowledge of this community. Safe Zone programs are based upon the Safe Zone Project, an online repository of information and activities for institutions wishing to create a Safe Zone program of their own (The Safe Zone Project, n.d.). The Safe Zone Project was co-created in 2013 by Meg Bolger and Sam Killermann (The Safe Zone Project, n.d.). Safe Zone is offered once a semester at SE Valley and is open to faculty and staff. However, these opportunities do not address how to show support in a classroom setting specifically and focus more on increasing awareness of this population instead of how to best support them.

Surrounding Community

Southeastern Valley Community College's main campus is located in a mid-size state located in the Southeast region of the United States. The city is a progressive-leaning one situated in a more conservative-minded state.

Currently, many conservative-leaning states have or are introducing legislation that seeks to discontinue DEIB efforts on publicly funded college campuses (2024 Anti-Trans Bills Tracker, 2024). The removal of resources supporting DEIB work threatens the safety, sense of belongingness, and ultimate success of trans students. While one could argue that the work can still be done in subversive ways, it makes the work more difficult to do.. From restricting access to life-affirming (and often saving) medical care for trans individuals to limiting the ways in which we create more inclusive and safe spaces on campuses, today's policies are meant to marginalize and harm trans students. parThese legislative efforts are nothing short of ill-informed and frankly transphobic.

Key Campus Partners

Considering this issue, key campus partners at Southeastern Valley Community College include: the Vice President of Instructional Services, the facilitator of the Safe Zone program, the Vice President for Student Services, the Director for Title IX Compliance and Student Life Development, and the faculty advisor for Queer the Way. We must also include faculty representation and the students, especially those who identify as trans. These individuals will influence or be involved with the design and implementation of the improvement work. A detailed description of their roles will follow in the section labeled: *Design Team*.

Current Status and Review of the Problem at Southeastern Valley Community College

Southeastern Valley Community College, like many other institutions, has a population of trans students on campus who struggle to find support in the classroom. Based upon

conversations with a trans graduate of the institution, this problem might be more prevalent or compounded within certain programs such as Construction, which as with many other STEM related fields, tends to be dominated by white, cis, straight males. Although this one conversation is not sufficient evidence of this, research suggests that it is a possibility and can lead to higher levels of discomfort and discrimination directed toward those who have identities outside of the gender norms associated with the field (Malloy et al., 2022). Nicolazzo (2017) found that there were certain fields of study that were more welcoming than others to trans students.

Another trans student shared with me that they switched from being a business major to being an education major for this reason. They shared that the business program had constricting expectations for “professional” dress and appearance, whereas the education program did not and allowed students to write papers related to their gender identity which allowed them the space to be more authentically themselves in outward presentation. At AB-Tech, we do not yet have strong data that explore this problem, but extant literature, personal experiences, and anecdotal accounts provide a starting point.

I conducted two interviews with recent graduates of SE Valley who are both trans to gain more information about their experiences at this institution. Jack, a trans man who was in the Construction Management program, had an experience at SE Valley that led to a Title IX report. In class, he had an instructor who called roll using his deadname, and when Jack supplied the name he uses, the instructor questioned him a few times. While Jack was sure the instructor meant no ill will, the experience left him feeling very uncomfortable and unheard. Jack relayed his experience to a trusted faculty member, who filed a Title IX report with him. Jack and his instructor ended up having a conversation after the report was submitted and the instructor apologized for the incident, which combatted some of his discomfort. Otherwise, he had a good

experience at SE Valley. This story shows that something that is seemingly minor can make a big impact on a student. Questioning a student's identity, especially for trans students, can cause harm, and can cause unexpected repercussions legally. If Jack's instructor had simply updated the name without question, the incident would not have led to the Title IX report, or made Jack feel uncomfortable in that classroom. Believing a student and listening to them are valuable skills when it comes to working with the trans population.

Joy, a trans woman who was in the Cosmetology program, had a negative experience while at SE Valley. Her experience also led to a Title IX report. Joy had multiple incidences where she was misgendered and had the wrong pronouns used for her while in class. She spoke with her instructors about it, as well as the head of the department, who were dismissive and did not work to rectify the situation. This led Joy to file the Title IX report. She also decided to discontinue the program. She eventually returned to complete a transfer degree fully online and is currently one class away from a second Associate's degree, but is not interested in returning to SE Valley due to her negative experiences in the classroom. She felt unsafe at the college and did not feel welcomed or like she belonged. Using the wrong pronouns and terminology, or misgendering, can be a detrimental experience that causes dysphoria and other negative emotions for trans individuals. Living with this day after day was damaging to Joy and caused her to not trust the program or the college. Experiences like these can impact a college's reputation as well as the mental and emotional state of students.

Southeastern Valley Community College has a preferred name policy, which allows any student to update their display name across systems on campus as well as on their diplomas. This is useful to trans students who may change their name once or multiple times due to their changing gender presentation and identity exploration. There is no information on how this

policy came to be, aside from its inclusion on the Safe Zone website. This policy is not trans-exclusive and was developed for all students to have the opportunity to update their display name in the system.

My Role & Positionality at Southeastern Valley Community College

As a nonbinary, trans man, this population is one that is near and dear to my heart. I always felt that I was different but could never quite pin down what those differences were. I first heard the term trans during my undergraduate career and tested the waters with my mom and husband at the time to see how they would react. I decided to provide them with the question, “What would you say if I told you I was really a boy?” They both reacted badly, telling me that there’s no way it could be true and laughing at the idea. I put off my transition for many years after that.

During that time, I experimented with my gender expression to find the place where I felt most comfortable with my physical appearance. My identity is nonbinary trans man, which means that I do not feel like a man in the traditional sense, instead feeling like I have aspects of both male and female identities, but I lean more towards the male/masculine side of things overall. I use the pronouns fae/they. I began my transition in my early 30s around the time I started my Masters Program in Higher Education Student Affairs. Navigating a Masters program while also going through a social and medical transition process was complex and one that took a lot of my time and energy.

In the classroom, starting in elementary school, I was bullied for having short hair as someone who was perceived to be a woman. Short hair was not a choice for me as a youth as I had thick hair that my mother did not know how to care for, but later it became my decision as I was able to choose my own hair style. I had tried to grow my hair out several times, but never

felt like my true self with it long, for reasons that I now understand are related to being trans but I did not realize it at the time. In high school, several students called me B.O.B., which stood for “boy with oversized breasts.” I did not realize until I began my transition that there was a reason this did not bother me. In fact, I secretly liked the nickname.

During my undergraduate career, I was not bullied or teased for having short hair, as I began to grow it out and kept it long for most of the four years I was at Western Carolina University. During this time, I was first exposed to the term trans, and even did a project surrounding the community for one of my classes.

Fortunately, my experiences in the graduate-level classroom have been nothing but positive. My professors and classmates were all very cognizant of my pronouns and name, and I experienced no instances of discrimination in the classroom. I received some questions from a few of my classmates including a question about how I knew I was trans, but nothing intrusive or offensive. Just because my experience in higher education was a good one, does not mean it is that way for others. Through this disquisition, I would like to ultimately ensure more positive experiences for trans students in the classroom through faculty support.

My current role at SE Valley is one of two College Navigators within the office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belongingness. My identity as a queer nonbinary trans man allows me to connect and empathize with LGBTQ+ students and their struggles on campus and off. I attend Queer the Way meetings regularly to learn from and connect with this population of students and develop a first-hand understanding of their struggles on SE Valley’s campus. By being open about my identity with students, faculty, and staff, this allows me the opportunity to answer questions others may have and to be a support for LGBTQ+ students on campus.

The Improvement Initiative: Professional Development for Faculty

In this section, I will discuss a) my theory of improvement, b) the driver diagram process preceding theory development, c) a literature review on the effectiveness of professional learning (chosen driver of change), d) components of the improvement initiative, e) improvement initiative goals, and f) improvement initiative design.

Theory of Improvement

There is more than one approach to creating safe and supportive campuses and classrooms for trans students. My review of the literature revealed three primary approaches: a) policy creation/reform (Goldberg, Beemyn, & Smith, 2019); b) recruitment/retention of trans faculty/staff (Goldberg, Beemyn, & Smith, 2019); and c) professional development for faculty on how to best support trans students in the classroom (see Figure 3). I believe that all three are necessary, but I focus upon the latter for this improvement initiative. The theory of improvement (Langley et al., 2009) I posited at the beginning of this work stated: *evidence-supported professional development for college faculty on how to support trans students in the classroom will ultimately increase faculty capacity and efficacy to build trans-inclusive classrooms.*

The Driver Diagram Process

Figure 3

Driver Diagram

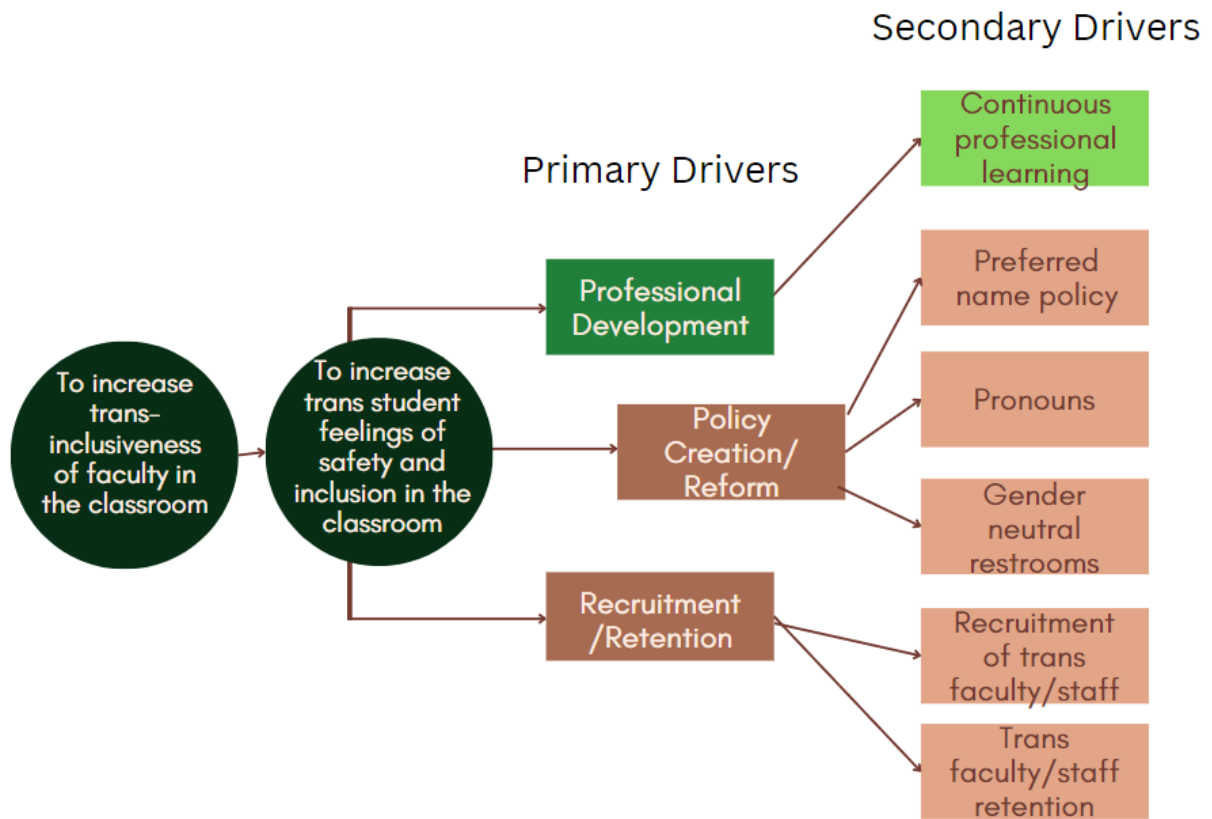


Figure 3 is a driver diagram (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Langley, et al., 2009). A driver diagram is “a tool that illustrates the thinking behind the theory of improvement” (p.119). It is used for showing the relationship between the desired aim, drivers of change, and change ideas (Langley, et al., 2009). In this figure, the boxes on the far right represent change ideas. The boxes in the middle represent primary drivers. All the boxes connect to the aim of the improvement initiative (increase educator capacity and efficacy to create trans-inclusive classrooms) as well as the ultimate aim of the improvement initiative (to increase trans student feelings of safety and inclusion in the classroom).

I have highlighted the boxes connected to my chosen improvement initiative (professional development) in green. Developing and implementing professional development for faculty on how to best support the trans community in the classroom is something I am

passionate about as I believe professional development opportunities can be one of the most effective avenues of building comfort and knowledge around those with differing identities from our own, especially when they are carefully crafted to include real-life examples and information. Beyond my personal connection to the work, the literature supports that professional development is effective when the theories and standards for adult learning are considered (Austin et al., 2016; Association of American Medical Colleges, 2014; Brown et al., 2017; Dean, 2016; Goldberg, Beemyn, & Smith, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019; Marx et al., 2017; Noyola et al., 2021; Seelman, 2014; Sheriff, 2011; Seigel, 2019). The following section dives into the literature on designing effective professional learning.

Literature Review on Effective Professional Development/Learning

Professional Development (PD) has been shown to be effective for advancing support of the LGBTQ+ community, as it increases awareness and knowledge as well as increasing the likelihood of individuals becoming advocates and allies for this community (Austin, et al., 2016; Association of American Medical Colleges, 2014; Brown et al., 2017; Dean, 2016; Goldberg, Beemyn, & Smith, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019; Marx et al., 2017; Noyola et al., 2021; Seelman, 2014; Sheriff, 2011; Seigel, 2019). It is important to recognize that a lesson/learning opportunity may not result in adult learning if the lesson designer does not integrate the principles of adult learning theories and the research on effective professional development. For this, I lean into Learning Forward.

According to Learning Forward, (an association that teaches how to develop, implement, and measure professional learning) designers of PD should consider 11 standards for professional learning, which they have grouped into three categories: a) conditions for success, b) transformational processes, and c) rigorous content for each learner (Learning Forward, 2022).

The conditions for success category include a) equity foundations, b) culture of collaborative inquiry, c) leadership, and d) resources (Learning Forward, 2022). Setting up a foundation of equity starts the professional learning off on the right foot, to create a space where all feel equal and respected (Learning Forward, 2022). Collaborative inquiry allows a group to create not only individual knowledge, but also collaborative knowledge, allowing them to co-create meaning (Learning Forward, 2022). Leadership is vital not only from the facilitators or developers of professional learning, but also the influence the participants have within their own spheres to advocate for impactful professional learning (Learning Forward, 2022). Resources are key to effective professional learning, as one needs time, money, technology, learning materials, and the people to create something impactful (Learning Forward, 2022).

The transformational processes category includes a) implementation, b) learning designs, c) evidence, and d) equity drivers (Learning Forward, 2022). Implementation comes in different forms depending on one's positionality within the organization; therefore, an individual at the administrative levels can impact policies and procedures related to professional learning, while someone in a coaching role provides day-to-day support (Learning Forward, 2022). Learning design is a way in which facilitators can develop the learning with awareness of the level of knowledge, time, and other factors while also ensuring that learning is designed intentionally with clear goals (Learning Forward, 2022). Equity drivers refers to ensuring that the professional learning is equitable to all, whether someone from a particular group is in attendance (Learning Forward, 2022).

The rigorous content for each learner category includes a) equity practices; b) curriculum, assessment, and instruction; and c) professional expertise (Learning Forward, 2022). Equity practices refers to creating professional learning that demonstrates to participants how to treat

their students equitably in the classroom (Learning Forward, 2022). Curriculum, assessment, and instruction is important as it allows participants the opportunity to learn how to create a curriculum that is accessible to all, how to assess their students' learning, and how to provide quality instruction (Learning Forward, 2022). Professional expertise refers to the responsibility of participants to continue to learn and grow, whether this is in their own area of expertise, or in areas relevant to their positionality (Learning Forward, 2022).

Components of the Improvement Initiative

Utilizing these components, the design team created a professional development opportunity. The conditions for success component was addressed by ensuring faculty participants had the resources necessary for successful completion of the professional development experiences as well as the resources for implementation into their classrooms. Engaging transformational processes, the design team provided a professional development experience that challenged faculty thoughts and previously held beliefs. Finally, rigorous content (curriculum) was ensured in two ways. One, the design team chose the Transgender Inclusive Behavior Scale (TIBS) (i.e. talking about pronouns and how to ask for them; talking about keeping up to date on trans issues) as a focus of discussion. Two, the design team consulted with two trans graduates of SE Valley, as well as the head of the Safe Zone committee on campus to draft content that they believe, from personal and professional experience, will help faculty be more trans-inclusive in the classroom. Story telling can be useful, as Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991) states, to helping faculty understand the trans population on our campus and the experiences and challenges they face. Allowing these students to share their stories and including some of that information in the professional development materials was vital.

Incorporating the Transgender Inclusive Behavior Scale into Professional Development

The Transgender Inclusive Behavior Scale (TIBS) is a tool used for anyone who is looking to evaluate their own or others' inclusivity towards the trans community. The TIBS is a scale that was developed in 2018 by Kattari et al., in order to measure one's inclusiveness of the trans population. It includes questions ranging from one's usage of correct pronouns and inclusive language, to questions about one's connection to and continued exploration of current research related to the trans community. For example, "I ask others for their pronouns" and "I try to keep myself updated on ongoing conversations about acceptable language to use when referring to transgender individuals" (Kattari et al, 2018). The scale utilizes a 5-point scale, ranging from never to always. This scale relates directly to how faculty can best support students, as many of the items are applicable to the classroom environment. Usage of correct pronouns and names, utilizing inclusive language, and continued research to become and maintain status as an active ally are vital to creating a supportive environment for this population of students. This scale is the first of its kind to explore positive behaviors that one can engage in to demonstrate their support of the trans community (Kattari et al., 2018). This scale was validated utilizing expert content reviewers, as well as educators who are looking to provide a more inclusive environment in their classrooms, in addition to the authors (Kattari et al., 2018). I obtained permission from Kattari in order to utilize this scale for the purposes of this disquisition. This scale focuses on generalized experiences and ways to support the trans community, which aligns with Queer Theory's (de Lauretis, 1991) focus on "queering" identity, instead of breaking it down into specific identities. There is also a focus on combatting and dismantling cis normativity in practice, albeit in a more subtle and underlying manner.

As part of the professional development, I provided the TIBS to faculty as a pre- and post-test in order to determine their inclusivity towards the trans population before and after the

professional development opportunity. The professional development included a PowerPoint presentation with relevant information in an easy-to-read format to help participants follow along as well as reinforce what they are learning during the session. The professional development opportunity included content that relates directly to the TIBS, including some best practices on how to ask for pronouns in the classroom according to trans individuals, tips on how to remember and effectively utilize trans students' names and pronouns when they differ from what you may have previously known the student as, and ways in which to optimize the classroom experience for trans students. These were communicated through verbal means, as well as represented on the PowerPoint as bullet points.

The professional development also included definitions of terms, such as trans and cis, to ensure all faculty in attendance are on the same page as far as knowledge related to the trans population. This helped faculty gain base knowledge to move forward with more complex knowledge as we progressed through the professional development opportunity. These terms were included in the PowerPoint and were verbally defined to the group to reinforce learning and retention of terminology.

Also included was a short video which draws upon the experiences of trans individuals, including their innermost thoughts as they navigate the world around them. This video is entitled Headspace. I have utilized this video before in a Trans 101 professional development opportunity I facilitated at Western Carolina University in the past, and it is truly exceptional at representing various situations trans people experience and their inner dialogue during these situations. The video was played from Vimeo as a part of the PowerPoint presentation. According to Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991), story telling is key to challenging our cis normative society and working to eradicate transphobia, so we also included some of the lived experiences shared by

trans students who either currently or have previously attended SE Valley. This allowed faculty to know more clearly what the issues on our campus are and learn more about their experiences to be more able to relate more readily to these students.

Some of the information included was about how faculty can best show support for the trans population in their classrooms with examples. There was also time for questions. As the facilitator, I was on-hand to answer any questions the participants had related to the professional development, but also to the trans experience. This provided faculty the opportunity to ask questions they may have related to the PowerPoint presentation, the YouTube video, or any questions they may have had outside of the professional development opportunity content. The aforementioned content was included in a one hour and a half long session.

Implementation Process

Due to time and scheduling constraints, I took on the bulk of the work on the development of the PD session. I was able to draft a proposed PD and PowerPoint to present to the Design Team for review and critique based on my previous PD development and ideas from trans graduates at SE Valley. The Design Team had very few suggestions for improvement, but one of the main changes was to include my own pronouns at the start of the PD on my intro slide, which I neglected to do in the first version. Otherwise, the Design Team thought the proposed PD was succinct, while also detailed enough in order to reflect the items on the TIBS and other relevant information. As none of my Design Team was trans, aside from the trans graduates, some members expressed feelings of not knowing enough to contribute in a meaningful manner to the content of the PD, so they commented on the ease of understanding and flow of the PD instead of the content.

PLCs for Reflective Dialogue

In addition to delivering a PD session, the design team and I developed a professional learning community (PLC) to provide faculty with a space where they could deepen their learning, co-create meaning, and collaborate with colleagues to support trans students in the classroom. The faculty who participated in the PLC were charged to work together to co-create classroom strategies to support trans students in the classroom.

I attended the first session of the PLC to answer questions and help guide the faculty in the process of conversing as a group to determine strategies. “There is broad consistency across the literature and within the innovative school cases in terms of core PLC elements of shared vision and values, collegiality, joint practical activities and student learning data, teacher inquiry and leadership support and opportunities,” (Owen, 2014, p. 55). For the purposes of this improvement initiative, the design team and I utilized these elements to be most effective when building and maintaining this PLC.

PLCs have been shown to be effective when implemented in various educational contexts, particularly when they are well-thought out and include discussion of best practices and research (Abbott et al., 2018; Owen, 2014). PLCs have also been shown to change participant attitudes (Abbott et al., 2018). The faculty members had the opportunity to talk with each other and bounce ideas off each other as experts of instruction, utilizing the information contained in the professional development opportunity. I attended the first PLC session, and myself, or members of the design team, will attend each of the PLC sessions in the future in order to be available to answer questions or provide guidance, at least for the first few semesters of their existence. From that point onward, my contact information will be provided for any questions or concerns. The PLCs lead with the charge of troubleshooting ways in which they can implement the classroom strategies and information learned from the professional development opportunity

into their own classrooms. The goal is for this community to exist for the foreseeable future, as I plan to continue the professional development sessions well after the scope of this disquisition.

Improvement Initiative Outcome Goals

In this section, I present three proposed outcome goals. Although the ultimate goal is to make trans students feel safe, supported, and included, for the time period of this disquisition, I seek the following outcomes:

1. By the end of the 2022-23 academic year, each faculty member/participant will show a 25% increase on the Transgender Inclusive Behavior Scale after completion of a robust professional development session and PLC participation on how to best support trans students in the classroom.
2. Analysis of focus group transcripts will reveal that 80% of faculty members feel increased efficacy in two of the three areas: defining related terms, knowledge of pronouns and their importance, knowledge of trans-inclusive classroom strategies.
3. At least 80% of faculty represented in the focus group report implementation of at least two trans-inclusive classroom strategies within their own classrooms following the professional development opportunity.

Improvement Initiative Design

In this section, I will discuss the design of my improvement initiative including the design team and the implementation plan.

Design Team

My design team consisted of one of the facilitators for the Safe Zone program, the Vice President of Student Services, the Vice President of Instructional Services, the advisor for Queer the Way, and two trans graduates of Southeastern Valley Community College, along with

myself. The facilitator of the Safe Zone program has many years of experience with facilitating the Safe Zone curriculum, which includes information about trans folx as well as pronouns and practice utilizing them. The advisor for Queer the Way has experience with trans students at the institution. The Vice President of Student Services has the institutional knowledge that will be vital in determining the overall presentation of content more than the content itself. The Vice President of Instructional Services has experience working with faculty on professional development initiatives across campus. The trans graduates of Southeastern Valley Community College have experience in the classrooms of the institution. See Table 2

Table 2

Design Team Makeup and Reasons for Inclusion

Title	Experience/Reason for Inclusion
Facilitator for Safe Zone Program	Years of experience, including with trans-related curriculum
Advisor for Queer the Way	Years of experience, particularly with trans students of SE Valley
Vice President of Student Services	Institutional knowledge
Vice President of Instructional Services	Experience working with faculty on Professional Development initiatives across campus
Trans graduates of SE Valley	Experience in the classrooms of the institution

Implementation Plan/Timeline

As a scholar practitioner, I led this improvement initiative in my practitioner role but also analyzed the improvement initiative through the scholar role. In order to engage the community,

First PDSA Cycle to evaluate PD development		X										
Pre-test utilizing TIBS scale			X									
First PD opportunity				X								
Post-test utilizing TIBS scale and focus group					X							
Second PDSA Cycle to evaluate PD						X						
Pre-test utilizing TIBS scale							X					
Second PD opportunity								X				
Post-test utilizing TIBS scale and focus group									X			
Professional Learning Community initial meeting										X		

My timeline began with the development of a design team to create the professional development opportunity for faculty on how to best support trans students in the classroom. The first PDSA Cycle followed to evaluate the professional development opportunity. During this cycle, the design team evaluated the professional development opportunity for clarity, content, and applicability to TIBS scale.

Before implementation of the professional development opportunity, participants completed a pre-test utilizing TIBS scale for faculty who register for the opportunity. The professional development opportunity on how to best support trans students in the classroom was one hour to an hour and a half over the two sessions, with extra time for questions, depending on

the amount of discussion and questions after each session. Following the professional development opportunity, participants completed a post-test utilizing the TIBS scale, additional questions to assess the relevance and usefulness of the professional development opportunity, as well as feedback questions on the professional development itself and how it can be improved for the future. After the professional development, individual interviews were held instead of focus groups due to the small number of participants and respondents in order to obtain more detailed data of the results of the initiative.

After evaluating the post-test data, the design team tweaked the professional development opportunity based on feedback from faculty to be more clear, concise, and helpful to faculty. Some of the feedback included allowing time for participants to introduce themselves (as time allows) and including more personal information on my own personal journey as a part of the opportunity.

Once the professional development was tweaked, the next cycle began with a pre-test utilizing TIBS scale for faculty who register for the second opportunity followed by a one hour to an hour and a half long professional development opportunity on how to best support trans students in the classroom. Following this, there was a post-test utilizing TIBS scale, as well as an exit survey at the conclusion of each session to assess the relevance and usefulness of the professional development opportunity, as well as feedback questions on the opportunity itself and how it can be improved for the future.

Following the second cycle of professional development, a Professional Learning Community (PLC) was created from the list of participants, to allow faculty the opportunity to reflect on their new classroom strategies and to co create more strategies based on their experiences in the classroom with trans students and feedback from each other. One session of

this PLC was held in which faculty talked mostly about the process of switching an existing restroom into a gender-neutral one as well as utilizing gender-neutral pronouns in other languages. This was brought on by one of the participants being an English language learner instructor and wondering how to have a conversation about pronouns with her class.

Implementation Challenges

The anticipated challenges and barriers included logistical issues and resistance to the work from faculty and/or staff. Logistical issues with the development and implementation of the professional development opportunity, including the potential of denial in Learner Web and difficulty/conflict amongst the design team in the development of the professional development opportunity were anticipated challenges. Resistance to the work from faculty and/or staff, due to internalized or overt transphobia or cis normativity were also anticipated challenges. Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991) and trans studies tell us that cis normativity is prevalent in our society and is something we must work to overcome when doing this work.

In order to address the first issues, I spoke with Human Resources before attempting to list the professional development opportunity on Learner Web. Additionally, I worked to encourage collaboration amongst the design team to attempt to prevent any conflict concerns. For the resistance challenge, I worked with Human Resources and other involved parties across campus to establish a network across campus of individuals who have awareness of and are in favor of the professional development, designed to show support for this initiative from the college, as well as to provide a heads-up about the professional development and potential backlash.

After this pre-work, I experienced no significant challenges or barriers to this process. The only challenge I faced was timing, in which I needed to receive permission from SE

Valley's Institutional Review Board in addition to Western Carolina University's. This caused a slight delay in getting on track with the professional development opportunity, which may have caused a lower turnout due to not getting it posted as quickly as I wanted to. Otherwise, I received no communication against the professional development in any way. In my role in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging office at SE Valley, I have experienced some backlash to other efforts we have put forward, including Pride Month celebrations, so I was pleasantly surprised to not receive any negative feedback about this PD opportunity.

Evaluating the Improvement Initiative

In this section, I will discuss the evaluation of and data collection for my improvement initiative. Evaluating improvement initiatives is key to inform each new cycle (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). As Hinnant-Crawford (2020) states, "a commitment to using improvement science is a commitment to an iterative pursuit of improvement." (p.163). I utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods for this improvement initiative. This happened by way of Qualtrics surveys and interviews.

The goal of formative assessment is to evaluate an improvement process while it is in motion - as it evolves (Parry et al., 2018). Improvers must use the data/results from the evaluation to make informed decisions about next steps. Will the team continue? Will the team stop? Will the team adjust? Not only must we assess our work, but we must respond to the data in real time.

Summative assessment processes examine an improvement initiative at the close of the initiative or at the end of a major stage in the initiative, focusing on impact and success (Parry et al., 2018). The table below (Table 4) lists each formative and summative evaluation measure employed and describes the type of data collected throughout the improvement process.

Table 4*Evaluation Measures*

Formative Assessment				
Type of measure	Instrument(s)	Data Collection Timeframe	Rationale	Data Analysis Technique
Balance	Interviews	Post-professional development	Co-creating meaning; questions about feelings of overwhelm	Descriptive Coding
Process	Attendance sheet	At the beginning of the professional development	Counting number of participants	Count of participants
Summative Assessment				
Type of measure	Instrument(s)	Data Collection Timeframe	Rationale	Data Analysis Technique
Outcome	Transgender Inclusive Behavior Scale (TIBS)	Pre- and post-professional development	Data tells us if participants developed trans-inclusive strategies	Average scores and means

Participants

The participants were mostly individuals who were already invested in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging work, and there were several who were learning more about the transgender community. There was at least one participant who had a transgender child. While I did not collect demographic data, I was able to observe some similarities during the sessions. Most of the participants were feminine-presenting, with 3 masculine-presenting participants out of the total of 10 participants. Most of the total participants (8/10) were White presenting, with two Black participants.

Formative Evaluation of the Improvement Initiative

In this section, I will discuss the formative evaluation process (balancing and process measures) including data collection and data analysis.

Balancing Measures: Data Collection and Analysis

A balance measure can be described as “system vital signs” (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 147). They ensure that when one makes a change it is not impacting other areas or people negatively. My balance measure was an interview question which gauged faculty feelings/perceptions of being overwhelmed with new knowledge. This helped determine if faculty did not implement change because they felt overwhelmed by the volume of knowledge gained through the professional development. I measured this through a question included at the end of the post-assessment TIBS, and it was analyzed utilizing averages due to low participant rates.

For the interviews, I created codes and themes utilizing descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021) and co-created meaning by sending out my identified codes and themes to each participant through member checking. Descriptive coding is a method that “assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 362). Through utilization of descriptive coding, I was able to develop coding that explains the conversations that took place during the interviews through the participants’ own words. This allowed me to best communicate the findings to the design team, in order to inform my PDSA cycle as well as to gain trustworthiness by using the member checking strategy. Member checking involves allowing participants to see their transcripts from the interview and allowing them to check and see if I transcribed their words correctly and if they would like to add anything (Carlson, 2010). I had the interviewees check over the transcript,

developed descriptive coding, ran that by the interviewees to determine full understanding, then moved forward with the coding to the Design Team to determine how to refine the PD to include the feedback and knowledge gained from the interviews.

I evaluated these data points by finding common themes and used the co-creation of meaning afterwards to ensure I effectively understood the data utilizing descriptive statistics. The threshold for deciding if the improvement initiative needed tweaking or changing along was informed by the faculty interviews. The interview protocol included questions regarding the effectiveness of the initiative to determine if we were working in the most efficient and effective manner to increase trans inclusive behaviors in the classroom (see Appendix C).

As shown in my Implementation Plan/Timeline above, I evaluated these measures on a regular basis throughout the process. I assessed the participants' progress starting from the very beginning, to collect baseline data to inform the design team of any change occurring in order to ensure we feel confident about the professional development itself and how it aligned with the TIBS. We also assessed professional development after each cycle to ensure I felt confident that we imparted the information we were hoping to throughout this initiative. I assessed these data points through interviews. The codes from the interviews were developed and shared with the design team so they could understand my findings.

Process Measures: Data Collection and Analysis

A process measure helps determine how a change is working (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). I did measure attendance, which tells me if faculty were consistently attending, but it does not tell me if the change is working or how the PD went for the faculty who attended.. I compared the number of faculty who attended to the total number of faculty at the college, to determine how many faculty members have attended the professional development versus those who have

not. This allowed me to determine the ratio of faculty who attend versus those who did not to demonstrate how engaged the faculty were with this topic over the period of two cycles of the professional development. Attendance relates to the implementation of the process in that it may show that the process could move forward in a positive direction, even if the attendance was low. Having faculty attend, no matter how many, may serve as an improvement for these faculty and any trans student they may teach or interact with from this point forward should the faculty be receptive to the training and actively change their practice, however I did not measure faculty perception during the training process.

Outcome Measures: Data Collection and Analysis

The TIBS survey provided me with baseline data and helped me determine if faculty feel confident about their ability to work with the trans community in the classroom before the professional development (see Appendix A). Additionally, this measure helped me to determine how much of the final TIBS score is related to gaining knowledge and confidence through the professional development, and how much was because of previous levels of confidence and knowledge I performed a pre- and post-test utilizing the TIBS in order to measure the participants' self-ratings before and after the PD.

An outcome measure is a measure that determines if a change implementation worked overall (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). My outcome measure was faculty feelings of being informed and confident working with the trans community in the classroom utilizing trans-inclusive classroom techniques. I quantitatively determined if there was an improvement by evaluating the TIBS pre- and post-test scores through analysis of averages.

Utilizing the Transgender Inclusive Behavior Scale (TIBS, 2018), I performed a pre-test and post-test to determine improvement along the scale. Ideally, I wanted to see a 25% or more

increase of individual TIBS scores based off of one point per item on the scale because. I weighed each item on the TIBS as one point in order to more easily quantify the results and to measure the attempt at improvement. This improvement initiative included several components; the professional development opportunity itself, a professional learning community (PLC), and interviews to evaluate the opportunity. These helped inform participants on the levels of comfort and knowledge they have before the opportunity, effectiveness of the professional development, and ensure faculty are not feeling overwhelmed and as if they cannot implement any change because of this. Doing so also gives the faculty participants a voice in the process of becoming more trans-inclusive in the classroom by providing them opportunity to speak and share with others.

I held individual interviews with seven open-ended questions along with follow-up questions developed during the interviews to also get at this information post-professional development (see Appendix C). I held the interviews a week or two after the professional development. Individual interviews were utilized in order to evaluate the professional development opportunity and its effectiveness. Interview participants were asked a series of questions related to their experience, as well as provided time to discuss the impact the professional development opportunity may have had on their teaching in the meantime and moving forward (see Appendix C).

This data informed my improvement initiative by providing me with information on how faculty participants perceived the professional development opportunity as well as if they are experiencing any feelings of overwhelm from receiving an abundance of information. I will discuss the themes from this data in the following results section.

To know if the improvement initiative was the sole (or primary) change agent, I included a question on the post-professional development Qualtrics survey (Did you have something happen in your life that could have impacted your responses to the post-test other than the professional development opportunity (i.e. a family member came out as trans, you attended a different training, etc.)?; see Appendix B). This question helped to measure any outside influences that may have impacted one's changed score on the TIBS. I also included a few questions on impact (i.e., Do you feel better prepared to work with transgender students as a result of this professional development? Why or why not; What content was the most/least useful? etc.) as a part of the post-professional development TIBS (see Appendix B).

For the survey question(s), I utilized quantitative methods to assess whether or not the improvement initiative was the sole (or primary) change agent. In order to evaluate the responses between the pre- and post-test, I utilized averages. This allowed me to directly compare the answers on the TIBS pre- and post-professional development. My estimation and anticipated number of participants was around 30-40, which was over the reality of the participation at 10 participants and 6 respondents to both the pre- and post-tests, but I was still able to gather data and results from the professional development, and in lieu of a t-test, I utilized group means and overall averages.

The data was linked to the specific participant and therefore I was planning to run a dependent t-test. This type of t-test is the most specific and accurate method of analysis for this improvement initiative. This would have allowed me to see the differences between the two surveys and how much improvement there was between the two. With a small sample size of 6, however, I was unable to run a t-test with good reliability, so I instead went with group means with overall averages to display the data.

Results

Balancing Measure: Results

A balance measure can be described as “system vital signs” (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p. 147). They ensure when one makes a change, that it is not impacting other areas negatively. My balance measure was faculty feelings of being overwhelmed with new knowledge. Due to the small number of participants in the pre- and post-test surveys and the small number of interested participants in sharing their experiences, I shifted from focus groups to interviews at the conclusion of each PD. Out of the two interviews conducted with participants who completed the PD, neither of them stated any concerns about feelings of overwhelm with new knowledge. The answers were a simple negative response to the question: Tell me about any points where you felt overwhelmed with new knowledge. While this data was useful, it was also apparent that I did not receive as much useful data as I would have liked due to low participation. While the participation rate seems acceptable on paper (33.33%), the reality is that I only spoke with 2 participants and may have missed some feelings of overwhelm from the other participants. Further research could include a question about overwhelm on the post-test instead of just during the interviews. To create a more robust measure, it would also be useful to include an open-ended question to ask something like “Please describe any areas in which this professional development has impacted your life negatively.” This would allow me to get more information other than just overwhelm, which can be a vague and often hard to describe concept.

Process Measure: Results

A process measure helps determine how a change is working (Langley, et al, 2009; Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). My process measure was the number of faculty members who attended the professional development each semester. While this measure does not tell us how

the change is working for faculty and lacks robustness as a measure, it does tell us the proportion of faculty who attended.

SE Valley has taken on this PD as an indefinitely continuing opportunity for faculty with myself as the facilitator, due to the importance of this topic. Even if enrollment stays steady or even declines, I feel if it makes a difference for just one trans student and their experience at SE Valley, it will have been worth the time and effort.

Interviews

The feedback provided by the participants were to have a part two session with a deeper dive and to have time at the beginning for the PD participants to get to know each other and their motivations for attending the session, both of which I plan to implement for the future. Overall, the participants enjoyed the PD and would recommend it to others.

Baseline Data: Results

Below is baseline data from the pre-test TIBS results. Overall, participants rated themselves higher on the Likert scale (indicating that they do not perform these behaviors as much as they did after the PD) for all questions on the TIBS pre-test. On average, the score for each question is in the chart below.

Table 5

Average Scores for TIBS Pre-Test

Question	Average Score
I ask for pronouns when I start my class for the semester	1.83
I use gender neutral language to refer to students whose pronouns I do not know	1.33
I know where nearby gender-neutral restrooms are in relation to my classroom(s)	1.5
I use the terms “non-transgender” or “cisgender” to refer to people whose sex they were assigned at birth matches their current gender identity	2.33
I have participated in discussions about the effects and/or benefits of cisgender or non-transgender privilege	1.83

I share my pronouns when I introduce myself to someone new in or out of the classroom	3.17
I have asked my co-workers what their pronouns are	3.17
I read books/blogs/articles by transgender women, transgender men, and gender non-conforming individuals, and include these in my course materials	2.17
I initiate conversations about how my community/students can support transgender individuals	2.17
I try to keep myself updated on ongoing conversations about acceptable language to use when referring to transgender individuals	1.33
I work to educate myself on issues regarding transgender communities	1.5
I am aware of local resources that offer support to transgender people	2.67
I keep myself updated on whether policies in SE Valley include transgender people	2.33

With the scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree (1-5), most participants ranked themselves as between Strongly Agree to Agree on most questions. The questions with the higher averages for the pre-test were questions 6 and 7. This shows that the participants were not previously thinking about pronouns outside of the classroom spaces prior to the PD as much as they could have, ranking it on average between Neither Agree nor Disagree and Disagree.

Outcome Measures: Results

Goals

In this section, I will discuss the goals I set prior to the implementation of the PD and the actual results. The goals were as follows:

1. By the end of the 2022-23 academic year, each faculty member/participant will show a 25% increase on the Transgender Inclusive Behavior Scale after completion of a robust professional development session and PLC participation on how to best support trans students in the classroom.
2. Analysis of interview transcripts will reveal that 80% of faculty members feel increased efficacy in two of the three areas: defining related terms, knowledge of pronouns and their importance, knowledge of trans-inclusive classroom strategies.

3. At least 80% of faculty represented in the interviews report implementation of at least two trans-inclusive classroom strategies within their own classrooms following the professional development opportunity.

For the first goal, I saw an average of 18.32% overall change between the pre- and post-tests, with a high of 50% and a low of 3.70%. See Table 6 below.

Table 6

Average Score Change Between Pre- and Post-Tests

Participant ID	Score Change Percentage
Alex	18.18%
Dana	12.00%
Lianna	16.67%
Sheri	50.00%
Cara	9.37%
Michelle	3.70%

This means I did not hit the anticipated goal of a 25% change for all of the participants.

However, an average change of 18.32% is still a change in a positive direction for the faculty who participated. This can be attributed to response shift bias, where faculty may have rated themselves on the TIBS more harshly on the post-test than the pre-test due to having more information after the PD session (Howard, 1980). This could have been remedied by utilizing a then/post-test instead, where a single test would be given at the conclusion of the PD and participants would rate themselves as they feel they were before and after the PD (Howard, 1980).

For the second goal, 50% of faculty interviewed saw increased efficacy in two of three areas listed above. The faculty member who reported no increased efficacy stated this was due to previous PD opportunities (including Safe Zone at SE Valley) and learning from their nonbinary child. The one who reported two of three areas of increased efficacy has a trans child, so they were aware of the basic definitions prior to the PD. This falls short of the 80% goal I started

with, but with only two interviews out of the six participants who completed both the pre- and post-test, the only percentage options were either 0%, 50%, or 100%. Therefore, especially given the background each interview participant had; this was a good reflection of the PD in giving at least one participant some new information.

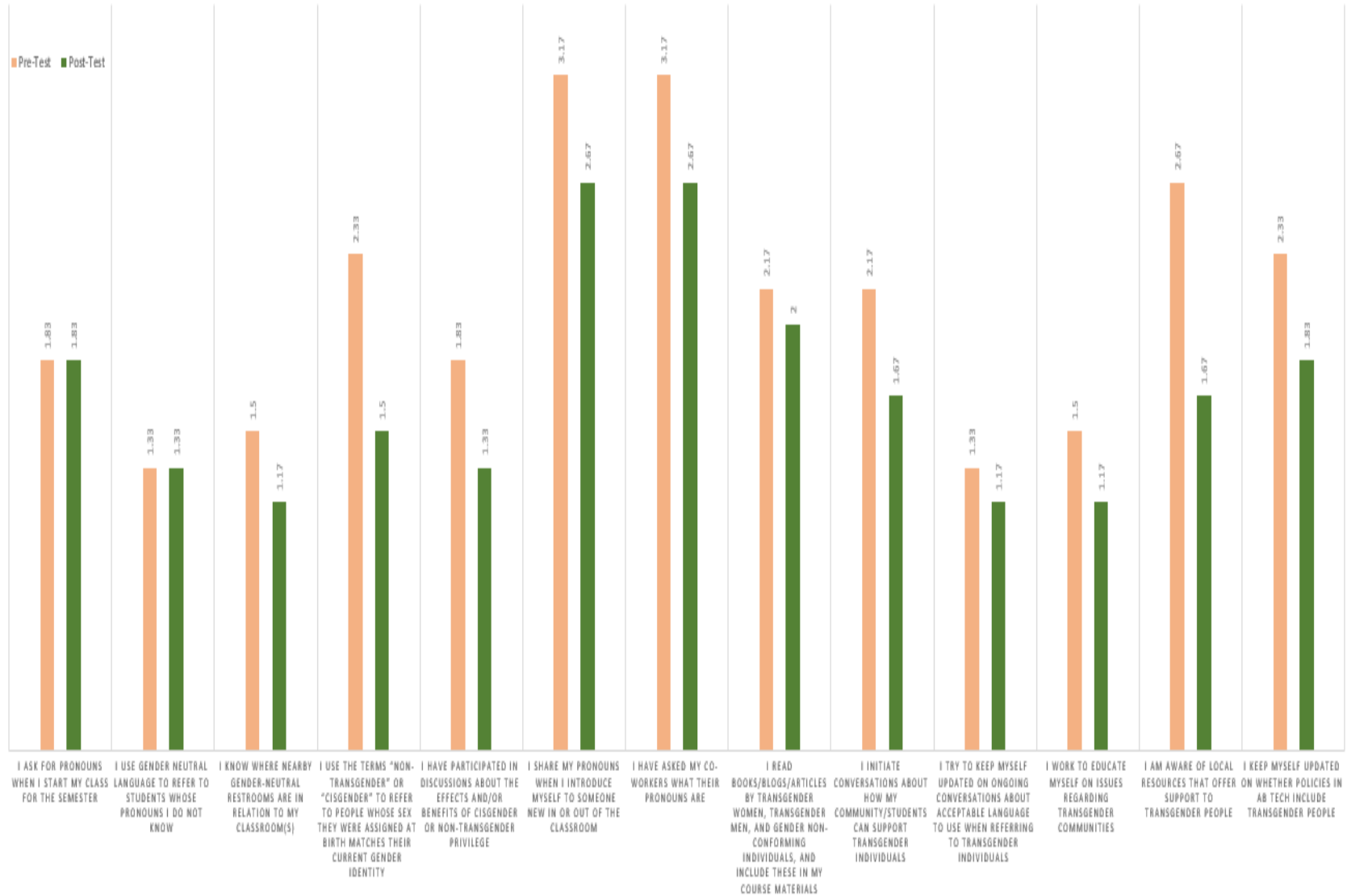
For the third goal, 50% of faculty interviewed implemented at least two trans-inclusive behaviors in the classroom as a result of the PD. 50% implemented three new trans-inclusive behaviors. The faculty member who incorporated three trans-inclusive behaviors into their classroom, including an entire week's module of trans voices, asking students their pronouns at the beginning of the semester (for those who are comfortable sharing), and using they/them pronouns for any person whose pronouns are not stated otherwise (both for students and authors of material utilized in the classroom) to model trans-inclusive behavior. The other faculty member has incorporated discussion of the singular they pronoun into a beginning English Language Acquisition class, which they said is challenging, but worthwhile. From the post-test/exit survey, all six (100%) of the participants implemented at least one trans-inclusive behavior in their classrooms, four of which (66.67%) implemented at least two new behaviors. This shows that faculty are taking what they have experienced and are incorporating it into their classrooms, even though increased efficacy was not reported. The PD has served as an impetus for faculty to make changes, even if they did not learn any new material during the PD, which shows its effectiveness regardless of where faculty may be in their learning about the trans population. Although I did not reach the 80% goal, I believe faculty implementing at least one new trans-inclusive initiative into their classrooms is of benefit to any trans student here at SE Valley who will be taking a class (or classes) with these faculty.

While there were 10 participants total through both sessions (5 at each), there were 9 total participants who completed the pre-survey and 6 who completed the post-survey. The 6 participants who completed both the pre- and post-surveys saw an average decline in their responses on the Likert scale of 1 meaning Strongly Agree to 5 meaning Strongly Disagree.

Figure 4

Pre- and Post-Test Comparison of TIBS

PRE- AND POST-TEST COMPARISON OF TIBS



This shows that participants feel they more strongly agree with the statements after the PD than before, showing the importance of the PD in demonstrating more trans-inclusive behaviors.

Interviews

During the interviews, the participants all shared that the PD was useful and helpful to them in their journey to becoming more trans-inclusive in the classroom. One interviewee said, “it was definitely, I would say galvanizing, just like little things that I knew...in the back of my mind that I shouldn’t be doing or should be aware of. It was...motivating to...make those things happen like make sure...my office is clearly sending the message that it’s a safe space.” This sentiment was also reflected in the other interview, showing that although these particular faculty members had some predetermined knowledge of this community, the PD was still useful in helping them to move forward in ways that are more trans-inclusive both in and out of the classroom.

The interviewees said the most impactful aspect of the PD was having space to simply discuss this topic as well as the video that was shown as a part of the PD on the inner thoughts of trans people. Having the opportunity to discuss this topic intentionally was useful as well as learning more about the impact of everyday interactions amongst the trans population was impactful for them.

Neither of the interviewees mentioned anything that could be removed from the PD, and said that “no, I think it was all good,” and “I think what you had was perfect.” For the question on if there was anything that was overwhelming, both participants stated that there was no point where they felt overwhelmed with new knowledge during the PD.

Both interviewees have strategies that they have started to implement as a result of the PD, including introducing the singular they pronoun to English language learners and allowing students to introduce themselves during class if desired along with completing an index card with more information.

TIBS

Participants overall scored themselves higher on items 6 (I share my pronouns when I introduce myself to someone new in or out of the classroom) and 7 (I have asked my co-workers what their pronouns are) on the TIBS. A higher score indicates less agreement with the statements, which indicates that participants are not taking steps outside of the classroom as much as they are inside. While many still have far to go to be truly trans-inclusive according to the items on the TIBS, many of the participants are demonstrating some trans-inclusive behaviors in the classroom.

Below is a table of the means and standard deviations for each of the participants' pre and post-tests, as well as the overall mean and standard deviation.

Table 5

Standard Deviation and Means for PD Participants

Participant	Pre-Test M (SD)	Post-Test M (SD)	Difference
478	1.692 (.821)	1.385 (.625)	0.307
666	1.923 (.917)	1.692 (.910)	0.231
683	1.846 (.361)	1.538 (.499)	0.308
1064	2.615 (.836)	1.308 (.462)	1.307
4741	2.462 (1.151)	2.231 (1.187)	0.231
4742	2.077 (1.328)	2.000 (1.359)	0.077

Response shift bias could explain the phenomenon of the scores not being as significantly different between the pre- and post-tests as I anticipated, as participants may have realized they did not know as much as they thought they did prior to the professional development or other

intervention, which could have led to the scores not being significant (Howard, 1980). It may be that participants, at the conclusion of the PD, felt that they were not as trans-inclusive as they thought before the PD began, due to learning more about being trans-inclusive. Howard (1980) concurs that the then/post-test is superior to the pre-/post-test method, as at the time of his writing, there had been shown no benefit of one over the other, and the then/post-test does not allow for response shift bias to occur. A then/post-test, or a singular test given at the conclusion of the PD to ask participants to rate how they felt they were before and after the PD, could be a way to produce more significant results in future studies (Howard, 1980)

Findings

These results tell me that the PD was effective in affecting change in faculty perceptions of their own trans-inclusive behaviors through their TIBS results. While the difference in the results were not as significant as expected, due in part to low participation rates and perhaps utilizing a pre- and post-test format instead of a then/post-test format, there was still a change in faculty ratings on the TIBS, which indicates change overall in a positive direction as a result of the PD. This is supported by the literature, which shows that PD is an effective and preferred method of helping faculty be more trans-inclusive in and out of the classroom.

Due to the feedback from faculty after the first cycle of implementation, there were few changes in the PD as a result, and they were relatively minor, such as including time for the participants to introduce themselves as well as the inclusion of some stories from trans graduates of SE Valley. These changes, however, added a richness to the PD that also brought in a humanizing component that may have been missing prior. This humanizing component was one that was not mentioned in the literature, but one that the interviewed faculty felt would be appreciated.

Limitations

Some unforeseen circumstances impacted the projected process and results. The first is that my design team was difficult to schedule an in-person or virtual meeting. We ended up communicating as a team through e-mail instead, so that I could get feedback and support from all the members. Secondly, there were very few participants in the professional development sessions with a total of 10 participants, even with an all-campus e-mail each semester, along with it being listed on our professional development calendar, and in our Vice President of Instructional Service's Thursday Brief e-mail that goes out to all faculty at SE Valley. However, this allowed me and the participants to have deeper conversations than we would have in a larger group.

There are several limitations to this study and areas of which more research can be done. Some limitations are lack of a final post-test to determine continued growth, no demographic information collected from participants, and small sample size from the population.

A final post-test would be helpful to gauge how participants are doing in the future related to trans-inclusivity. This would allow them to have more time to implement change, as well as to learn more through PD opportunities and other areas of growth. A good time to send out this post-test would be in the semester following the one where the participants took part in the PD.

No demographic data was collected on the participants, aside from observational data based on participants' racial presentation. This could help to determine if women, men, and nonbinary participants had differing scores and levels of change between the pre- and post-tests. All the interview participants were feminine-presenting, which included a lack of masculine-presenting individuals. Nonbinary individuals have differing presentations outside of masculine

and feminine presentations, so it is difficult to gauge if there were any nonbinary participants to determine their experience with the PD. Also of value would be collecting racial demographic data in order to look at differences based on race and/or ethnicity of participants. As the observed racial presentation of participants was observational and not attached to the pre- and post-tests, there was no way to determine the exact experiences of participants from each represented racial presentation.

Small sample size from the population was also a limitation for this research. While the PD was advertised across campus through all-campus e-mails, targeted faculty e-mails, inclusion on the PD calendar, and word-of-mouth, there were very few participants. There is no way to know for sure why the participants were so low. Some reasons could include lack of comfort with the topic, sense of being trans-inclusive already, feeling of irrelevance of topic, and lack of interest in the topic. Faculty may feel as if this PD was not necessary for several reasons, whether it was on a personal level or a campus level.

Implications and Recommendations

In this section, you will find implications and my recommendations as a result of this study. You will see implications for practice, recommendations for practice, implications for policy, and recommendations for future research.

Implications for Practice

Overall, the PD, while it did not meet my goals, did show a positive result. This shows that the PD was useful to faculty in becoming more trans-inclusive and incorporating trans-inclusive behaviors into their classrooms. However, the lack of goal achievement means there is a way to go in order to make a significant and measurable change at SE Valley. For the future, I would utilize the information gathered as a result of this process to tweak and adjust the PD,

along with methods to increase faculty participation over time. I would recommend duplication of this process at other institutions, perhaps with a then/post-test instead of a pre- and post-test in order to get more accurate results, which may not be tainted by response shift bias, as I suspect my results may have been.

This work contributed to equity across campus for trans students by getting information out to faculty to start these conversations. While the faculty who participated already had some basic understanding of the trans community and terminology, the faculty who participated did show an increase in trans-inclusive behaviors in the classroom, even if they fell short of my goal. Slow change is still change, and whether or not it met my goal, it did make a change for those faculty members, and likely would have a positive impact in the lives of trans students who take classes with those particular faculty members, whether the faculty see/hear about it or not. The mere existence of this PD on a campus also demonstrates a commitment to promoting trans-inclusivity across campus and can send a message to trans students, faculty, and staff that they are supported, even if only by the facilitator and participants in the training. Reminiscent of Safe Zone, these types of trainings can help students find faculty who they feel more comfortable with across campus.

Recommendations for Practice

I would recommend this type of work for any campus that serves trans students and would even recommend it outside of the higher education environment due to the prevalence of trans individuals. Providing information to faculty on how to best support this population of students is vital. As the trans community is one that has experienced discrimination and oppression in classrooms, this is certainly a community that needs support.

While this is simply the start of a campus initiative here at SE Valley, this work will continue to grow and develop with time in order to provide this PD for more faculty across campus. Next steps on our campus will include tweaking the PD to be more effective based on the final round of interviews and further research, discussion of the PD with the LGBTQ+ student organization on campus to receive more student feedback on the PD and how it can be optimized, inclusion of staff in the training for the future as they interact with trans students as well, development of a logo participants can attach to their offices or e-mail signatures to demonstrate participation, and development of a comprehensive marketing campaign to faculty and staff across campus to increase participation and scale up the PD.

This work can be sustained as long as there is at least one facilitator who is willing and able to lead the work. Continued success would necessitate more facilitators, any of whom could lead the PD for a department or other campus group in addition to PDs that are open to all of campus. I would suggest the design team (or team of facilitators) starts with working with the LGBTQ+ student group on campus to gather more stories and suggestions for the PD, perhaps leading the PD with the group, then capturing feedback. SE Valley has made it clear that this PD can and will continue on our campus for the foreseeable future, so my first step will be the development of a team of facilitators who can lead the PD, even in my absence, and who can work with future faculty and staff to maintain a group of facilitators to continue this work.

Small sample size was a concern during the process of this disquisition work. There were a total of 10 participants, 6 of which completed both the pre- and post-tests, and whose data could be utilized for analysis. The total number of faculty at SE Valley is 538 (including 41 basic skills, 358 curriculum, and 139 continuing education faculty). This means that only 1.86% of faculty attended the PD sessions in total. While this is a low number, my hope is as the PD

continues to be facilitated at SE Valley over time, that more faculty will hear about the PD and sign up for it for future semesters. This tells me that a more concerted effort needs to be made to spread the word about this PD opportunity to create more widespread change across the SE Valley campus. With only 1.86% of faculty participating in the PD, this could mean that change in this area will be a slow and lengthy process. In order to work on increasing attendance for the future, the following are my recommendations:

- Personalize the marketing through targeted strategies, such as speaking in front of the Academic Affairs meetings, reaching out to Department Chairs, and spreading the word through faculty on the importance of this PD.
- Work with students from Queer the Way in order to help facilitate communication between the students and their faculty on why this PD is important for them to attend, even if they feel they are already supportive of this population of students.
- Advertise the PD through student channels such as the weekly newsletter to get information to all students about this opportunity for their faculty.
- Intentional wording of the all-campus e-mails to be less formal and include a section on why this PD is important for all faculty.
- Work with faculty to determine the best times and dates for PD sessions to best serve their schedules and time commitments.

While the focus of this disquisition was on faculty, it would be useful and impactful as well to collect data from students on their experiences in the classroom before and after the professional development is completed by faculty. One way to do this is to identify trans students with faculty who would like to attend the PD and working with the students to identify how they

feel in the classroom utilizing the TIBS to develop questions for either a pre- and post-test or then post-test. This would provide data showing how this PD is impacting students directly.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy

Utilizing this data shows that faculty are not as trans-inclusive as they believed themselves to be prior to the PD session. This only includes those who chose to attend this PD opportunity. Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991) tells us that homophobia and transphobia exist within our society at high rates, which could likely attribute to faculty not wanting to participate in the PD sessions as well.

Due to these factors, policy must be created and regularly updated to help protect this population of students. Policies such as a preferred name or lived name policy, an equity policy that specifically includes the trans population, and classroom policies for faculty to provide trans-inclusive classroom experiences are a start.

A preferred or lived name policy allows for students to change their first name (and sometimes middle and last names as well) in certain systems across the campus, as well as on their diplomas or certificates. Policies such as these, when implemented well, provide trans students a way to update their name to the name they use instead of the name they were provided at birth (also known as a deadname). Certain places and systems may need to use the student's legal name but will limit the instances for students to see their deadname across campus systems.

Equity policies should intentionally include the trans population, either by mentioning the trans population outright, or including gender identity and expression explicitly in their statements. On SE Valley's office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging page, it includes gender nonconforming at LGBTQIA+, which does include this population, even if not explicitly separating it out from the rest of the LGBTQ+ community.

Classroom policies for faculty to provide trans-inclusive classroom experiences would also be useful policies to enact. Such policies could include items recommended by the U.S. Department of Education in their factsheet on supporting transgender youth in school (2021). This includes equal access to activities and programs; policies to state that faculty should use a student's preferred or lived name instead of legal name when calling roll or interacting with students along with the proper pronouns; policies to keep legal names and sex assigned at birth confidential; and transition support protocols for faculty, staff, and administrators. Transition protocols could include a checklist of different steps students and/or faculty can take to ensure a smooth process for the transitioning student in the institution.

Ultimately, every faculty member should be well-versed or at least familiar with the trans population and how to best support these students in the classroom, however the faculty feel about this population of students. Respect is something that can and should be given by faculty to every student in their classroom, regardless of personal opinion.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Practitioners need to be trans-inclusive in their behaviors. As higher education practitioners, including both faculty and staff, we must work to create a welcoming environment for every student on our campuses, regardless of whether our identities are shared, and most especially for those whose identities we do not share, as those are typically our areas of weakness as far as information and skills lie. Recommendations for practitioners are to assess themselves with the TIBS, attend PD sessions with a focus on the trans community, and to research trans-specific concerns related to the higher education experience.

Familiarizing oneself with the TIBS is important in that it allows a practitioner to see how trans-inclusive they are in and out of the classroom. This allows practitioners to see what

trans-inclusivity is and how to become more trans-inclusive over time. With the scale, one can determine areas in which one could learn more or increase knowledge surrounding the trans community. Utilizing this framework allows for practitioners to see what items they may lack skills in and where to continue to grow in the future to be more trans-inclusive in and out of the classroom.

Attending PD sessions with a focus on the trans community is also important. PD is vital to continued learning and growth for practitioners. Focusing on the trans community amongst others allows the practitioner to gain more knowledge and skills related to this population of students. It allows the practitioner to understand the lived experiences of the trans population, while also gaining valuable information about defining terms and concepts as they continue to shift and grow as a society along with those of us from these populations, learn more.

Researching trans-specific concerns related to the higher education experience allows practitioners to see what they need to focus on in and out of the classroom for this population of students. Reading about and listening to the concerns this population has in higher education is vital in understanding more clearly what these students face on a day-to-day basis, which, in turn, allows practitioners to combat these concerns within their spheres of influence.

Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991) tells us that homophobia and transphobia are rampant in our society and shows us alternative ways to queer the system. This may seem like an insurmountable task but utilizing theory and the research on PD and other trainings for faculty, one can work towards chipping away at these incidences of oppression and discrimination with knowledge and education for faculty, in turn to improve the lives of trans students, both in and out of the classroom.

Professional Learning Community Takeaways

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting was held in early November and was an opportunity for faculty to get together to discuss their experiences with the PD and in their classrooms as well as strategies that could be shared. This PLC meeting focused heavily on discussions surrounding gender-neutral restrooms on campus, as two of the participants were involved in beginning the process to convert an existing restroom into a gender-neutral restroom and were running into difficulty in doing so. Due to coding concerns and legal considerations, the process is not as simple as printing a new sign and affixing it to the outside of the restroom in question, specifically as SE Valley is a state-run institution. The faculty members who were discussing this were initially disheartened by this news but left with renewed vigor to push forward on this endeavor after discussing it with those in attendance.

Other discussions were about working with trans students outside of the classroom, the PD and how it was helpful to those in attendance, and general trans concerns, specifically surrounding trans individuals in sports and the inclusion of that information in the PD. Overall, the discussions, while not all relevant to the topic of supporting trans students in the classroom, were productive and provided the participants with the opportunity to talk through some concerns of theirs while providing a sense of community amongst faculty who were working to support trans students in and out of the classroom. The goal for the PLCs is to hold one a semester to provide a space for faculty to have similar discussions for the future moving forward.

The goal of the PLC was to allow faculty an opportunity to discuss what they had learned and how they had incorporated it into their own classrooms, as well as to provide a space where they could discuss trans-inclusivity in general with each other. As there was no set agenda for the meeting, we did not end up with the time left to discuss strategies implemented into the classroom. The PLC would have been a prime opportunity to measure goals two and three,

specifically measuring increased efficacy in certain areas and implementation of trans-inclusive behaviors in the classroom. Having more structure with pre-developed prompts would be useful for future PLC meetings and in collecting this data.

Directions for Future Research

Some directions for future research include breakdown of data by gender or race/ethnicity, working with faculty who presently have trans students in their classrooms and interviewing the student(s) before and after the PD to see what has changed for them in the classroom environment with that specific faculty member, and studying the trans-inclusivity of all faculty instead of focusing on those who completed the PD.

Breakdown of data by gender or race/ethnicity allows for the researcher to see if there are any concerns related to these demographics or if one demographic responds more effectively to the PD or certain aspects of the PD. This would allow for better tweaking of the PD to serve all faculty in the most effective manner, including incorporating different methods of learning into the PD to encompass all populations who may participate.

Working with faculty who have trans student(s) in the classroom presently allows for the researcher to determine how the TIBS and faculty scores directly correlate with student experiences. This will allow for any discrepancies between faculty perceptions and actions to be highlighted, as well as for researchers to gain a more detailed picture of what is happening on one's campus with this population of students.

Studying trans-inclusivity of all faculty allows for a baseline to be established for the TIBS over an entire campus. While not all faculty will participate, TIBS scores for more faculty could be useful to help determine where the shortfalls are on campus overall, instead of just those faculty who attend the PD, many of whom are already invested in this work. This will lead

to a more comprehensive and tailored approach for each campus, depending on the specific challenges.

Overall, research on trans students in higher education settings is lacking. There is limited research on this topic, but even less on how to truly support this population of students. As the population grows and experiences shifts in visibility, we must keep up with this by utilizing research. Research first on how to support this population in higher education should be a priority. Studies on the differences between trans women, trans men, and nonbinary individuals separately would be useful in determining the unique needs of each facet of the population, if they exist. Similarly separating out the differences between varying race and ethnicities would be useful in determining the challenges faced when we look at intersectionality of identity. Research delving into trans-inclusivity looking at response shift bias could also be eye-opening as it could show practitioners how to best evaluate their similarly structured workshops and PD opportunities.

Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991), tells us that we must disrupt the current structures in favor of development of methods that work for the queer populations. This holds true to the trans population as well. Oftentimes, working within a developed structure can be limiting, whereas rethinking the entire structure itself can be freeing. More research could also take place on this queering of education and what that would look like, specifically in higher education and how it would impact trans students specifically. Would a trans student flourish in a less structured environment, for instance? Would they see benefit through shifting to a hybrid option, or a fully online option? Would they see a change in their own engagement on campus if something like homework were removed from the list of student responsibilities and instead incorporating

assignments into class time? Would they see improvement in their academic success by moving from synchronous to asynchronous formats?

Finally, research on what would happen to trans student retention and success if more trans authors, examples, and scholars were added to the curriculum would be interesting to determine. There is a lot to be said about seeing those who look like you in a curriculum, but what does that mean specifically for trans students in higher education classrooms?

Leadership Lessons Learned

When looking at the work of improving the trans-inclusivity of faculty in higher education classrooms, leaders should certainly take the time to get to know their campus and the unique challenges they may face by speaking directly to trans students. This can be easily accomplished on any campus with a LGBTQ+ student organization, as there will likely be some trans students who are members, or at least students who may know of trans students who would be willing to discuss their experiences on campus. Starting from here allows the leader to develop a PD session or workshop that speaks to their individual campus and what it needs to be more trans-inclusive in general. At SE Valley, there were at least two incidences of Title IX complaints, which is indicative of faculty needing more information and professional development in this area in order to best serve their students. In one case, the faculty member was unaware of the harm they were causing the student. In the other case, the faculty member did not realize that what they were doing was hurtful, even after the Title IX complaint was processed. PD in this area could have helped both faculty members to learn more about the trans student population as well as ways to show support in the classroom.

Leaders should not serve as the sole source of information on this topic and should utilize student stories to add robustness to the PD and to give faculty real-life stories to hear and

connect to. They should also determine the supports on their own individual campus in order to best support this population of students. This can include people with expertise or lived experience; other students; student organizations; offices on campus such as diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging offices or intercultural/multicultural offices; and other supports such as mental health care and counseling.

Building critical consciousness was important as a part of this process, both for myself and others. For myself, it was eye-opening to see just how much trans students are impacted in the classroom through my preliminary research. It was also shocking to see how much faculty, even those who purported being trans-inclusive already, did not do in their classrooms until after the PD session. There were some who were already doing some work, but all of the participants who completed the pre- and post-tests stated that they were incorporating at least one new trans-inclusive behavior into their classroom as a result of the PD, which shows they were not previously doing all they could to support this population of students. This shows that the development of critical consciousness may take some time and effort to fully develop and may not develop the first time one learns of the challenges this population faces. I will continue to build my capacity as a leader of improvement work by continually educating myself on this population, including the research on the best ways to show support in the classroom. Although I do not currently teach in a classroom, I do provide workshops and PD sessions for students, faculty, and staff on various topics and could utilize some of these suggestions and skills into these opportunities.

We enacted critical praxis by the development of this PD utilizing the current research and information gleaned from trans graduates of the institution. This allowed us to start the process of change at SE Valley. This process of change will continue on for as long as the

current Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging is at SE Valley, as she fully supports and will advocate for the continuation of this PD for faculty on our campus. This plays a part in justice-oriented reform efforts as it begins the conversation across campus of how we can best support these students. Even if faculty do not attend the session, they may be prompted to do some research on their own, to enact trans-inclusive behaviors they already have knowledge on in their own classrooms, or they may simply know that SE Valley is a place that supports our trans students. While there was no significant dismantling of oppressive practices within and across the systems at play, I truly believe this work is the start of something extraordinary. By making this a common and repeated PD embedded in our institution's PD calendar on a regular basis, it sends the signal that this work will not back down or be stopped. It shows faculty, staff, and students who are opposed to respecting this population that SE Valley does not support their lack of respect and instead encourages information-gathering and knowledge and skill building for this population of students. While it will be hard work to start on dismantling the entire system, in the meantime, working within the system to enact change can be impactful to trans students on our campus. They can see the effort that is being made on their behalf, and I know from my time advising our LGBTQ+ student group on campus that it is appreciated.

Conclusion

In order to increase faculty's trans-inclusive behaviors in higher education classrooms, my design team and I developed a professional development session that included various components that are research-based and representative of the trans student experience at SE Valley. Participants completed a pre-test before the PD, the PD itself, then a post-test afterwards. I interviewed a participant from each session on how they have changed their habits and about

the PD itself and how to improve it for the future. After the first cycle, the PD was tweaked and adjusted to implement the feedback received, and a second cycle was performed.

Overall, while I did not meet my goals of increasing the TIBS scores by a 25%, 80% increased faculty efficacy in two areas, or 80% of faculty implementing at least two trans-inclusive behaviors in their classrooms, I did see a TIBS score overall increase of 18.32%, 50% of faculty saw increased efficacy in two areas, and 50% of faculty implemented at least two trans-inclusive behaviors, with 100% implementing at least one. This shows a marked improvement in these areas, regardless of whether they hit my goals.

I would highly recommend this work be done at other institutions of higher education in order to help each campus learn about this population of students and how to best support them in the classroom. Other recommendations include classroom and campus policy creation and reform, research broken down more by demographic data, and the inclusion of a then/post-test to account for response shift bias.

By doing this work, I hope to increase faculty knowledge and comfort with supporting trans students in the classroom utilizing trans-inclusive classroom strategies. As a nonbinary trans man, this subject is very near and dear to my heart and, as such, I shared my experiences and the experiences of trans individuals, who previously have attended SE Valley with faculty to help them to be the most supportive they can be to this population of students. I did this through a robust professional development opportunity that included aspects which align with the Transgender Inclusive Behavior Scale (TIBS, 2018). Through this professional development opportunity, I aim to see faculty creating a more welcoming culture for trans students on SE Valley's campus through the practice of trans-inclusive behaviors in the classroom. There were

several limitations to the study, including lack of demographic data, lack of attendance, and lack of a final post-test several months later.

Nationally, this work, when done on a local level, can help influence many lives. The faculty who learn about this community may move to another institution at some point, taking this knowledge with them. The trans students who are in these classrooms will feel more supported and will more likely persist to graduation, leading to more trans individuals in positions that require formal education.

I aim to continue to do this work in whatever capacity I am able, to work towards creating a campus culture that is more welcoming to trans students and embracing of their identities. This could mean continued PD sessions, continuation of the Professional Learning Group, and one-on-one strategy building with faculty who express interest in learning more. This work is important as the trans population is a significant part of our campus, and the numbers will only grow with time as more students feel comfortable with being authentically themselves. I learned a lot through this research that will help me in continuing onward into the future.

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Appendix A**Trans Inclusive Behavior Scale (TIBS; Kattari, et al., 2018)**

5 point scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

1. I ask for pronouns when I start my class for the semester
2. I use gender neutral language to refer to students whose pronouns I do not know
3. I know where nearby gender-neutral restrooms are in relation to my classroom(s)
4. I use the terms “non-transgender” or “cisgender” to refer to people whose sex they were assigned at birth matches their current gender identity
5. I have participated in discussions about the effects and/or benefits of cisgender or non-transgender privilege
6. I share my pronouns when I introduce myself to someone new in or out of the classroom
7. I have asked my co-workers what their pronouns are
8. I read books/blogs/articles by transgender women, transgender men, and gender non-conforming individuals, and include these in my course materials
9. I initiate conversations about how my community/students can support transgender individuals
10. I try to keep myself updated on ongoing conversations about acceptable language to use when referring to transgender individuals
11. I work to educate myself on issues regarding transgender communities
12. I am aware of local resources that offer support to transgender people
13. I keep myself updated on whether policies in SE Valley include transgender people

Appendix B**Additional Questions for Post-Test**

Yes or no question:

- Did you have something happen in your life that could have impacted your responses to the post-test other than the professional development opportunity (i.e. a family member came out as trans, you attended a different training, etc.)?

Open-ended question:

- If so, explain the situation:

Appendix C

Post-Professional Development Exit Survey

- Did you feel better prepared to work with trans students as a result of this professional development opportunity? Why or why not?
- What content was the most useful?
- What content was the least useful?
- Have you implemented trans-inclusive practices into your classroom as a result of this professional development opportunity?
 - If yes, Which practice(s) did you implement?
- Suggestions for improvement:

Appendix D

Questions for Interviews

1. How useful do you feel this training was and why?
2. What part of the professional development opportunity do you feel is the most impactful?
Why?
3. Do you feel any parts of the professional development opportunity could be removed while maintaining the overall goals of the PD? Why?
4. Tell me about any points where you felt overwhelmed with new knowledge.
5. How do you plan to implement this knowledge into your teaching?
6. What thoughts and/or feedback do you have for me?