



TEN NEWSLETTER

Bimonthly Newsletter of the
Transformative Education Network
at Montclair State University

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QUEER AFFIRMING: FROM INVISIBILITY TO JOY

The month of June has many associations, the end of school, the start of summer, and the thrill of rainbow attire calling out for "Pride." But even as rainbows make their way into the mainstream, educators and students alike admit they are not comfortable discussing issues of gender and sexual orientation schools ([Meltzer & Belsha, 2024](#)). In addition to that discomfort, there are bills and laws being rolled out across the country with the goal of restricting rights of LGBTQIA+ students. In New Jersey alone, there were 8 bills introduced this year, including censoring curriculum, school sports participation, and removing instructional mandates about topics related to diversity and inclusion ([ACLU, 2024](#)). These bills add to a national climate that is hostile and unsafe for many students and faculty in schools.

Against this backdrop, [Black Lives Matter at Schools](#) asserts in their guiding principle 6, Queer Affirming, "We reclaim the word queer as an act of defiance and in solidarity with those who have paved the way for us to live openly. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of cis-heteropatriarchal assumptions. We foster a network in which all people can be genuine and express their authentic, embodied selves."

Creating classrooms that are queer affirming requires more work than many educators realize, "it requires several elements that educators can actualize in their work environments to help make 'safer spaces' for all. It is a process, not a pronouncement" ([Moran, 2022](#)). To begin this process, think about action items you can take to transform a student's experience from invisibility to safety, as Dr. Moran discusses in her article, [Creating Safer Spaces](#). Queer affirming means embracing the fullness and intersectionality of queer identities. No matter how you identify your gender or sexuality, as a teacher, it is essential that you look inside and confront your own internalized biases before raising potentially divisive complex topics with students. What assumptions do you hold about affirming the queer community in your space? What are the things you don't feel prepared or comfortable to talk about? Can you identify any bridges or barriers to opening up these conversations in your setting?

Here are a few suggestions of ways to get started: post queer-affirming images in the classroom and hallways, use gender-neutral terms to group students (not boys and girls), ask students to share their pronouns and share yours, offer diverse representation in materials, move beyond heroes and consider the contributions of everyday members of the queer community, honor and teach the history of queer movements, and most importantly leave room for students to learn about and feel safe discussing their own identities. Creating queer affirming spaces should be uplifting for all students, when we create room for queer identities, we make room for all students to express their identities more freely!

SPOTLIGHT ON...



Beatrice Simpkins

Beatrice Simpkins, MPA is the Executive Director of the Newark LGBTQ Community Center. She is a recipient of the Rutgers 250th Anniversary Revolutionary Thinkers award and is a graduate of Rutgers Newark's School of Public Affairs and Administration. Minister Simpkins also serves her community as a servant clergy member of Unity Fellowship Church of Newark.

What is your connection to TEN?

My connection to TEN started back in 2019, when Dr. Tanya Maloney reached out to me to be on a panel with a group of community leaders to speak to the Newark Teacher Project. It's been four years of in person or virtual community connections where they asked speakers to talk to teachers about issues in the community, and what to expect with their students. I'm usually there to represent queer kids, LGBTQ families, LGBTQ children and the issues that the teachers might experience, and to give them resources. You know, tell them what to expect because queer kids deal with different issues.

What is your WHY for anti racist or social justice education?

A lot of [my why] is seeing what's happening to other people. I've been in the human services field for a very long time, dealing with things like HIV and AIDS and the stigma of all that, and health care. There are a lot of inequalities when it comes to just about everything. I see my neighbors and my family struggling to find housing and jobs. Through my volunteer work with the Newark LGBTQ Center, I see people come in looking for different things, I hear stories about what happens with people. I see the police treat [queer] people differently than they treat other folks and I see the courts treat [queer] people differently than others. There needs to be some accountability for these public systems that are not treating queer people well; it touched my life in different ways. I've [also] experienced my own forms of discrimination [such as] the oppressive binary construct that pressured me to not be who I am. I was not able to be who I am without feeling it would affect my career, or I'm not going to get that promotion. I thought my skills and knowledge would never be fully recognized because of how I show up in my authenticity. I'm also a minister at my church and those two things just came together in my ministry of social justice. So all of that is my reason. Here I am being a rebel rouser...

How do you incorporate queer affirming techniques in your curriculum or in the community center?

We do everything with an affirming lens, all are welcome. We have engaged with students in high school and elementary level, who are having issues in schools due to their coming out or their representation. We offer them our mentorship, counseling, but we will also go to the school and intervene on behalf of the student, and bring the student together with the administration, with teachers, with the social workers and talk about what this child is experiencing. Sometimes the kids want to participate. Sometimes they don't, so we become their voice. We talk about the different ways that kids express themselves in terms of sexuality and gender. What does queer, lesbian, pansexual mean? Parents are overwhelmed with all this, so we help create a language for them to be able to use, to discuss and to feel comfortable. [We facilitate] conversations between the parents and the child, between parent and school, school and student. We approach it from a human perspective. We're dealing with children who are in development, and their gender identity is fluid. We come in all different shapes, sizes, and colors, just like flowers, just like trees, just like snowflakes. We tell people, "don't damper your child's creativity." These formative years are very important to raising a confident adult, who's going to go out in the world and be able to be themselves and live and love as they choose. We stress how important that family relationship is.

What is one change you would like to see in public education?

I would love it if we didn't have to argue over the bathrooms, that can escalate into such a violent thing. So to me, as we're designing new school spaces and educational spaces, I think we should ditch the binary bathrooms completely and just have gender neutral bathrooms. It would be such a simple thing: you just go to whatever bathroom you want. It would just take away that tension, because you're taking away the stigma of this person having to make that choice and now subjecting themselves to all kinds of threats and ridicule.

What's the book that changed your life?

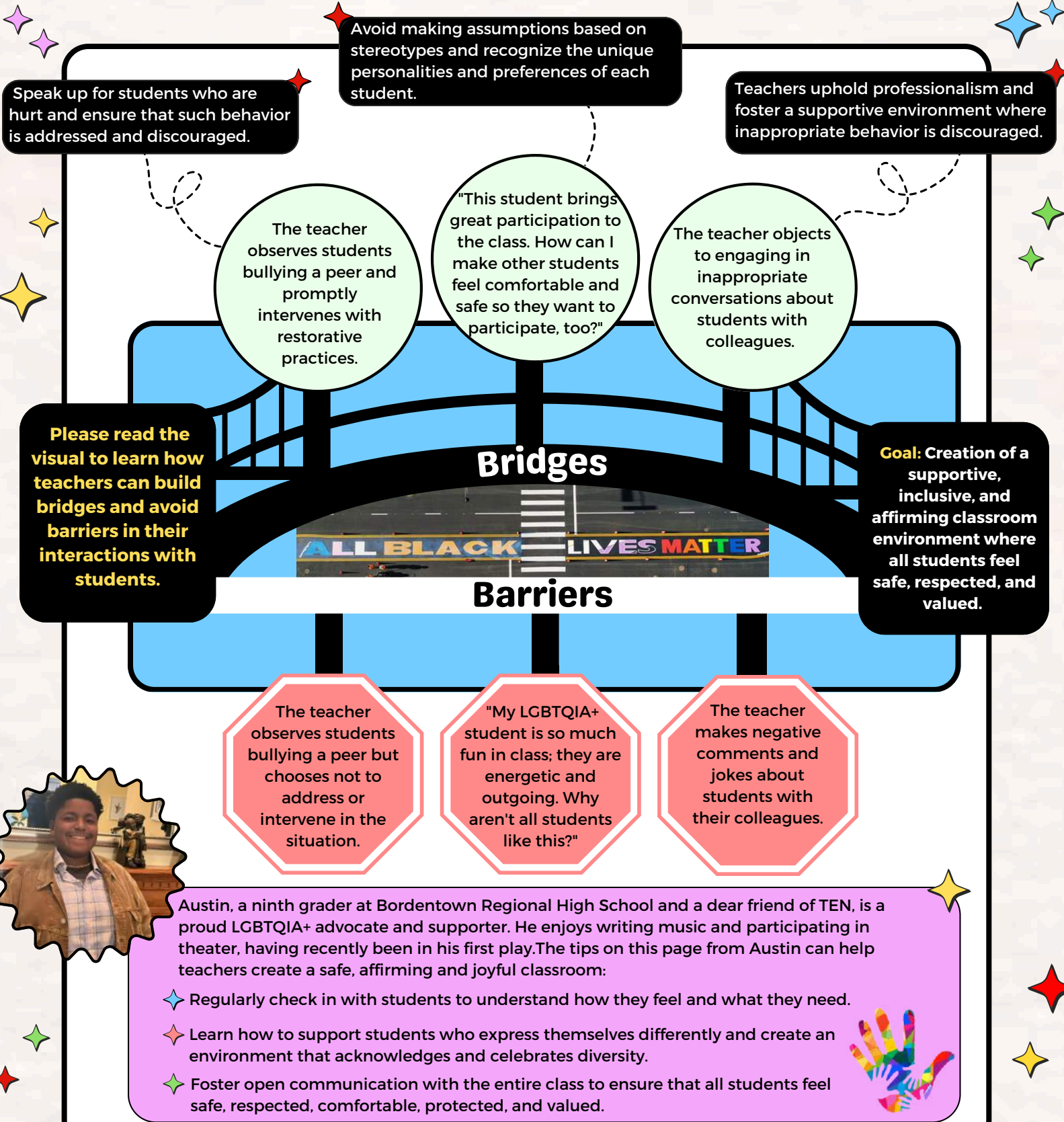
[A Little Book of Restorative Teaching Tools](#) by Haley Farrar, Kathleen McGoey, and Lindsey Pointer



DID YOU KNOW?

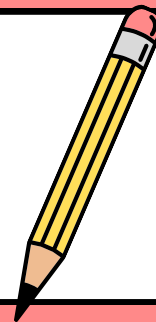


That the best resource for helping teachers create an inclusive, supportive, and affirming environment are the students themselves? Here are some tips from a ninth-grader on the bridges (positive actions or behaviors) and barriers (negative actions or behaviors to avoid) that allow students to feel respected and safe in school.

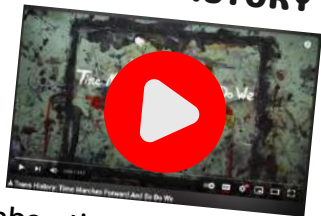


Resources

LGBTQIA+



A TRANS HISTORY



This collaborative video highlights the historical presence and ongoing struggles of the transgender community amidst contemporary challenges like discriminatory legislation and policies.

HARVEY MILK AND THE RAINBOW FLAG - LESSON PLAN

Welcoming Schools
PROJECT OF THE GLENN BECKLEY FOUNDATION

This lesson plan aims to foster discussions on identity through literature and art, and empower them to create original identity flags or capes expressing their diverse identities.

HOW BLACK QUEER CULTURE SHAPED HISTORY

TED

Queer culture historian Channing Gerard Joseph highlights the forgotten contributions of Black queer leaders like Bayard Rustin, Frances Thompson, to pivotal movements such as emancipation, civil rights, and LGBTQ+ pride. Watch here.

THE TIME IS NOW: AFFIRMING BLACK QUEER YOUTH



Black Queer students deserve an inclusive education that values their unique identities and experiences, ensuring they feel seen, heard, and affirmed in every classroom. Read the article here.

WHAT SHALL I DO AS A FUTURE BLACK GAY TEACHER



Creating safer spaces for Queer students of color requires fearless queer teachers to combat intolerance, but these environments often remain hostile to queer teachers themselves. Learn more here.

THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION

In this episode of *Beyond the Letters*, Kate and Maggie Roberts discuss the significance of queer representation in schools and the positive effects of inclusive curriculum with CUE speaker Harper B. Keenan.



STUDENTS ON BEING MISGENDERED



In this *Queer and Trans Community College Student Oral History Project* video, trans and non-binary students discuss the importance of their pronouns and how to respect them.

TRANS STUDENT EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

TSER
TRANS STUDENT EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Trans Student Educational Resources is a youth-led organization dedicated to transforming the educational environment for trans and gender non-conforming students through advocacy and empowerment.

IT GETS BETTER PROJECT

IT GETS BETTER

It Gets Better empowers LGBTQ+ youth to define their own journey.

