



Using Chosen Names and Pronouns for Students is Important

By Educator Barnes – October 21, 2019

If you have been reading my work long enough, you know I am adamant about teachers pronouncing students' names correctly. A student's name is part of his or her identity. It is not a teacher's place to complain about a student's name or make fun of it. This should also apply when a child's preferred name is different than a name given at birth.

Childhood is tough. Teachers should not be part of the environment making life harder for students. Locally, we have had teachers refuse to use students' preferred names. Teachers are hired to teach content, not to pass judgment or assert their views, beliefs, or religion onto students. We are guides on the side. It is not our job to dictate to students what is or is not acceptable when it comes to their life choices. We are supposed to create environments where they feel loved and safe.

There was a student in a school where I used to work that identifies as transgender. The student went by an androgynous name. The student would frequently hang out by my classroom even though I did not have this student in my class. One day, the student said, "You're real cool." I replied, "Of course, I am." I love to goof around with students, but the student was attempting to have a serious conversation with me. The student then replied, "You've never questioned me or asked me, well you know." To which I replied, "Why would I? What does that have to do with teaching English?" Later on that day, I took a moment to reflect. I wondered if what the student said to me was why the student was hanging out by my door during each passing period.

Now, it's time to take it a step farther. We need to use the correct pronouns, too. In the signature of emails and in profiles, it has become more common to state your preferred pronouns. You don't have to be transgender to do this. If a family informs the school of their child's preferred pronouns, school staff need to use them. Just like we have to know each child's academic ability, what in their IEP or ILP, we should know and use their preferred pronouns. If you work in a public school, this is not going away. Is refusing to use a student's preferred name or pronoun really the hill to die on? I think not. If it is your hill, consider teaching at a private or religious school.

Suicide rates and bullying is on the rise in our youth. Teachers need to be role models on how to accept and embrace students for who they are. If we don't, we are not making all students feel welcome.