



# TEACHING, AFFIRMING, AND RECOGNIZING TRANS AND GENDER CREATIVE YOUTH

*A Queer Literacy Framework*

sj Miller

QUEER  
STUDIES &  
EDUCATION

**Series Editors**  
William F. Pinar  
Nelson M. Rodriguez,  
& Reta Ugena Whitlock



# Queer Studies and Education

Series Editors

William F. Pinar

Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, BC, Canada

Nelson M. Rodriguez

Department of Women's, Gender,  
and Sexuality Studies  
The College of New Jersey  
Ewing, NJ, USA

Reta Ugena Whitlock

Department of Educational Leadership  
Kennesaw State University  
Kennesaw, Georgia, USA

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sj Miller

Editor

# Teaching, Affirming, and Recognizing Trans\* and Gender Creative Youth

A Queer Literacy Framework

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*Editor*

sj Miller

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*The world changes in direct proportion to the number of people  
willing to be honest about their lives.*

Armistead Maupin

*This work is dedicated to all trans\*, queer, and gender creative  
youth whose lives have been lost in the war of misrecognition and  
misunderstanding. May your deaths not be in vain. May we draw hope  
from your darkest moments. May this work offer some attempt to heal your  
friends and families who lost you far too soon.*

*We are here. We hear you. And, we are so, so sorry.*

*A Note On The Book's Title*

*The asterisk has been removed from “trans\*” on the cover to avoid errors in older electronic search systems.*

## FOREWORD

The relationship between realness and representation has been central to education for millennia. When Socrates discusses the divided line, he is critical of the act of representation for replacing the real with a pale copy. While we may not agree with his analysis, he does indicate to us the power of representation and the potential for reinscriptions to upset seemingly solid conceptions of what is real and by so doing to push us into new ways of thinking about truth, presence, and learning. Prof. sj Miller's wonderful edited collection pushes us to see the complex relationship between trans\* people and other aspects of gendered and sexuality-related identity, authenticity, representation, recognition, and contestation. In a sense, this collection works a complex divided line of its own; it destabilizes gender identity and insists on the stabilization of justice by engaging the possibilities within literacy education. Reading (really, Socrates was right on this) is an interpretive task that shatters certainty but one also embedded in understandings that precede it. The circulation of meanings, in the best pedagogical and political contexts, opens possibilities for understandings, communities, and subjectivities. In its finest practice then, literacy is a transactional event, inviting students into meaning making and showing them that their intellect, lives, and bodies matter. Miller calls on us here to ensure we recognize trans\* students and ensure their place in this energetic and challenging sort of learning community.

The authors in this collection aim to help us to think about how trans\* innovations to teaching and learning can enhance student criticality and encourage equitable education. Encouraging students to understand the multiplicity of interpretations and experiences in their midst provides



them not only with contexts for intellectual growth, but it also invites them into a world characterized in and through diverse perspectives and experiences. But schools may also be experienced as contexts that perpetually stress the right way to be, think, and act. In this sort of constrained institutional environment, perhaps too intent on accountability more than on students flourishing, the play of gender, the reversals of readings, and other resistant actions become suppressed by restrictive pedagogies, narrow curricula, and inequitable practices.

Queer and trans\* theories have helped show us generative refusal of stability both in the context of meaning and subjectivity. This book shows how pedagogies based in those refusals can counter institutional omissions and welcome trans\* students into schools, as well as encourage trans\* allies to create equitable lessons and classrooms. Many educators are of course troubled by the exclusions written into school policy and practice. We can cite multiple examples of exclusions from the perpetual underserving of lower-income communities of color to more specific instances. We can cite the connections among exclusions; the outlawing of ethnic studies in Arizona; the fake prom in Mississippi held for queer kids and students with disabilities; and, the initial refusal of the principal of Sakia Gunn, who was African American and gender-nonconforming, to allow a moment of silence to mark her murder. Schools, all too often, are contexts for damaging refusals: refusal to recognize language and cultural diversity, refusal to mitigate divisive disciplinary policies, refusal to recognize gender identity diversity, and, the refusal to be inclusive of embodied and intellectual diversities. The added damage of these refusals of schools to sufficiently care for trans\* and gender-nonconforming students may be seen in the disproportionate rates of bias and violence they experience, including especially the violence experienced by trans women of color. While schools will not solve everything, they are nonetheless institutions that can reflect the better hope for futures without violence through becoming more inclusive and welcoming places of and for difference.

This collection encourages educators to become more finely attuned to the play of meaning in texts and to the necessity for respect for the vast diversity of student identities. It encourages us to understand as well that trans\* students are adept critical readers of social and embodied possibility, able to think at young ages about who they are and want to be. And one hopes that with more books like this groundbreaking collection, educators will be increasingly able to help young people negotiate what seems to be, sometimes, hopefully, a more welcoming society. Young trans

people are coming out earlier and more often. Our task is to ensure that they are met with care and recognition of their complex work with and through genders, and to ensure they have access to educational contexts that encourage their flourishing, their creativity, and their potential to continue to help us all to think, read, and live gender better.

Cris Mayo  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Together, through the relationship between families and teachers, trans and gender creative youth *are* the hope for our future by embodying the change that can shift the genderscape of society.

The original version of this book was revised.

An erratum to this book can be found at  
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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: The Role of Recognition

*sj Miller*

*It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.*

-W.E.B. Du Bois (1903)

*I do not want to explain myself to others over and over again. I just want to be seen.*

-sj

At one year of age, Blue is a curious and precocious pre-toddler, feeling her way through the world, putting everything in sight in her mouth, and grabbing spoons and using the family dog as a drum. Blue runs around *a lot*. In fact, Blue runs around so much, her family predicts Blue will become a phenomenal runner or some type of athlete. It is the early 1970s so Blue's parents dress her in gaudy suede jumpers with bling, pink socks, and clogs. Sort of a mismatch to the identity Blue has begun to exhibit.

At two, Blue's affinity for running has accelerated. Now, Blue runs after the dog, the neighbor, the birds, and right out of the door, into the yard,

---

sj Miller (✉)  
Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA

and even the street. Blue's mom supports these adventurous pursuits, but Blue's dad does not think it's appropriate for *his daughter* to behave this way, and even asserts, "I don't want my daughter to be a tomboy." Blue is just being Blue.

From ages three to five, Blue looks like a boy. Her hair fro'd, her now tube socks hiked up to her knees, her cutoffs pretty hideous even for the 1970s, and her appearance, masculine. Blue likes to watch her father pee standing up, and when alone, tries to emulate the behavior, but with limited success, and lots of splatter on the floor. Blue likes to watch her father shaving, and when alone, smears toothpaste on her face and traces it off with strokes of her toothbrush. She is far more successful with this task than the attempts at urinating. Blue likes to ride her Huffy BMX bike around the neighborhood and bring food home to her mom and sister when her dad is late home from work. Blue steps into a caregiving role, quite naturally, because it is just what feels *right*.

Blue loves playing football topless in the streets like the other boys do, and seems to be living life in a way that just *seems* right and normal. Then one day Blue runs into the house screaming, "I want to be a boy!" Blue's parents do not understand these words, but actually maybe they do. In response, Blue's dad begins to gender Blue by reminding her of her gender in passive-aggressive ways. For special events, he wrestles Blue into dresses and heels, only for Blue to then throw her body into dog shit and roll around in it. Then Blue's dad beats Blue and dresses her up again. Helpless and in tears, Blue's mom, watched passively as her only recourse. To different degrees, this family battle would play out for the next forty years.

At the age of five, Blue enters school. Blue has mostly boys as friends and enacts behavior typical of other boys. Blue plays sports during recess, sits with the boys at lunch, *tries* to pee in the boy's restroom, and only wants to be in classroom groups with other boys. The only gender marker to reveal that Blue is a girl is her clothing and the colors, those that typically demarcate girls' identities. Blue doesn't understand when the class is separated into groups based on gender and why she is put into the groups with other girls. After all, Blue feels like a boy, thinks she is a boy, and is treated like a boy by other boys in school.

As Blue goes through her primary and secondary schooling years, gender was not on the radar in her teachers' classrooms. Music, dating, film, and athletics are the only aspects of her life, outside of her family, that gives Blue sources to understand her gender confusion. Blue is drawn to musicians for unconscious reasons. For Blue, the artists and bands she

is most drawn to, like Morrissey (the Smiths), Adam Ant, David Byrne, Tracy Chapman, Boy George, Depeche Mode, the Talking Heads, Kate Bush, Pet Shop Boys, Erasure, Trio, Oingo Boingo, New Order, Yaz, and David Bowie seem to express challenges to the gender binary through both looks *and* lyrics. Blue's favorite musician is Robert Smith, lead singer of The Cure. Smith dresses in black, has disheveled hair, wears lipstick, and occasionally even dresses. Smith's lyrics are poetic, dark, and forlorn but they bring meaning, order, and respite to Blue. Blue listens to everything produced by The Cure until it drowns out the negative thoughts about Blue's internal gender struggle. The Cure *is* the cure.

Throughout high school, Blue dates males. Blue doesn't understand her feelings but is drawn to boys, as if she herself is one. She has many close female friends and is attracted to some of them, but not from the identity of female; she is drawn to them as if she *is* male. So she continues to live her life, dates males, acquires friends along a continuum of genders and with queered identities—gay, lesbian, bisexual, and straight. All of this just feels *normal* to Blue. The unconscious urges to be with males, as a male, remain unrelenting but she does not know how to talk about them. None of her teachers address gender or sexual identity in her classes. She reads no texts, sees no examples of herself or others that could possibly help her understand who she is. Even with friends and teachers she adored, she is lost at school.

Blue turns to film for reasons similar to music. Films assuage a curiosity that gives visual recognition to different identities in the world. Without the language to support the unconscious emotionality Blue feels, films such as *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *I've Heard the Mermaid Singing*, and all films by Ivory Merchant Productions become running stills that shape and inform who Blue is becoming. Many of the characters in the films, and the actors who illuminate them, give calm to the raging storm brewing inside Blue.

Soccer and swimming, two stabilizing factors for Blue's identity development throughout secondary school, provide critical spaces and opportunities to release pain and confusion. Again, without the language to know what Blue feels inside, these sports calm the inner rage. Blue is a better-than-average swimmer and often places in the top five at meets in both freestyle and butterfly sprints. Blue's natural talent as a runner is channeled into soccer, and Blue is a *star*. As a forward, Blue breaks district and state records, leads her team to compete at the state level, and becomes the first female All-American in her state. Six top academic and

Division 1 schools offer her scholarships. She chooses Cal-Berkeley. With memories of her family, music, friends, teachers, school, and film, Blue leaves for college—it is 1988. The future is unknown, and it would take Blue until age forty, twenty-two years later, to come to terms with her gender confusion....

## RECOGNITION

The struggle for recognition is at the core of human identity. With social positioning as the presumed or “normative” condition, those whose gender identities fall outside of the binary tend to be misrecognized and misunderstood and suffer from what I call a *recognition gap*, much as I did in my childhood and adolescence, when I was *Blue*.

Misrecognition subverts the possibility to be made credible, legible, or to be read and/or truly understood. When one is misrecognized, it is altogether difficult to hold a positive self-image, knowing that others may hold a different or negative image (Harris-Perry 2011). When the presumed normative condition is challenged though, a corollary emerges; this suggests that at the base of the human condition, people are in search of positive recognition, to be seen as “normal,” because it validates their humanity.

Looking back into *my* youth, there was no common language for society to help people understand gender confusion, or if there was it was not brought into my life. This leaves me little room to wonder why a core group of my peers in high school and even in college—many who felt similar to me—have only come to identify themselves as trans\*<sup>1</sup> or gender creative<sup>2</sup> later in their lives. As language and understanding around trans\* and gender creative identities have become part of the social fabric of society, youth have had more access to recent changes in health care and therapeutic services that have supported them in their processes of becoming and coming to terms with their true selves. These opportunities for visibility have galvanized a movement fortifying validation and generating opportunities for both personal and social recognition. Now, we see more trans\* and gender creative people portrayed positively in the media. With individuals such as Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, Chaz Bono, Aydian Dowling, Scott Turner Schofield, Ian Harvey, and Caitlyn Jenner, and TV shows such as *Transparent*, *Becoming Us*, *Orange Is the New Black*, *The Fosters*, and *I am Jazz*, just to name a few, we see a growing media presence. With an estimated 700,000 trans\* people now living in the USA,

there is even the “Out Trans 100,” an annual award given to individuals who demonstrate courage through their efforts to promote visibility in their professions and communities. But, where teacher education still falls short is in how to support pre-K-12 teachers about how to integrate and normalize instruction that affirms and recognizes trans\* and gender creative youth. These identities are nearly invisible in curriculum and in the Common Core Standards. That is why 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.

To understand the role of recognition in school, this work draws inspiration from W.E.B. Du Bois who, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, wrote about the struggle for Black recognition and validation in USA. In this book, Du Bois (1903) describes a double consciousness, that sense of simultaneously holding up two images of the self, the internal and the external, while always trying to compose and reconcile one’s identity. He concerns himself with how the disintegration of the two generates internal strife and confusion about a positive sense of self-worth, just as I shared in my story.

Similar to what Du Bois names as a source for internal strife, youth who live outside of the gender binary and challenge traditionally entrenched forms of gender expression, such as trans\* and gender creative youth, experience a double consciousness. As they strive and yearn to be positively recognized by peers, teachers, and family members, they experience macroaggressions, because of their systemic reinforcement, and are forced to placate others by representing themselves in incomplete or false ways that they believe will be seen as socially acceptable in order to survive a school day. Such false fronts or defensive strategies are emotionally and cognitively exhausting and difficult (Miller et al. 2013), otherwise known as *emotional labor* (Hochschild 1983; Nadal et al. 2010; Nordmarken 2012); trans\* and gender creative youth are thereby positioned by the school system to sustain a learned or detached tolerance to buffer the self against the countless microaggressions experienced throughout a typical school day. In fact while research from Gay, Lesbian & Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) (2008, 2010, 2014) reveals that at the secondary level trans\* youth experience nearly the *highest* rates of bullying in schools, even more startling, painful, and of grave concern is that trans\* youth of color, when combined with a queer sexual orientation, experience *the* highest rates of school violence.



When school climates support and privilege the normalization of heterosexist, cisgender, Eurocentric, unidimensional (i.e., non-intersectional), or gender normative beliefs—even unconsciously—it forces students who fall outside of those dominant identifiers to focus on simple *survival* rather than on *success and fulfillment in school* (Miller 2012; Miller and Gilligan 2014). When school is neither safe nor affirming, or lacks a pedagogy of recognition, it leaves little to the imagination why trans\* and gender creative youth are suffering. As potential remedy to disrupt this double consciousness and an erasure of such youth, a trans\* pedagogy emerges from these urgent realities and demands for immediate social, educational, and personal change and transformation. Such legitimacies of the human spirit, when affirmed by and through a trans\* pedagogy, invite trans\* and gender creative youth to see their intra, inter, and social value mirrored, and to experience (a)gender<sup>3</sup> self-determination and justice. My hope for the millennial generation of trans\* and gender creative youth is that they can start living the lives they were meant to have from an early age, be affirmed and recognized for who they are, and not wait a lifetime to find themselves. Educating teachers (and parents) and school personnel across grade levels is an intervention and potential remedy. For schooling to truly integrate and embed gender justice into curriculum, it is important to understand the history of gender injustice that led us to the present day. When Edmund Burke spoke the words “Those who don’t know history are doomed to repeat it,” little did he know the importance of how their potential prophecy would manifest for specific populations of humanity.

### ATTEMPTS AT TRANS\* ERASURE

While nearly thirty years of research about the criticality of bridging lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning issues (Quinn and Meiners 2011) to school curriculum has been well documented, education remains without a large-scale study of how schools of education are preparing preservice teachers to address and incorporate topics for the *millennial* generation lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, agender/asexual, gender creative, and questioning youth (LGBTIAGCQ<sup>M</sup>)<sup>4</sup> (Miller 2015). There is, however, a growing body of pre-K-16 LGBTIAGCQ research across various geographical contexts of preservice teacher preparedness. Studies include teachers’ personal beliefs (Meyer 2007; Miller 2014; Robinson and Ferfolja 2001a, b; Schmidt et al. 2012); teaching and queering disciplinary literacy (Athanases 1996; Blackburn and

Buckley 2005; Clark and Blackburn 2009; Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth 2013; Schmidt 2010); preparing teachers to teach queer youth of color (Blackburn and McCready 2013; Cammarota 2007; McCready 2007); program effectiveness on preparing teachers to teach LGBTQV issues (Griffin and Ouellett 2003; Szalacha 2004); and of key relevance to this book, challenges to gender norms (Miller 2009; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; Mayo 2004, 2007; Robinson 2005; Savage and Harley 2009). Absent from this list is both glaring and recognizable—supporting teachers who work with or will work with trans\* and gender creative youth. While previous work has been concerned with gender normativity and has focused on trans\* issues in the midst as part of LGBTQ work, this book takes supporting trans\* and gender creative students as its primary and concerted function.

Historically, society has tried to erase trans\* people but in this attempt at erasure, trans\* identities and visibility (Namaste 2000) have actually been produced. In this production though, society writ large has experienced a grand anxiety (Miller 2015), and trans\* and gender creative youth are the resultant victims of this anxiety. In schools therefore, such youth experience inurement because of this larger lack of systemic recognition and legibility. This production of invisibility of trans\* and gender creative youth has generated a movement toward greater visibility, and such visibility is where this work asserts that a trans\* pedagogy must be produced to sustain the personal and social legitimacy of trans\* and gender creative youth as both recognizable and validated.

Such polemics usher in the urgent concern about what schools and teachers can do to not only recognize the presence of trans\* and gender creative students in their classrooms, but how to sustain safe, affirming, and inclusive classrooms across myriad sociocultural and linguistic contexts. Through a *queer literacy framework* (QLF) (Miller 2015, 2016, forthcoming), a framework guided by ten principles and subsequent commitments about how to recognize, honor, and affirm trans\* and gender creative youth, the next chapter presents how teachers can use *trans\** pedagogy and sustain curriculum in order to mediate safe, inclusive, and affirming classroom contexts. Drawing then from parts of the QLF, the book offers pre-K-12 teachers a select sample of strategies that cut across social, economic, cultural, and linguistic contexts to support their students about how to understand and read (a)gender through a queer lens; how to rework social and classroom norms where bodies with differential realities in classrooms are legitimated and made legible

to self and other; how to shift classroom contexts for reading (a)gender; and how to support classroom students toward personal, educational, and social legitimacy through understanding the value of (a)gender self-determination and justice.<sup>5</sup>

## A TRANS\* PEDAGOGY AND A THEORY OF TRANS\*NESS

First, we begin with why a trans\* pedagogy matters? We know that in schools, trans\* and gender creative youth have identities that are “made” vulnerable to incurring the highest rates among their peers of bullying, harassment, truancy, dropping out, mental health issues (Kosciw et al. 2010; Miller et al. 2013), and suicidal ideation (Ybarra et al. 2014). Such deleterious realities beget a deeper and more systemic issue that unearths how underprepared teachers and schools are equipped to mediate learning that affirms and creates and then *sustains* classrooms of recognition and school spaces *for all* (Jennings 2014; Quinn and Meiners 2011). While many tropes about trans\* and gender creative youth focus on their suffering, this project hopes to advance a different narrative that calls for recognition, stemming from a misrecognition. Some argue that we cannot have pedagogy without theory but in this case, I operate from the premise that youth need recognition in classrooms and schools, and from within that indeterminate context, a theory of trans\*ness emerges. By creating a pedagogy for *trans\*ness*, a pedagogy built upon and by rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guittari 1987; Miller 2014), spatiality and hybridity, and geospatial (Miller 2014; Soja 2010) theories, this work seeks to inspire a school climate that advances and graduates self-determined youth whose bodies become *spatially agentive* (Miller 2014), who can shift deeply entrenched binary opinions about gender through a deepening of human awareness, thus revealing that identities are multitudinous and on an ever-changing path in search of love and recognition.

A trans\* pedagogy first and foremost presumes axioms (see Table 1.1) that can both validate trans\* and gender creative youth and support their legitimacy and readability in schools and form the foundation for a trans\* pedagogy. For instance:

### *What Does Trans\* Mean?*

The word trans\* infers to cut across or go between, to go over or beyond or away from, spaces and/or identities. It is also about integrating new

ideas and concepts and new knowledges. Trans\* is therefore comprised of multitudes, a moving away or a *refusal* to accept essentialized constructions of spaces, ideas, genders, or identities. It is within this confluence or mash-up that the self can be made and remade, always in perpetual construction and deconstruction, thereby having agency to create and draw the self into identity(ies) that the individual can recognize. But self-recognition is not enough because, as Butler (2004) suggests, human value is context based, and one's happiness and success are dependent on social legibility (p. 32). Therefore, the possibility of becoming *self-determined* presumes the right to make choices to self-identify in a way that authenticates one's self-expression and self-acceptance, rejects an imposition to be externally controlled, defined, or regulated, and can unsettle knowledge to generate new possibilities of legibility.

Self-determination resides in the rhetorical quality of the "master's" discourse (Butler 2004, p. 163). This is problematic when the "master's" (i.e., in this case the teacher or the school) discourse lacks deep understanding about how to integrate new knowledges that affirm trans\* and gender creative youth. Therefore, this theory of trans\*ness suggests that for new knowledges to emerge, classrooms must be thought of and taught rhizomatically, or as a networked space where relationships intersect, are concentric, do not intersect, can be parallel, non-parallel, perpendicular, obtuse, and fragmented (Miller 2014). Arising from this plan then, trans\* as a theoretical concept connects to spatiality and hybridity studies that have focused on how literacy practices position student identities (Brandt and Clinton 2002; Latour 1996; Leander and Sheehy 2004; McCarthy

**Table 1.1** Axioms for a trans\* pedagogy

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- We live in a time we never made, gender norms predate our existence;
  - Nongender and sexual "differences" have been around forever but norms operate to pathologize and delegitimize them;
  - Children's self-determination is taken away early when gender is inscribed onto them. Their bodies/minds become unknowing participants in a roulette of gender norms;
  - Children have rights to their own (a)gender legibility;
  - Binary views on gender are potentially damaging;
  - Gender must be dislodged/unhinged from sexuality;
  - Humans have agency;
  - We must move away from pathologizing beliefs that police humanity;
  - Humans deserve positive recognition and acknowledgment for who they are;
  - We are all entitled to the same basic human rights; and,
  - Life should be livable for all.
-

and Moje 2002), and to other studies which have focused on how histories have spatial dimensions that are normalized with inequities hidden in bodies whereby bodies becomes contested sites that experience social injustice temporally and spatially (Miller and Norris 2007; Nespor 1997; Slattery 1992, 1995). This book offers readers insight on how teachers mediate these axioms that bodies are not reducible to language alone because language continuously emerges from bodies as individuals come to know themselves. Bodies can thereby generate and invent new knowledges or as Butler (2004) suggests, “The body gives rise to language and that language carries bodily aims, and performs bodily deeds that are not always understood by those who use language to accomplish certain conscious aims” (p. 199). Similarly, Foucault (1990) reminds us that the self constitutes itself in discourse with the assistance of another’s presence and speech. Therefore, when trans\* and gender creative youth experience the simultaneity of both self and social recognition, they are less likely to experience the psychic split or double consciousness that DuBois (1903) called debilitating.

Building upon these frames, a theory of trans\*ness aligns with geospatial theory mediated by a “spatial turn” (Soja 2010), or a rebalancing between social, historical, and spatial perspectives, whereby none of these domains is privileged when reading and interpreting the world (p. 3), rather, they are viewed in simultaneity. This connection between these theories therefore presumes that geographies are beholden to geohistories (Miller 2014), or the ideological practices that shape a collective history of a people and a place, revealing a society’s dominant view through acts of social justice and injustice, reinforced through policy and patterned absences of language (Massey 2005; Soja 2010). Combined, such theories inform a critical consciousness about how we read and are read by the world (Freire 1970).

### TEACHERS APPLYING A TRANS\* PEDAGOGY: CLASSROOM AS SPACE FOR RECOGNITION

The classroom as a space, encumbered by the inheritance of myriad geohistories, is shaped by the deployment of policies that typically affirm or negate the body’s drive for true expression and recognition. When policies, or a lack thereof, are made visible through discussion or units of study, such as banning a gay-straight alliance, or states that have no promo

homo laws, or do not enumerate specific kinds of bullying, or share with students that their country lacks federal anti-bullying laws, studying these macroaggressions through schools' codes of conduct and examining school climate through the eyes of students, teachers can begin to enact what I see as the strongest mediator of a trans\* pedagogy: *refusal*. Refusal is a strategy that teachers can take up to support their students in developing positive identities. Through models of refusal that will be explored in subsequent chapters throughout the book, the teachers, in drawing from the axioms, disrupt binary constructions of gender and introduce new tools that support students in their critique of the world.

### SETTING THE STAGE FOR WORKING THROUGH THE BOOK

Across the millennial generation of pre-K-12 in myriad school contexts, both nationally and internationally, we see a growing number of youth who eschew gender and sexual labels, who embody what seems to them to be self-determined authentic identities, and who are proleptically changing the landscape of school and society writ large by pushing back on antiquated gender norms. Faced with these realities, teachers across all grade levels and disciplines are challenged to mediate literacy learning that affirms these differential realities in their classrooms. That said, how can teachers move beyond discussions relegated to only gender and sexuality and toward an understanding of a continuum that also includes the (a)gender complexities students embody? How *can* teachers undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life, unhinging one from the other, and treat them as separate and distinct categories? Even more critical, how can we support emerging literacy professionals and in-service literacy teachers to develop and embody the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help *all* students learn while simultaneously supporting them to remain open to redefinition and renegotiation when they come up against social limits?

This affirming book forges a pathway for teachers who work with or will work with trans\* and gender creative youth as they address such fundamental questions and provide literacy teacher educators and subsequent researchers examples for future study through models of a flexi-sustainable<sup>6</sup> curriculum design (some aligned to standards), pedagogical knowledge and applications, and assessments across pre-K-12 literacy contexts, either/or in and out of school, by highlighting affirming texts across genres, media representations, models for inclusion and differentiation,