



Teaching, affirming, and recognizing trans and gender creative youth: A queer literacy framework

Mario I. Suárez

To cite this article: Mario I. Suárez (2018): Teaching, affirming, and recognizing trans and gender creative youth: A queer literacy framework, Journal of LGBT Youth

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2018.1435329>



Published online: 26 Feb 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

BOOK REVIEW

Teaching, affirming, and recognizing trans and gender creative youth: A queer literacy framework edited by sj Miller. New York: Springer, 2016. 323 pp., ISBN 978-1-137-56766-6.

Reviewed by Mario I. Suárez 

Department of Teaching, Learning and Culture, College of Education and Human Development, Texas A&M University, TX, USA

sj Miller opens the introduction to his book, *Teaching, Affirming, and Recognizing Trans and Gender Creative Youth: A Queer Literacy Framework* (2016) by leading the reader through a story about Blue, who is assigned female at birth. Blue displays characteristics that may seem “tomboy-ish” at an early age, such as playing football. Without teachers who affirm Blue’s (a)gender identity, Blue does not acknowledge they are transgender until the age of 40, when he decides to transition from female “*toward*” male (p.17, italics in original). Blue goes through a full medical transition and for all intents and purposes, lives a happy and healthy life...one that he would not have were it not for the community of allies and resources that crossed his path. This is in fact, sj’s story. sj did not know, understand, or have the language to recognize sj was a transgender man due to a lack of exposure. Miller calls this a “recognition gap” (p. 4). sj states that “this book was written, as an attempt to bring trans* and gender creative recognition and legibility into schools. In this collection, authors model exciting and innovative approaches for teaching, affirming, and recognizing trans* and gender creative youth across pre-K-12th grades” (p. 5). Miller and chapter authors do achieve the purpose of the book, which is to bring awareness to trans* and gender creative youth’s lives through engaging lessons, by writing in a format that is accessible to practitioners, community activists, and researchers alike. The addition of the (a) before gender and sexuality throughout the book brings awareness to gender (or agender) and sexuality (or asexuality) in the classroom, and helps to close this recognition gap.

Each chapter in this edited volume presents a lesson or a unit that addresses one more of the ten principles of the Queer Literacy Framework (QLF), with specific commitments that educators can make to create a more affirming classroom environment for their transgender and gender creative youth. QLF consists of ten principles designed to prepare educators that can address (a)gender and (a)sexuality in the classroom, such as not assuming that a student has a gender or sexuality, being an advocate, relating the social construction of gender to their disciplines, among other principles. For those of us who have not been exposed to the QLF, a figure with the detailed framework is shown on page thirty-six of the book that explains each principle. Each chapter begins with the QLF principle(s) addressed, continues with either a study or vignette and rationale, followed by an overview of a lesson that can be taught at different levels, from elementary to high school. Most lessons are rich, detailed, and make use of best practice strategies commonly used in the classroom. For example, Chapter 4 addresses Kindergarten English/Language Arts objectives

like identifying main characters and their characteristics, understanding vocabulary tied to the story, and forming judgment about the characters through the book *I Am Jazz*. Lesson objectives include making predictions based on the book's cover to understanding bullying vocabulary. Assessments of student learning give educators evidence for whether or not the students has accomplished the lesson's objective.

The majority of the book's chapters contain essential questions that address (a)gender identity and (a)sexual orientation, while being broad enough so that teachers can implement them in their own classrooms. Chapter four, for example, calls these "enduring understandings" (p. 68). Some of these enduring understandings include being comfortable with difference and understanding that anatomy might not always be equivalent with gender identity. Some chapters also use LGBTQ-themed books as instructional tools, which centered around the lives of transgender and gender creative youth, such as *I Am Jazz* (in Chapter 4), *Parrotfish*, *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*, *What Happened to Lani Garver*, *Some Assembly Required*, and *Rethinking Normal*, (all in Chapter 7) among others.

This edited collection contains 15 chapters total. Chapters 1 and 2 serve as introductions to the book and the QLF. Chapter 3 highlights two research studies where pre-service and in-service teachers were given a Likert-type survey with self-efficacy questions regarding LGBTQ issues, and a lesson that teacher educators can use to address (a)gender and (a)sexuality with their students. Chapter 4 targets kindergarten, while chapters 5 and 7 explicitly focus on the broader elementary classroom. Chapters 6 and 10 through 15 discuss the secondary classroom. Chapter 8 gives a look into the lived reality of educators in the South, often the most conservative part of the United States. Chapter 9 provides a view of how QLF principles can be used to learn vocabulary terms and themes in a Japanese Foreign Language classroom through the course of two days, in whole class, small group discussions and drawings, surrounding a reading of *Michael's Diary*, a short story, and *Death by Bullying*, a short article.

At the end of the book, there is a glossary of some widely used terms used in the queer community. I can see this being useful for educators who might not be well informed on socially-acceptable language that will not trigger their trans* and gender creative students, with the disclaimer that some terms change as community visibility evolves. Additionally, there are terms that some educators, even allies, might not know can be offensive to the community, and Miller warns the reader that while some may have reclaimed specific term, for others, they still might be offensive. Some of the examples discussed in the glossary include use of the terms "transgender", "intersex", "crip", and "queer."

One of the major strengths of this book is the practical value it has for academics, teachers, parents, and administrators alike. Each chapter, after the introduction, includes a lesson plan with a thorough explanation of what is to be learned, tying it to the Common Core Standards and the QLF. It also gives rationales for what to say when a child asks a question that the teacher might not know the answer to or how to respond to an administration that might not be supportive. This book would also be very useful for practitioners and community organizers/activists that work with trans* and gender creative youth.

Having worked as a high school mathematics teacher, I had hoped to see examples of how the QLF could be addressed with mathematics and science educators. Miller addresses this concern toward the end when he writes, "While this book includes examples about how to teach, affirm, and support the recognition of trans* and gender creative youth for uptake by literacy educators, pre- and in-service teachers for only a few disciplines, a hope is for other disciplines across all grade levels to also apply the QLF to math, science, the humanities, technology, history, physical education, and so on" (p. 293). The concluding chapter includes a series of recommendations for pre-service teacher educators, in-service teachers, schools, districts, and community activists that wish to see a more trans* inclusive

society. For example, Miller suggests that research focus on trans* pedagogy in addition to trans* and gender creative youth, the inclusion of these with pre-service and in-service educators, having district specialists include policy safety recommendations for trans* and gender creative youth in conjunction with the teachers, and the recognition of the whole support system.

Overall, this edited collection is a great resource for pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as teacher educators and community activists that work with youth. Indeed, more work needs to be done to tie in QLF, especially in STEM contexts, but it is definitely a great start to this very complex conversation that we are starting to have with youth through curriculum. This important book takes up the call to listen our students and their hunger for learning more about (a)gender and (a)sexual orientation in the classroom. At times, depending on the audience, the book might read as a bit too academic, but most of the chapter authors do a good job at tying academic content back to a specific objective and activity making it practical and accessible. Collectively, the authors also do a good job at addressing possible scenarios and providing concrete implications for practitioners making it an important and novel contribution to the field of LGBT youth studies.

ORCID

Mario I. Suárez  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6008-1664>

References

- Andrews, A. (2015). *Some assembly required: The not-so-secret life of a transgender teen*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Cronn-Mills, K. (2012). *Beautiful music for ugly children*. Minnesota: Flux.
- Herthel, J., & Jennings, J. (2014). *I am Jazz*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.
- Hill, K. R. (2015). *Rethinking normal: A memoir in transition*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Miller, S. (2016). *Teaching, affirming, and recognizing trans and gender creative youth: A queer literacy framework*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Plum-Ucci, C. (2002). *What happened to Lani Garver*. Orlando: Harcourt.
- Wittlinger, E. (2007). *Parrotfish*. New York: Simon & Schuster.