

Gender Diversity and Mathematics: Implications and Directions For Future Gender Research

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Gender diversity has been officially recognised by the Australian government. No longer is the male/female binary the sole means of gender identification. The census, birth certificates, and government data, for example, are now reported with three gender identifiers: male, female, and (in general) gender diverse. While controversy abounds in the literature about the terminology used for gender identification, the official terms adopted by Australian government authorities are pragmatic and understood in society.

With respect to education, each state/territory already has prepared (or will soon) guidelines for schools on issues related to gender diverse students. To date, Victoria, through the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), appears to be the only state/territory in which enrolments and achievements of students completing the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) are reported for the three gender categories since 2017.

The Session

In this session, I will share some of the data on the representation of gender diverse people in society. I will also present some of the research findings on gender diverse students and their schooling experiences, teachers' and pre-service teachers' views about gender diverse students, as well as the limited research results on gender diverse students that are specifically focussed on mathematics and science.

The VCE enrolment data for two of the three mathematics subjects offered at the VCE level by gender (male/female/gender diverse) will be presented; the numbers of gender diverse students were too small to include the third subject. The enrolment patterns identified will be discussed.

Drawing attention to the known experiences of gender diverse students and their presence in mathematics classrooms—a situation that cannot be ignored—is an important starting point. With time, gender diversity in schools, and in mathematics classrooms in particular, will require more attention to be paid to the needs of these students. But, very little is known about their needs in mathematics classrooms, or of the obstacles they do or might face. There are minimal data available to work with. The necessity for knowledge on how best to facilitate the mathematics learning of all students, how best to be inclusive in general, and gender inclusive in particular, in the mathematics classroom are areas wide open for research.

What are the implications for gender diverse students of what is being done in mathematics classrooms today? Are changes needed? If so, what kinds of changes? What are the implications for those undertaking gender research in mathematics education? In the session, I aim to open discussion to explore these issues, examine possible ways forward, and identify avenues for future research.