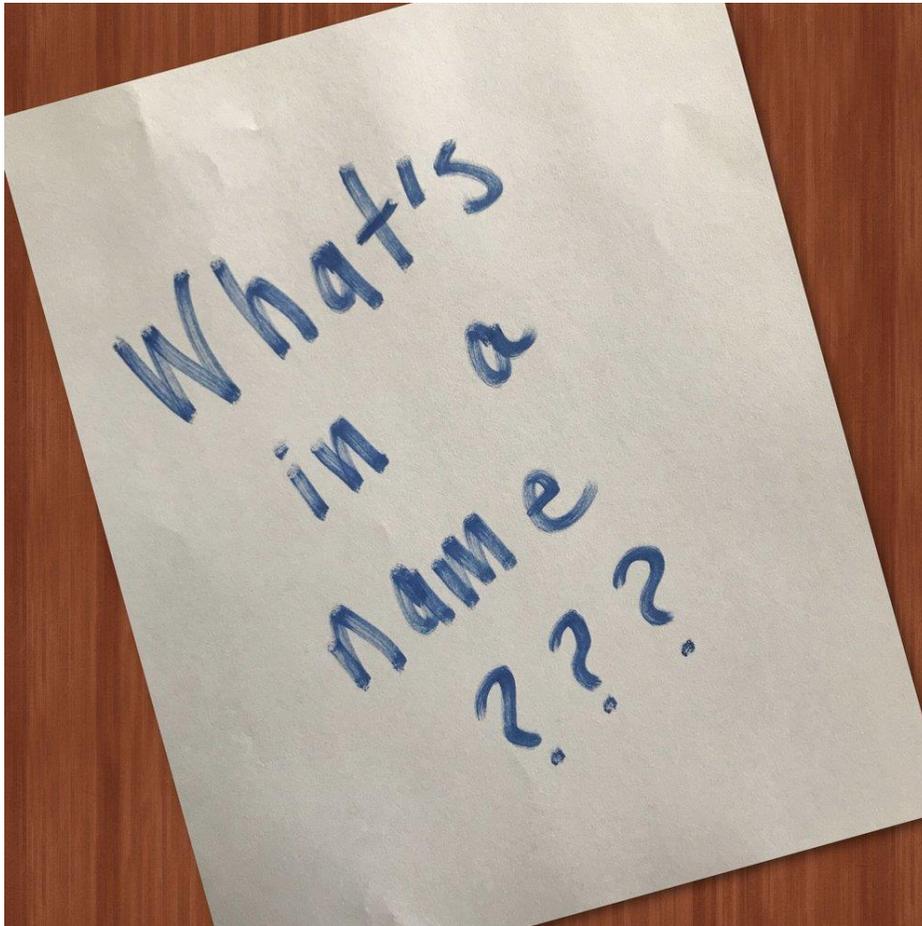


What's in a Name? Identity!

By Shawnta S. Barnes - June 7, 2018



In the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, Juliet says to Romeo, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Juliet is a Capulet and Romeo is a Montague and their families are enemies. Juliet thinks they both should forget about their names and the implications their names have on their relationship. Your name is part of who you are and discarding a name and ignoring the implications can be problematic...if you don't believe me, read the play.

This is why I find the actions of former Brownsburg High School Orchestra teacher John Kluge problematic. Brownsburg Community School Corporation in Brownsburg, Indiana requires staff to call transgender students by their preferred names. As reported by *Indy Star*, Kluge stated, “I’m being compelled to encourage students in what I believe is something that’s a dangerous lifestyle,” he said. “I’m fine to teach students with other beliefs, but the fact that teachers are being compelled to speak a certain way is the scary thing.”

Calling a student by his or her name is not promoting a lifestyle; it is being respectful. Too many young people are struggling; they’re depressed and even suicidal and an action of one person could send a child over the edge.

About half-way through my career, I learned a student in the school where I taught was transgender. This child was not my student but his friends were. I didn’t even know the student was transgender until later in the school year. It never crossed my mind to find out what name was written on the student’s birth certificate to refer to the student by that name or to only refer to the student by his surname like Kluge chose to do for all his students whether or not they were transgendered to avoid following district policy.

People’s names represent who they are regardless if it is a nickname, birth name, or a self-assigned name. Teachers have to remember their actions have consequences. Kluge was informed that he could no longer use last names and he chose to resign. Now, he is fighting the resignation saying it was post-dated. That’s like giving someone a post-dated check and being surprised the person cashed it and accepted the money.

The bottom line is Kluge wasn’t comfortable with the district’s policy and chose not to follow it. This policy is in place to protect transgender students and acknowledge them as an accepted part of the community. Time and time again, my students have made choices I don’t agree with, but that doesn’t stop me from showing them respect.