

The Invisible Majority

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This case takes place at a school in Saxony, a federal state in eastern Germany,¹ and explores the question of how gender sensitivity should be implemented and taught in the educational sector and in educational processes. Some (far-right) actors have branded gender issues as ideological and framed them as harmful to children and families. For example, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) faction in the Saxon state parliament has launched a campaign against gender-sensitive work and the organizations that provide it.

As early as 2021, the Saxon Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs instructed public schools not to use certain forms of gender-sensitive language. The German language is gender-marked, and its usage has traditionally been strongly androcentric.² For gender-sensitive expressions, there is the option of including non-binary people through additional symbols.³ However, since August 2025, these options have been prohibited by an administrative directive, which mandates they be treated as spelling errors. These directives are binding on school staff, and principals are responsible for their implementation, although there are no automatic penalties for noncompliance. At the same time, the mandate does not explicitly prohibit addressing the topic of gender sensitivity. Furthermore, the Saxon School Act clearly states that non-discriminatory coexistence is a central educational goal.

"Thanks for coming to this meeting," Principal K tells the teachers who have gathered. "I've been hearing concerns from a number of parents—and from some faculty members as well—about the upcoming workshop for students. Ms. D, as the teacher hosting the workshop, could you quickly summarize what's been happening?"

"Two students approached me several weeks ago with concerns that their classmates—and some of their teachers—are insensitive to the ways that gendered language harms girls, plus nonbinary and trans students," Ms. D begins. "Of course, German is a highly gendered language, which technically makes gender-inclusive language grammatically incorrect. But in my classes, I don't take points away when students use it, and students have told me they really feel recognized and valued when we use inclusive language in class.

"So the two students came to me asking for a workshop for their peers, and maybe eventually the faculty. There's a local organization that will work with the students on gender equality and respectful forms of address, as well as broader issues of discrimination-sensitive language. The workshop is supposed to happen next week, free of charge."

"Discrimination awareness is obviously incredibly important to our school," Principal K affirms, "but I've heard from a lot of parents who are concerned that this workshop is sending a political message. They'd

¹ In Germany, education is a state matter; educational rules and regulations do not necessarily apply throughout the entire country.

² Dominated by male interests and a male point of view

³ For example, the term *die Schüler* refers to a group of male pupils (as well as a group of mixed-gender pupils) and *die Schülerinnen* to a group of female pupils, while a gender-sensitive term for a group of pupils could be *Schüler*innen* or *Schüler_innen*.

rather address what they call ‘gender ideology’ at home. And if the AfD⁴ learns about this, we’d be risking attacks in the media or even doxxing that could impact all faculty members. So before I make a decision, I want to hear from all of you.”

“I don’t see what there is to talk about,” Mr. A, a senior German teacher, pushes back. “In 2025, the ministry issued the latest administrative directive explicitly discouraging gender-inclusive language in schools and prohibiting its evaluation as standard German. Why would we teach such language to students?”

“Because students are feeling excluded!” Mr. C, a civics teacher, protests. “A non-binary student told me last week, ‘It feels like I don’t exist properly here.’ I don’t want any student feeling that way.”

“I don’t want students to feel that way, either,” Mr. A replies, “but the rules are clear. We’re a public institution.”

“And not all students are happy about this workshop,” Mr. H, a science teacher, adds. “I even had a girl who identifies as a feminist tell me that she wishes the workshop wasn’t happening. With all the controversy around it, she feels like it’s making things worse, not better.”

“But remember, many students want the workshop—it was a student initiative,” Mrs. W, a literature teacher, reminds the group. “And like Ms. D, I’ve been using inclusive language and allowing students to do the same. As one girl told me, it’s about respect.”

“Besides,” Ms. D adds, “what message would canceling it send to our community?”

“What message does holding the workshop send?” Mr. R, assistant principal, asks. “Discussions about gender identity are socially contested. Our role as a school is not to take sides.”

“Doing nothing is also taking a side,” Mr. C points out. “Allowing the status quo to continue means students feeling excluded every day.”

Principal K intervenes with a sigh: “We need to find a solution that considers all perspectives. And the workshop is scheduled for next week.”

What should Principal K do?

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<https://www.justiceinschools.org/invisible-majority>

⁴ The far-right Alternative for Germany party (AfD) has been gaining power across Germany since its founding in 2013. Anti-feminism is a key part of their platform.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09644008.2025.2587228#abstract>