**Novel Title:** *George* by Alex Gino

**Contemporary Novel Synopsis:** George looks like a boy, but she knows she isn’t a boy. She just wishes everyone else understood, and could accept her for who she truly is on the inside. When her teacher announces that the students will audition for roles in *Charolette’s Web*, she dreams of playing the role of Charlotte, and, she refuses to allow her teacher’s misunderstanding of her gender to get in the way. With the help of her best friend, Kelly, Melissa (a.k.a. George) takes steps to ensure she not only has the opportunity to try out and perform the role of her dreams, but that she can take steps towards transitioning into the person she was always meant to be.

This delightful middle level text engages readers in an exploration of identity and gender fluidity as they grow to know Melissa, and identify the importance of being true to yourself.

**The Novel and Professional Development Components:**

- This novel features a young protagonist who is certain of her identity and eager to share her true self with those in her life. This novel speaks to the fact that trans-gender youth are aware of their true identities, but struggle in speaking out due to current social constructs, stigmas, and fear of negative response from others.

- The novel is told in 3rd person. As such, the reader is able to see the intentional use of the protagonist’s preferred pronouns, and speaks to the importance of asking students or preferred pronouns, rather than assuming pronouns based on a student’s physical appearance, legal name, or gender response on formal documents.

- The fact that the character wishes to be called “Melissa” speaks to a need for teachers to consider “dead names” when beginning class instruction and encountering students both in and outside the classroom. Rather than read names from a roster, teachers can request students share their preferred names from the start of the school year, and engage students in their perferred name throughout the academic year.

- Melissa shares her true self with her best friend, Kelly, her brother, and eventually her mother. However, she takes time in determining with whom she will share her identity, and when she will share her identity. It’s important for teachers to remember that a student’s choice to share their identity with you does not mean they have yet chosen to share their identity with family, friends, and others. For this reason, it’s important to discuss the student’s identity and their decision to expose this identity to others so that you don’t inadvertently out the student to others. After all, it is the student’s identity and the student’s choice when and how to share that identity with the world.

- The teacher within the novel refuses to allow Melissa to try out for the role of Charlotte due to her perceived gender. While some might see this encounter as problematic, the truth is the teacher might have yet to acquire the funds of knowledge necessary to see what lies below the surface, and to truly understand the inequities she poses in her decision to limit students to roles based on gender alignment. The teacher’s character offers insight into potential ways we might be taking actions or utilizing language that is detrimental to the social and emotional needs of our learners. It is important that we reflect on our decisions in the classroom, and how these decisions impact our students – particularly our transgender youth. We can seek out ways to learn and grow, and further develop our funds of knowledge, shedding light on ignorance, and taking action to create positive change.