Gender Inclusiveness Guidelines

Creating Inclusive and Brave Learning Spaces

2GATHER

Building quality and emotional resilience in youth work on gender equality

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Executive summary

These Gender Inclusiveness Guidelines provide educators, youth workers, and trainers with a framework to create inclusive, safe, and brave spaces in youth and adult education.

They combine theoretical foundations, practical strategies, and reflective methods. Key principles include: creating caring and participatory environments, using gender-inclusive communication, acknowledging trainer privileges, ensuring accessibility, and addressing resistance to gender equality.

The guidelines integrate workshop experiences and EU policy frameworks, offering concrete tools such as the Brave Space Rules, Glossary Game, and inclusive communication practices.

They aim to strengthen democracy, prevent violence, and empower diverse participants to express themselves freely.

1. Introduction

Gender inclusiveness is a crucial principle in youth and adult education, ensuring that all individuals—regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, or background—can participate safely, freely, and equally. According to data from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, discrimination and violence against queer people remain widespread, with trans* and intersex people facing the highest levels of discrimination.

The aim of these guidelines is to provide educators, youth workers, and trainers with concrete strategies to create inclusive, safe, and brave learning spaces, while fostering democratic values and preventing violence.

2. Core Attitudes and Principles

Inclusiveness is rooted in caring, empathy, and responsibility towards oneself and others. It also means building both Safe Spaces (protective, supportive) and Brave Spaces (reflective, transformative).

Safe Spaces are places of retreat, while Brave Spaces encourage participants to question privilege and engage with difficult topics. Inclusiveness also requires self-responsibility, patience, and the "calling in" technique—supportive rather than shaming corrections.

3. Practical Implementation in Workshops

Preparation: Gather participants' needs before the activity if possible.

Opening: Begin by co-creating ground rules, sharing names and pronouns, and clarifying expectations.

Participation: Apply the principle of "challenge by choice"—everyone decides their own level of engagement.

Methods: Use interactive tools such as the Gallery Walk, Glossary Game, and

reflective rounds to stimulate dialogue.

4. Inclusive Communication and Language

Language shapes inclusion. Gender-inclusive and gender-neutral language should be used consistently.
Examples: Use “Dear colleagues” instead of “Dear Sir or Madam.” Introduce yourself with pronouns and invite others to do the same.
If mistakes occur, correct them briefly and continue without focusing unwanted attention on the person affected.
Always prioritize self-definition and confidentiality when it comes to names and pronouns.

5. Role of Trainers and Youth Workers

Trainers should reflect on their own privileges and acknowledge the social roles they represent. They are responsible for creating structured yet participatory learning environments.
This includes combining professional expertise with recognition of the lived experiences of participants. Trainers should act with empathy, openness, and willingness to learn.

6. Target Groups and Accessibility

Inclusivity also means accessibility: activities should be free or affordable, voluntary, and sensitive to different age and gender groups.
Spaces should offer both active engagement and calm environments for relaxation. Collaboration with other organizations is encouraged to reach diverse target groups.
Challenging traditional gender roles through tools, media, and creative activities

helps young people to explore alternatives.

7. Dealing with Resistance and Antifeminism

Resistance and anti-feminist arguments are common. Trainers should apply strategies such as:

• Withdrawal: avoid unproductive conflicts.

• Asking questions: invite reflection rather than confrontation.

• Setting boundaries: define limits respectfully.

• Discussion: engage when conditions for a meaningful exchange are present.

Self-care is essential—choose your battles wisely and build alliances.

8. Brave Spaces and Learning Spaces Framework

11 Brave Spaces and Learning Spaces Framework

Brave Spaces are central to critical educational work. Unlike Safe Spaces, which emphasize protection, Brave Spaces explicitly encourage discomfort, reflection, and the courage to confront power, privilege, and inequality.
Key rules for Brave Spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013) include: agree to disagree, owning intentions and impacts, challenge by choice, respect, and no attacks.
Brave Spaces acknowledge that mistakes and discomfort can be valuable starting points for collective learning, but must be handled with care, ensuring that marginalized participants are not left alone with discrimination.

Beyond Brave Spaces, critical pedagogy also conceptualizes that emphasize diverse aspects of inclusion and transformation (drawing on Bell Hooks, Urmila Goel, Frigga Haug, Paulo Freire, and others):

• Space of Power: Power is always present in learning environments. It must be made visible and addressed, rather than ignored, recognizing structural inequalities such as sexism, racism, classism, and ableism.

• Space of Differences: Diversity is not a deficit but the starting point for pedagogy. It requires both recognition and deconstruction of social differences, while being attentive to intersectionality.

• Space of Experience: Learning builds on lived experiences, which must be critically analyzed in relation to power structures. Non-discriminatory experiences of acceptance can be transformative.

• Space of (Self-)Critique: Education should foster critical thinking not only about society but also about one's own complicity in unequal structures. Collective critique supports mutual growth.

• Space of Uncertainty: Learning is a process of crisis and risk, where uncertainty becomes a quality criterion. Trainers model vulnerability by sharing their own experiences.

• Space of Conflict: Conflicts are not disruptions but opportunities for deeper engagement. They can challenge racist, sexist, and other oppressive structures and lead to growth.

• Space of Unlearning: Critical pedagogy also requires unlearning privileges and assumptions that reproduce inequality.

• Space of Appreciation: A transformative learning space values everyone's contributions, histories, and presence.

• Space of Dialogue: Teachers and learners co-create knowledge through

dialogue, countering the "banking" model of education.

• Space of Questions: Encouraging questions, even uncomfortable ones, strengthens collective learning and reduces fear.

• Space of Responsibility: Teachers and learners share responsibility for shaping inclusive and participatory spaces.

• Space of Emotions: Emotions are integral to learning processes. They should be acknowledged as resources for engagement.

Together, these spaces expand the Brave Space concept into a holistic framework for inclusive and critical pedagogy.

9. Reflection and Evaluation

Each workshop should end with reflection rounds: "What surprised me? What did I learn?"
Anonymous feedback should be enabled. Trainers and participants should share responsibility for follow-up actions and commitments.

10. References

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