



The Think Inclusive Podcast

Season 9, Episode 11

Amanda Darrow and Shamby Polychronis | Honoring Intersectionality

Tim Villegas (00:00:00):

The internet says it is too late to wish you a happy new year. So happy January everyone. My name is Tim Villegas and you are listening to the Think Inclusive podcast presented by MCIE. This podcast exists to build bridges between families, educators, and disability rights advocates to create a shared understanding of inclusive education and what inclusion looks like in the real world. To find out more about who we are and what we do, check us out at thinkinclusive.us or on the socials: Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. We are bringing you an extra long episode today. When it is all produced, it will clock in at around one hour, but I encourage you to settle in for a fascinating discussion. Our guests are Amanda Darrow of the Utah Pride Center and Shamby Polychronis with the University of Utah. We talk about honoring intersectionality between the disability and the LGBTQIA+ communities.

Tim Villegas (00:01:07):

We cover a lot of ground, but here is a quick preview. We discuss how gender differs from sexuality, which differs from sex. We talk about pronouns. They share stats on people who identify as both LGBTQIA+ and disabled. We discuss ways educators can make our classrooms more inclusive for both communities. And Amanda and Shamby respond to the question, "If kids consume media that has LGBTQIA+ representation, won't it just confuse them?" I'm so glad you're here. Thanks for listening, subscribing, and rating us on Apple podcast or Spotify. And now our interview with Amanda Darrow and Shamby Polychronis.

Tim Villegas (00:01:57):

Today on the podcast, we have Amanda Darrow, who holds a master's degree in education and a bachelor's degree in clinical and counseling psychology, both from Westminster college in Salt Lake City, Utah. Amanda works at the Utah pride center to make homes more accepting and welcoming for our youth and families, schools and community spaces more inclusive for all, and to educate the current and future generations about our incredible LGBTQIA+ community. Dr. Shamby Polychronis is an assistant professor of special education at the university of Utah. She's a passionate advocate for disability rights and has over 20 years of experience in the field. She advocates for social justice issues, including intersectionality, alternatives to guardianship, full inclusion in school and community environments, eliminating aversive interventions and meaningful employment. Shamby and Amanda, welcome to the think inclusive podcast.

Shamby Polychronis (00:02:58):

Thanks for having us.

Tim Villegas (00:03:01):

So really excited to have y'all on, I saw a presentation you gave at TASH about honoring intersectionality. And the, the thing that I, I think is so important for our audience, and our audience is mostly special education teachers, general ed teachers, principals, administrators from all around the country and the world is, you know, there isn't enough safe spaces for us to talk about intersectionality and kind of what it means. And for us to ask questions about you know, gender and identity sexuality, attraction, all this stuff that I learned and and we were just touching, you know, the, the, the tip of the iceberg here. So I really wanted to have you on to talk about that with our with our community. But before we do that, would each of you share your role at the Utah pride center and university of Utah respectively?

Amanda Darrow (00:04:14):

Yeah, so I am the director of youth, family and education here at the Utah pride center. And what that means kind of, you said it in my bio, I really work to work with families and youth to really make their homes more inclusive. Their spaces is more inclusive. I work with educators on how to make their classrooms, their curriculum everything just welcoming to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Tim Villegas (00:04:44):

Thanks, Amanda.

Shamby Polychronis (00:04:46):

And this is Shamby. I am a professor at university of Utah. I I have also worked in other colleges and universities and made a switch about three years ago, starting back over as an assistant professor so that I can get back into some research as well. My big focus, my, my main hat that I wear is preparing teacher candidates to become special educators. And so I do a lot of work in the schools and also preparing teachers to meet all their licensure requirements. And then, you know, on the side, I still advocate for the things I'm the most passionate about and that is anything related to disability rights. And so that kind of covers a, a broad variety of things.

Tim Villegas (00:05:30):

Well, I'm sure in our conversation, you know, maybe some of those things will come up and we can, we can touch on those as well. So what I wanted to dig to to start off is, you know, when, when I was a special education teacher I struggled with having conversations about gender about sexuality. And, and I think that it's not just an educator thing, right. I think a lot of people struggle to have those conversations in a meaningful and authentic way. And so I was struck with just how clear the communication was with your power point. So I really wanted to you know, have you, give you the chance to explain the way that you explain to us in our, in the presentation, you know, let's, you know, about gender, right? So in the PowerPoint, you actually had this visual of it was a, a genderbread person, which that was really clever that breaks down identity, attraction, sex and expression. So would you share that with our audience? And then maybe we can, you know, dive a little bit deeper into the, some of the, some of the, some of those concepts.

Amanda Darrow (00:06:55):

Yeah, absolutely. So the genderbread person, the one that I used specifically was created by Sam Killerman, and you can find that itspronouncedmetrosexual.com. I do wanna point out that that Sam created this image, but we do not know who created the actual genderbread person. So if you're out

there, we're still searching for you. Come forward, we're trying to find you the original creator. So in this image it's widely used in the LGBTQIA+ community to really show that we, we break up gender identity, gender expression, anatomical sex, our attraction who we are sexually and romantically attracted to. And the ways that we do that is to really break it up step by step. And you know, it's really important because folks don't recognize that we break up sex and gender. And when we do that, it helps others understand, you know, the biological components compared to the ways that we know ourselves to be.

Amanda Darrow (00:08:01):

So for example I always start with sex because we're all assigned sex at birth. And when we, when we explain this usually typically there's two ways that we've been assigned a sex of birth and that's being female and being male, but now we're starting to see individual jewels who are being assigned intersex. And I always use the organization InterACT. They have a wonderful definition for folks who don't know what being intersex means. And intersex is an umbrella term for differences in sex traits or reproductive anatomy, and intersex people are born with these differences or develop them in childhood. There are many possibilities in these differences, which is genitalia, hormones, internal anatomy, chromosomes, and that's just compared to the usual two ways that human bodies develop. So folks often just think that, you know, you have the option of being male and being female, and that's, we're starting to see that that's not the case.

Amanda Darrow (00:09:01):

So those are our, that's the sex, a physical makeup. We then move to our gender and our gender identity. And this is who we know ourselves to be. And we typically try to explain gender identity as so if you are cisgender and you are assigned a sex assigned at birth, say you are assigned female at birth, and you identify as a woman, you are a cisgender woman. So I was assigned female birth. I identify as a woman. So I'm cisgender woman. If, for, if my gender identity did not correspond with the way my sex was assigned at birth. And so say I was assigned female birth, and I identify as a man, I would be a transgender man. So transgender is an umbrella term for anyone who sex assigned at birth and gender identity do not correspond. And it's really important that we talk about the fact that being transgender you do not have to go through what individuals know as medical transition to be transgender. The only thing you need to do to be transgender is to say you are transgender. So if your gender identity who, you know, self to be does not correspond with your sex assigned of birth, you are transgender. Many do go through medical transition, but it's not, it's not a requirement. And underneath the transgender umbrella, we have identities like non-binary, gender fluid, third gender, and two spirit. We have agender. So those are all identities within the transgender community whose gender identities do not correspond with their sex assigned of birth. And they all kind of have different identities within that umbrella. So for example, someone who is non-binary doesn't necessarily identify with being in the binary of a man and a woman, right.

Amanda Darrow (00:11:04):

And it doesn't mean that they're right there in the middle. It just means they're not binary. Their identities may range. They could be somewhere feeling a little more like a man, little more like a woman, but they might not feel like either it it's just kind of an expansive understanding of gender identity. So then we move in. So we've got those two. So, and one of the main things that I always touch on is that when we talk about these identities, they might correspond with one another, or they might not. So when we move into our gender expression, for example, we have folks who could be gender nonconforming. I myself am gender nonconforming. I'm a very masculine woman. I tell folks all the time, you rarely see me out of a tie. The times you've met me, Tim, I'm in a tie.

Amanda Darrow (00:11:58):

So it's my look. And it's, it's nonconforming with society because we don't expect women to be in masculine presentations. A feminine man would be another example of gender nonconforming, and our expressions don't have to necessarily equal our gender identities. That's what I mean when it could align, I'm a cisgender woman, who's very masculine. We then move to an androgynous look. Those are folks who a lot of times people think individuals who are non-binary must be androgynous, cause you can't share, you know, a muscular feminine look, if you wanna be non-binary, but that's not the case. You can have a very feminine presentation and still be non-binary. That's what we mean when these identities do not need to correlate or do not need to add up to each other. Androgynous can also be a blend.

Amanda Darrow (00:12:57):

It can be where if I wanted to wear a dress shirt and tie and a skirt, that's a very androgynous look cause you can't see either masculine or feminine point out which one I'm dressing as. So that's kind of our gender expression. So we've got our sex assigned at birth. We've our gender identity who we know ourselves to be the gender expressions, how we present on the outside and then we move into our orientations and with attraction. So when you assign gender based on who you are assigning, your based on your attraction, you're getting your sexual and romantic orientation. So this is where, you know, we, we see our sexualities and this is we can be part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and identify as homosexuals or outside of the community as heterosexuals.

Amanda Darrow (00:13:53):

We have our lesbians women who are attracted to other women gay, which is men who are attracted to other men, but often an umbrella term that we use in the community. Just to say, we're attracted to members of the same gender. We have bisexual for individuals who are attracted to people of two gender identities, pansexuals someone I always say pan for all, you're attracted to all gender identities and expressions. And then when we use that into our romantic orientation, we basically have, you know, heteroromantic meaning that you are romantically attracted to members of the opposite sex or gender homoromantic homo just as homosexuals, you're attracted romantically to members of the same sex or gender. Biromantic that's bi for two. So you're romantically attracted to members of the, the two gender identities or sexes and pan for all, all individuals, Roman or you're romantically attracted to members of all orientations and sexes and then aromantic.

Amanda Darrow (00:15:07):

Everyone always wonders what the, a stands for. Sometimes they ask me if it's ally and I'm like, no, it's not ally. I wanna say that right here right now. So a can mean aromantic asexual. A I typically say for no or very little so a for no but it is not ally. So let's, let's say that here. So, so all of these, these things that I try to explain when we do this now I've given you a sexual orientation and a romantic orientation and people don't often think of those as different. They think that when you are attracted to someone, you automatically have a sexual attraction or a romantic attraction with that same person. And that's not the case. I myself could be sexually attracted to say women and non-binary folks, but I could be romantically attracted to women, men, non-binary folks. I could have a, more of a broad range for, for my romantic orientation than I do with a sexual orientation. And when we bring that into disability, we often assume that folks who are in the disability community automatically are asexual or aromantic and have no attractions whatsoever. And Shamby's gonna do a wonderful job diving into that a little bit.

Tim Villegas (00:16:33):

Yeah. That's I think that's an important conversation. So a couple things, a couple things that you said, Amanda that I just wanted to point out because when I first, when I heard this information for the first time, there was a, a couple things that surprised me. So number one, when you talked about transgender, if someone is transgender, it doesn't mean that they have to transition, right? And I think that's a misconception.

Amanda Darrow (00:17:05):

Absolutely. Everyone's gender journey is going to be their own gender journey. It, it is their route. They will, they will take what measures they need to find their affirming selves. They will, it, it's not just a, this is what it means to be transgender. And many people thought that you have to go through surgery, you have to take hormones, you have to do all these steps to be transgender, but that's not the case. No, absolutely. It is. You just need to say, you know what, my sex is assigned to birth and gender identity don't correlate. This is who I am. I'm trying to match myself to who I know myself to be. And it's all individualized.

Tim Villegas (00:17:49):

Right. Yeah. Yeah, so that's, so that's the one thing, and then the other thing that I thought was interesting about what you said was the, about pansexual, because I think there's also like, again, before I heard this I understood it to be not what you said, let's just put it that way. So and I, I think that just to reiterate, you know, there's, there's a lot of misconceptions around, around all of this information. So like, like people can, people can listen to this conversation and, you know, uh get some more information, but where are we supposed to find this information? You know? Like, like where would we go? Like if we just Google, you know, one of your terms, I, I have a feeling like there'd be a number of different interpretations, right?

Amanda Darrow (00:18:50):

That's absolutely something we're trying to build a conversation because how I define these may not be how someone else defines them. And it's really important to know, and I'm not trying to confuse anyone, but it's really important to know that when we find, you know, if we say we're, we're bisexual what I, what I term is bisexual is kind of the overarching understanding of the community, right? But that doesn't mean someone who identifies as bisexual has to say, oh, that's the term that fits best with me. That's the, that's the language you use to define bisexual. It, it really is how we interpret it, how we say it, how we explain it to others. And that's the biggest thing that you can and do is talk with individuals in the community. When someone says, I'm bisexual, you might wanna say, you know what, I've heard many different definitions of bisexual. What does it mean to you? If you're comfortable sharing with me, what does that mean to you? And you know, some people will often explain that to you. They may not, they may say you, you can Google it, but it really is, it's best to just ask people what those terms mean to them and how they identify. And when we use these terms it is kind of a loose definition, but a broad understanding.

Amanda Darrow (00:20:07):

Where you would find that is you know, there's excellent books. Again, Sam Killerman wrote a wonderful one on gender and it can help you understand all these different identities in different ways too. There's multiple aspects of where you can find this, but just talking to folks in the community is probably the best way to really understand how we identify and what it means to us.

Tim Villegas (00:20:34):

The other thing I wanna ask was about pronouns and specifically how educators can use pronouns in their classroom to, to make it more you know, to normalize the usage of them. Because, you know, we have teachers who've, who've worked in classrooms for years and years and years, and they're like, well, you know, what's with the pronouns, putting it after their name, or, you know, why, why should that even be a thing so help, help educators help us understand why of that's important.

Amanda Darrow (00:21:08):

The first thing I'm gonna say is it's wonderful that it's being discussed in classrooms, but I'm hoping that we make it more broad and we use it in our everyday lives. When I introduce myself to someone, I always say, my name's Amanda, you She/Her pronouns. It's nice to meet you. What pronouns do you use? And the reason I do this is because I always want to every individual that I talk to, I wanna make sure I'm not misgendering people because the assumptions could happen. And I could assume that they use those pronouns and they may not use those pronouns. So as an educator, it's especially important for us to make sure we're not misgendering our students. And the reason for that, and we've seen it in numerous studies, but respecting pronouns is suicide prevention. When students have their pronouns respected by all or most of the people in their lives, they attempt suicide at half the rates of those who do not have their pronouns respected. So it's often something that we do just to protect students.

Amanda Darrow (00:22:09):

And when we, when we just model our pronouns, that's the first thing you can do. I am always wearing a pronoun pin. We gave out pronoun pins here in the state of Utah from the Utah pride center and to any educator that wanted 'em and they went state, state by state, people were asking for 'em. So it wasn't just Utah. It just said simply their pronouns. It said she, her, or they, them whatever pronouns the educators wanted. And that opened up the way for a student to walk up to a teacher and see that as soon as they see you modeling it, whether you use it in the classroom, you know, my name is Amanda and I use she/her pronouns students.

Amanda Darrow (00:22:54):

See, okay, it's safe for me to say this it's safe for me to tell you my pronouns. So modeling is the first way to show educators or to show students that these educators are here to respect and, and use the correct pronouns. So modeling is a great way. I often see name plates outside of educators classrooms that will say, you know, their last names and then the pronouns they use on their doors. In email signatures, on zoom calls, if people are still doing virtual classrooms we really are just looking for ways for student to see. And again, the importance is this is just suicide prevention and we really wanna use pronouns. It saves lives.

Tim Villegas (00:23:41):

Yeah. That's, that's powerful, that's powerful. And it's such, it's such an easy thing to do, right doesn't require a whole lot of us just acknowledging. Yeah. did you have anything to add for that Shamby? I didn't. I don't want to, you know, I know, I know we're talking about intersectionality, but I didn't want to not have you participate.

Shamby Polychronis (00:24:04):

Yeah. I, I mean, Amanda really covered it, but I, I think just, even kind of going back to those small pieces, there's big pieces that really make you breathe heavily. Like what if a parent sees this? And, and

we'll talk about those maybe in a minute, but you know, just some, some smaller ones I do even at the college level. Right. I make sure I put my pronouns in my syllabi. They are in, in my my email signature they're right now on my zoom, by the way, they're she, her, we kind of miss that in our intro today, but you know, there's just these pieces and, and I've had multiple students say right off the bat, I was so grateful to see your pronouns because I know you're, you're somebody who won't judge me. Right. I lot of people, especially coming into teacher education, if they identify as trans and non-binary, they're really nervous about what that means for getting a license and the minute they see it in my tagline, they know they can at least ask me the question, what's my reality to getting a license. Right. So it, it is kind of that, Hey, I'm open to this. I'm I open to this conversation and you can ask me these questions and, and I'll talk to you about my identity. It also helps too, because I've been told many times that people are surprised when they meet me. My name evidently sparks a a thought that I'm gonna be this middle aged Greek man. And I don't know where that comes from, but so, you know, pronouns help for lots of reasons, but that's true. Yeah,

Tim Villegas (00:25:32):

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I, I don't think I have that thought, but I did. I did notice it was a unique name. So is it it's is it short for anything or is it no,

Shamby Polychronis (00:25:43):

No, that's the whole name.

Tim Villegas (00:25:43):

That's the whole name. All right. Excellent. Love it, um so also in your presentation you cited some numbers about people who identify as both LGBTQIA+ and disabled. So this is kind of where we bring, can bring in that intersectionality piece. And would you share that with our audience?

Shamby Polychronis (00:26:10):

Yeah. Well, let me tell you just a quick story on why this even started in my head of something I was interested in because my background really is disability and, and guardianship and inclusion. Those are the biggest things. I, I want to make sure that inclusion is front and center, and we're not taking away rights without recognizing it. And I was teaching a class specific on autism every single year. And what I recognized pretty soon is the demographics of my college age, students were changing. And I started seeing more trans and non-binary students in that class. And they were often saying, self-identifying as also this is, this is their identity as saying I'm, I'm trans and autistic. And, or my brother is, or my twin is, and about here three, it kind of clicked in, wow, there, there might be something to this.

Shamby Polychronis (00:26:59):

So I've, I've been watching numbers for quite a while now. And just in the last couple of years, there's been some really interesting ones come out. So for example, the movement advancement project has a big list of intersectionality with disability and LGBTQIA+ identities. And just to give you a sense that there's an estimated three to 5 million P people that identifies both LGBTQIA+ and disabled within the general population, that's about 27.2 general population reporting, having a disability, but within the LGBTQIA+ those numbers go up pretty significant. So we're talking 40% of bisexual men, 40% of transgendered adults, 30 36% of lesbian women and bisexual women, 26% of gay men reporting having a disability. So aside from gay men, the numbers are really a lot higher with, in the LGBTQ plus community than it is the general population.

Shamby Polychronis (00:28:09):

And I wanna pause there for just a second and just make sure I wanna say this multiple times, LGBTQIA+ identity is not a disability, and I just wanna keep reiterating that. Absolutely. Yep. Yeah. And in my world, especially working with student with intellectual disability, it is really common for teachers and parents to say like, like Amanda said either one, assuming cisgender and assuming you know, asexuality, there's no interest there. So I don't know what this behavior's all about, cause my kid's not interested in sex. Right. I mean my all teachers have these stories. Right, right. So it goes both ways, right? LGBTQIA+ is not a disability. And on the flip side, having a disability does not create errors in understanding our own identities and expressions and orientation. So diving little bit more into the numbers, a few more interesting facts is that the intersectionality specific of autism and trans identities have really kind of hit the news in the last two, three years.

Shamby Polychronis (00:29:17):

For example, 14% of transgender or non-binary adults also identifies being autistic compared to 4% of the general population. So that's a really significant number and it could be even higher. The, the, the movement advancement project estimates, it could be an additional 28% higher than that 14% number because of the issue of not having diagnosed but having displayed autistic traits. So there's an interesting phenomenon. I think us as educators are very used to like, Hey, what's your Whisk score? Or what's the Woodcock Johnson number, right? Like we're used to that kind of language, but within the self-advocacy a side of disability. So we're talking about the students that we worked with, their whole lives, they grow up and then they go out into the world, or maybe we never even worked with them to begin with. They're starting to be some, some interesting acceptance of self-identifying as being autistic or having autistic characteristics. And so that's where that number potentially could be a lot higher. Does it give you services? Nope. We all know the rules, you know, you have to have that diagnosis, but, but does it maybe help give people a way to explain to their friends, loved ones, coworkers the ways in which they interact with other people? Absolutely.

Tim Villegas (00:30:40):

So in your research and look at the numbers and I know you specifically cited autism, but is it, is it any like neuro divergent, you know aspect like, or is it specifically autism? That is, is kind of like the, I don't don't know if, I don't know if that question made sense.

Shamby Polychronis (00:31:05):

Absolutely. It, it's a totally great question because it's one I also had, and I think many of us are curious about, I think it's that the research really has, has been around autism and the intersectionality. And I think there's multiple reasons for that. The interest is really high in autism. The research funding is really high in autism, so it makes sense that that's where the direction is. And then on top of that you know, again, I think that's where the community interest is, and this is a population that can speak for themselves often and they have language and they have the, you know, but there's less research or, or any at this time that I'm aware of, it might be in progress right now or newly published. But we haven't looked at as much at other things like ADHD, for example, or OCD and, and things.

Shamby Polychronis (00:31:56):

But disability world in general we do have that three to 5 million number of intersectionality. So I think disability in general, neurodiversity is, is fairly specific to autism. But I think it was because of a magazine article that really sparked this interest. And it was, you know, there there's been a lot of stuff come out,

for example, from the Silicon valley and here in Utah, Silicon slopes, right. Where we started seeing some of these advanced, no numbers of autism. And then we started seeing some advanced numbers in LGBTQIA+ identification and thinking, wow, that's interesting. Let's talk about that for a minute. So I think that's where the research has come from is that's where we started noticing first. But I, I highly anticipate we're gonna start seeing things related to other neurodiverse identities pretty soon. Mm.

Tim Villegas (00:32:45):

Okay. I appreciate that. So this question is for, as, for both of you really you know, as an educator, what can what can as educators, can we do to make our classrooms and our schools more inclusive for both and the disability community?

Shamby Polychronis (00:33:11):

I'm gonna let well, yeah, I'm gonna let Amanda take the bulk of this because she has done some really significant contributions to the field in this, with her master's project. But what I'll say is from a teacher perspective, right, is I see this as a three layered approach. There's things we can do individually with building relationships, right. We know how important that is. We just talked about using pronouns as a way to say, Hey, come talk to me. I I'm open to these conversations. I, I encourage them. But we can do a lot with our environment too. I'll let Amanda talk a little bit more about that. But one thing I am just like bound and determined to get across, despite what it does to my personal career and reputation is we have got to start addressing a, a stronger policy you know, people and leadership positions have got to, to start pushing back on the, the extreme conservative behaviors that we're starting to see with removal of books in the classroom with inability to have conversations about this.

Shamby Polychronis (00:34:14):

This is, I mean, you take a, a conservative place like I live in. Right. And what we find out really quickly is we can't even talk about sexual health. Right. Unless we can tie it into an IEP goal. Right. And so a lot of teachers steer away from all of it. So it's like, well, how do you talk about menstruation? Right. that's that's the health, you know, how do you talk about that if it's been globbed into sex, right. And I think in conservative spaces, everything that, that is uncomfortable to talk about gets, gets globbed in together as being bad. Right. but the, the truth of the matter is we have got to start pushing back a little bit on that rhetoric and saying, this is suicide prevention. This is about mental health. This is a out functional life skills. This is about you know, appreciation and you know, inclusion.

Shamby Polychronis (00:35:09):

We have to start pushing back on that rhetoric because it's happening really covertly. And if, if you don't think teachers are more nervous about talking about this. I mean, I, I taught in the field 20 years ago. Right. that's when I was the classroom teacher and I remember how nervous my colleagues were to talk about things like menstrual care what to do when students are self-stimming in a sexual way, you know, teachers didn't know how to deal with that. And it's like, wow, okay, well, this is kind of basic generic, like developmental information that we should be giving them now flash forward 20 years. And we're banning books in classrooms because we don't like the way they're going. Teachers don't dare talk about anything right now, and it's actually chasing people from the field. So that's where I'll stop because Amanda has some really good practical suggestions.

Amanda Darrow (00:35:58):

That was wonderful, Shamby. You touched on pronouns. And one of the biggest things I always think about is deadnaming a child. So a dead name is the name that often transgender non-binary students might use. And then in that was their legal name, the dead name is the legal. So we don't use the Le the dead legal or dead name in the classroom, if at all possible we use what name they, they they're choosing to use now. And something really important is not always will the system allow students to update it. So something that happens and I saw happen this last week is teachers forget to let substitute teachers know. And so a student is dead named. So when you use those names, make sure you use 'em all the time. You know, and an important thing that you need to ask students is if they come up and they tell you which name they prefer to be called the first thing I often say is, okay, who do you like me to use this name in front of, of, do you want me to use this in front of parents and caregivers?

Amanda Darrow (00:37:01):

Do you want me to use this with other educators? It's really important and yeah, it's hard. We have to code switch. If they say, no, I only am comfortable using this in your classroom. Then we only use that name in their class, our classroom with them. And then we code switch. We may have to use, and we tell, we may have to use, you know, your, your dead name in front of other educators then, or in front of your parents or caregivers. Because it's not our job to out our students when they're not, if they're not ready and they're comfortable with us, then we only use those names in front of us. And that's the same with pronouns. When a student does say, Hey, I use they them pronouns. You, do you want me to use those pronouns in front of other educators, your parents, your caregivers, where should we use these?

Amanda Darrow (00:37:45):

Because I wanna make sure that you're safe when I use these pronouns. Cuz it's often not. You're sometimes as the educator, the first person they ever wanna use these names with, they wanna know it's safe. They wanna know their pronouns are respected before they're able to out to others. So it's the little things we can do as educators there with, with names and pronouns. Other things that people don't typically think about is the way we gender our classrooms, especially in elementary school classrooms. So hall passes as simple as a hall pass, typical says boys and girls, where do our non-binary students go? What bathroom pass do they have to take? When we say, okay, boys and girls, time to line up. If we're putting 'em into classrooms where we sit them boy, girl, boy, girl, boy, girl.

Amanda Darrow (00:38:39):

Also we're assuming their gender identities by doing this. We wanna remove those assumptions. Another thing that I, you know, Shay talked about these books being banned, number one, we absolutely wanna make sure that we have representation in schools, right? We wanna make sure that we are including LGBTQIA+ authors or books into our classroom. But we also wanna think about maybe if there's, you know, already curriculum in the classrooms that are reinforcing a heteronormative classroom environment. For example, if you're reading a story for, we have one here in Utah that is called brother and sister, and it is about a brother and sister who grow rice in China and the brother needs to take home more rice because he has a family to feed and the woman does not take as much rice because her husband should provide that for her.

Amanda Darrow (00:39:40):

That is reinforcing the stereotypes number one of what to expect from men in family settings, and to expect that the woman's going to marry a man and the man has a family with a woman. We can, we can

show those types of families, but if we're showing those families, we have to show the other families. We have to show representation of maybe two women, two men you know, maybe non-binary couple, we have to think through what we're showing and what we're putting into what we call hidden curriculum, cause it's already there already in our classrooms. So we really need to expand on making sure that all curriculum is included. And when people push back, we wanna push back and say, you know what, this curriculum's being shown. So if this curriculum's being shown, our curriculum will be shown. And Shamby, you could really share a little bit about how we could do that in the realms of disability and inclusion of the community in the classroom as well, right?

Shamby Polychronis (00:40:47):

Yeah, for sure. I, you know, this kind of goes back to a couple of things. One is especially when, when our students need help and pH assistance, right? We, we start treating everything as an error and that's really a problem for teachers to be thinking about if, if they really aren't in tune to, you know, their unconscious bias, for example, that one, we, we tend to go in extremes. This is a harmful assumption, right? That there's a presumed lack of interest. With sexuality, if you have a disability or there's a presumption of like extreme interest in sexuality, if you're LGBTQIA+ right. Viewpoint has to be challenge. We have to challenge our own, the error thinking that disability does not con you know, create confusion about our identity and, and expression and attraction. And the LGBTQIA+ identity is not a disability.

Shamby Polychronis (00:41:44):

And then finally, and this is a problem that's been in special education forever is this idea of fixing, right? And this is where both of our communities and, and, you know, the intersect actually really there's a lot of commonality, but within the disability thought is like this concept that they are wrong, that something was broken early on. We've gotta fix it. We've gotta treat it. We've gotta, you know, it's led to all sorts of harmful and even deadly treatments. We know very much about a like shock therapy. For example, both of these populations have had to endure and it's still legal within the disability community. Right. and, and the other idea of fixing and that causes errors and assumptions is this mourning, the child you thought you had, we, we actually told parents, this is a normal grieving process, but then it causes secondary trauma to these kids, you know, like it's really harmful for the, the, that relationship over time.

Shamby Polychronis (00:42:41):

And so kind of bringing it back into a classroom. One, we have to challenge as teachers, we have to challenge the kind of information we're sharing with parents, especially in that transition age where a lot of this comes up for its team to 16. And we have to really think twice about that. And then also quit treating things as an error like, oh, that's cute. You don't understand, you can't have a crush on Billy. Right. You know, we have done that. We've infantilized kids based on their disability. And then, you know, quit, quit respecting that. And I don't know if this is helpful to talk about for just a minute, but maybe talking about where some of our laws could be protective of the intersectionality between these two populations in particular for one, because there are a lot of mental health concerns around having your, I don't know, your existence, your value challenged every single day tends to create some mental health issues, right.

Shamby Polychronis (00:43:42):

The depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, those are very common in both of these communities. But you know, not being able to use the restroom that you feel safe in not being able to share your pronouns being deadnamed, we know that's creating a lot of issues. And so ADA can actually be, again, I wanna reiterate the identity of LGBTQIA+ is not a disability. However, the mental health concerns that are around being dismissed constantly and being treated for anxiety and depression that actually can create can, can provide some accommodations to those who are struggling with mental health disorders in public spaces, right? So in schools, accommodations can be used including on IEPs and 504 plans for anxiety related activities, like getting ready, getting dressed, using the bathroom those kinds of things. So and then above that, we have FAPE right free and appropriate public education under IDEA there there's been tested lawsuits on this one that allowing bullying, and we didn't even talk about bullying for both of these communities is so much more significant for these communities than it is in the general population, which is already completely unacceptable by the way.

Shamby Polychronis (00:45:02):

Right? So it, it really high here but bullying and it is a violation of free and appropriate public education. And the school can be held accountable to remediate that. So there is some financial retribution to a school for not protecting kids against bullying. And then obviously title IX comes into play here too. Harassment or punishment for failing to conform to sex based stereo types is prohibited by title IX. So we have to look at our dress codes. We have to look about the way that we're penalizing students for the way they're showing up to school and behaving in school, that if we're operating from this heteronormative framework, we very well could be violating laws as well.

Tim Villegas (00:45:50):

Hmm. Wow. That's a well lot there a lot there. That's there and I love the way I love the way that Shamby brought in the policy aspect of that. And I love Amanda all of your very practical strategies for educators to make our spaces and schools more inclusive. I'm wondering if, you know, if, if we have a principal or administrator listening to this conversation and you know, maybe this is the first time they've thought about, like, you know, about these concepts, you know, about like, oh my gosh, is, is my school I'm running nice school. Is it, you know, heteronormative and like, like how, what, what would you suggest they do? How, how what's the next step for them. If, if this is sounding some alarm bells in them and saying, oh, Hey, I really need to dig into this more. Like, where can I find more information?

Amanda Darrow (00:46:52):

Yeah, absolutely. Well, this is a good time to say, I am doing a conference specifically on LGBTQIA+ inclusion in schools on January 22nd. It is virtual. So educators can join us. You can find it at utahpridecenter.org. And this conference specifically breaks down ways to make your classroom in schools, more inclusive. There's an administrative role track. There's an educator's track. There's a community track, there's a student's track. So there's, there's space for educators to learn more and get some more practical ideas of what to do for their schools. But the first thing is walk in your school and look around challenge what's in your schools to say, is this for all students? Or is there stuff represented on my walls for all communities, all families because the, you walk in that space every day. And if you start to look around and say, oh, there isn't a rainbow, or there isn't a rainbow sticker, there's not a trans sticker.

Amanda Darrow (00:47:52):

How can I make students walk in and know, you're welcome, you belong. And I value you and see you in this space. That's the first thing an educator can do make your space be seen. It, it's the easiest way to make sure that these students and really feel comfortable. We can't learn in spaces that aren't comfortable for us. If we're being constantly taught and reminded that heteronormativity is the, is the norm or CIS normative is the way to go and be expected. We're not gonna learn the same way as other students. We owe it to our LGBTQIA+ students to build them an inclusive environment. So walking into your school and starting to look around and, and see that, and then building your own professional learning day in and day out for all students whether it's for the LGBTQIA+ community, or the disability community, we can keep going. We need space for our BIPOC students. We, we, we know we have to build these spaces in our schools, period. We're, we're, we're not a cookie cutter society. It's time to really open up the, the classroom and, and our schools.

Tim Villegas (00:49:08):

Great ideas. So Amanda, before we started recording, you had mentioned that you, well, why don't you explain it cause I don't remember exactly.

Amanda Darrow (00:49:20):

Yeah. So here in Utah, we had a specific district poll titles and every single one of those titles included LGBTQIA+ authors or people of color, and the library, the Utah library association and others here. Other educators here in Utah are pushing back. We know that the books belong on shelves. So we did a press conference because the conservative parents are starting to pull books without even reading the book without even understanding the entirety of the book. And the one thing that we're pushing right now is that you read the book from start to finish. Before you even question the book, you don't just pull a sentence or two, you don't you need to understand the entirety of the book. And we first got push back in the state from "Call Me Max." I have it right above me.

Amanda Darrow (00:50:15):

I constantly have that book by Kyle Lukoff above me. Parents had a problem be in a third grade classroom saying that we were teaching sex into our classrooms. Well that book's about a transgender child. And as you heard earlier in our conversation being transgender is not a sexual orientation. It's a gender identity, it's who these kids know themselves to be. And so saying that we're teaching sex is, is just flat out lie. We are teaching about who these kids know themselves to be. So what we kind of discussed at this you know, press conference is that talking about sexuality in schools is taboo, unless that sexuality is heterosexual. And you know, when we start to say, well, LGBTQIA+ is sex. Well how happens is that we're seeing LGBTQIA+ identities they're being seen as not age appropriate or not appropriate for the classroom.

Amanda Darrow (00:51:17):

But the truth is when we talk about LGBTQIA+, we're talking about love. We're talking about kids. We should be talking about love, not sex. You know, maybe as they get older, but when we're talking about a third grade classroom, we're definitely not talking about sex, nor do we bring sex into the classroom. But that leads our students to believe, you know, the, the they're not welcome in the classrooms. We're seeing lower academic achievement, bullying, lack of family you know, increased mental health problems. We've talked about that. There's social exclusion when, when our identities are being pressed an, an increased suicidality. So we really do owe it to our students to make sure that that representation

is in schools. And that, to what the big push here nationally is, is that don't remove our books and make sure you're reading it the book from front to back. And what are you learning from that book? It may have an explicit moment or two, but we're going to be reading these things. We need to read these things. We're only gonna grow and learn from these things. And I absolutely believe that we should not ever ban a book because that makes students wanna read it even more

Tim Villegas (00:52:42):

Oh, yeah, it sure does. It sure does. So I, I think this leads in nicely to the, to the question I, I wanted to ask you about representation because so we, like as a, as, as you know, a media company that is interested in making sure that there is a disability in, in the media disability authentic disability representation in the media that we, you know, that we watch and we read I'm assuming that also, you know we also want that representation for LGBTQIA+ communities. Right. And so let's take, for example, the book that you have, you know, behind you, Amanda call me max, right? I have heard, and I'm sure you have heard too, this idea that like, well, if kids read book, then they're, you're just confusing them. Like, like they, they're gonna read this book and it's, doesn't just apply to call me max.

Tim Villegas (00:53:56):

It could be a YA novel, right. That has a romantic relationship. That's not heteronormative. They're gonna read this. They're gonna get confused. They're gonna, you know think that there's something that they're not Shay you, you mentioned that, right. Like the error, right. Pointing out the quote unquote error in someone's thinking about their identity or sexuality. Like how, how, how would you respond to that? Because I'm sure even, and the people who are listening to this podcast who are very progressive, you know, and have, have an idea about this in disability may not, may not have that light bulb maybe not have has turned on for them for as far as identity and, and sexuality.

Amanda Darrow (00:54:41):

Yeah. So when you say, you know, it might confuse we often also hear, unfortunately that it might turn them gay. Number one, our books are never gonna turn someone gay, but what it does just like any other curriculum or any other teachable moment or learning is it, has you think it has you question, it has, you turn work into, we know that, you know, real reality is all of this is a social construct. We've constructed these ideas of gender we've constructed sexuality. We should question it. We should wonder, we should try to figure out our own identities. That's part of our life journey. And if these books get you to question your own sexuality or your own gender, amazing, that's what I want it to do. I want it to take you on a path of who am I, we need to self explore as human beings and just like any other way that we learn in schools, this is what books are for. Teach us, help us question things. It's I, I hope that you as educators sit back and say, you know what, I wanna question this too. I wanna look into this too. That's what we do as educators, we turn it into a, learn a teachable moment and we learn, and we will only grow as a society when we allow everyone to explore their own gender journeys, sexuality journey, identities in any shape or form.

Tim Villegas (00:56:16):

Right? Yeah.

Shamby Polychronis (00:56:18):

I'll just double down on that because I can speak to being cisgender straight, a white female. Right. I, I have a lot of privilege in my life for sure, but I also at least can speak to what it's like to be a female and

make 70 cents on the dollar. So if I read a book, that's like, oh, the women don't need this kind of money because the man brings money home. Right. A I should question that and I should be pulling, I should be offended that that is being taught to my kid right. Or at least have a conversation around that. Like, whoa, that's where this occurs. Right. and, and again, I, I went through a very traditional teaching pathway program. Right. We didn't talk about sexuality. We, we didn't talk about some of the harder stuff to our jobs which we're finding out.

Shamby Polychronis (00:57:10):

We should have probably been learning about some of this. Right. But I'll give you an example. When, when again, the intersectionality start coming up, I was like, oh man, I don't know what to say about this. Right. I'm gonna say it wrong. So I'm gonna not say it. Right. And I think that's kind of our knee jerk reaction. And then, you know, I have these opportunities to work with amazing people like Amanda, that really start getting me thinking, and then all of a sudden questioning and sometimes questioning is uncomfortable. And then you, you, you know, affirm your own thinking around things. And then you grow. Growing is hard folks. I mean, like I'm in teacher education growing is hard and we have pushback on growth all the time. But I still experience discomfort. I mean for example there is a really interesting a, a drag troop, right?

Shamby Polychronis (00:57:58):

That, that it, Justin Bond, for example, it's a drag syndrome. It's a London based group for people down syndrome who like to dress in drag and it's a professional performance. Right. And we didn't necessarily talk about you know, drag king and Queens being a performance based, which is part of gender expression. Right. But I remember my first knee jerk reaction to that as an educator thinking, oh my gosh, because there there's, you, there's a whole avenue of different ways to do a performance drag. Right. And my first knee jerk reaction was this is going to be seen as somebody who doesn't understand what they're doing or is somebody enticing. Is there some problematic behavior from somebody who's in charge here? Like my mind went all the negative spaces that we encourage people not to go to. Right. Right. I was very protective and very patriarchal.

Shamby Polychronis (00:58:52):

And then I had to pull that back and question, and this is one thing probably I would, I would push all of your listeners and to think about is we might have two journeys that we're all taking at this point. One is, is our personal journey of, we gotta get our unconscious biases out there. We've gotta challenge our own thinking. We might even have to come to terms with some of the things that we don't even know. We don't accept until you're like, oh man, you know, I'm looking around at my classroom. And I recognize that I have all these gendered words on the wall. There is no room for anybody else. Right? So one that's my personal journey. And then two, as an educator, I need to help others on their journeys too, which, which is the safe spaces, the, the relationship building, challenging policies, working with my admin to, to fix problems that are, that are schoolwide.

Shamby Polychronis (00:59:45):

So, you know, we have our classroom environment, we have our school environment, we have our community environment. There's lots of work we can do. So that might be two different journeys. And sometimes we might struggle with, I mean, again, I, I come from a very conservative state. We're taught what's right and wrong from the time. We're little, whether we know we're being taught that or not. And then all of a sudden you're challenged in a space where you're like, wow. If, if I continue with that

belief system, this kid is in danger. I need to figure out a way to stay with my core values and my belief systems in a way I'm comfortable with, but also do my job and keep this kid safe. So we might have a couple change challenges as educators that we're having to work through.

Tim Villegas (01:00:25):

Well this has been a fascinating conversation. Shamby Poly-Polychronis. I'm gonna, I'm just gonna edit it out is what I'm gonna do. Amanda Darrow I really could have like another hour of a conversation with, with, with y'all. This has been fantastic and I hope whoever's listening can see the connection between, you know, we, we fight so hard for disability rights, you know in, in inclusive education spaces. And we need to also think about how to include LGBTQIA+ communities in that inclusion, inclusive education is about all students, not just a segment of students. So thank you so much for your time and being on the podcast. I really appreciate it.

Shamby Polychronis (01:01:20):

Thank you.

Tim Villegas (01:01:25):

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