

## A Review of Elizabeth J. Meyer's (2025) *Queer Justice at School: A Guide for Youth Activists, Allies, and Their Teachers*

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In a short 170-page text, *Queer Justice at School: A guide for youth activists, allies, and their teachers* (2025, Teachers College Press), Elizabeth J. Meyer calls attention to the enduring need for queer justice in the K–12 school system and offers both practical ideas for *queering* schools, as well as theoretical and data-driven reasons why this work is so important.

Elizabeth J. Meyer serves as a professor and program chair in Educational Foundations at the University of Colorado, Policy and Practice. She is also the author of *Gender, Bullying, and Harassment: Strategies to End Sexism and Homophobia in Schools* (2009). In both that book and *Queer Justice*, Meyer's research focuses on gender and sexual diversity issues in K–12 education, and she works to support teachers, youth activists, and allies in advocating for queer communities in schools. Combining personal experience and research-based evidence, Meyer (2025) guides readers of *Queer Justice at Schools* through a journey of engaging in meaningful work in queer communities in and beyond institutional spaces.

As a cis, white, heterosexual woman and descendant of settlers living and working in Saskatchewan, I approach this text from a place of privilege and professional engagement. I work in the field of education as a sessional instructor at the University of Regina and the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), and I am also a master's student with my research focused on trauma-informed pedagogy. Both roles position me as a learner and a facilitator of learning. This dual perspective shapes the way I read texts like this—with a commitment to reflecting on my own practices, while also considering how the ideas might resonate with and be approached by both teacher candidates and educators in the field. Additionally, my role as a sessional instructor of teacher candidates allows me considerable influence regarding how future educators will position themselves in the field. Because of the intersection of these multiple roles, it is essential that I remain current in the challenges and solutions that are facing the education profession.

In our collective North American political and social climate, queer communities are facing an increase in hatred and attacks from the public (Adamczeski, 2025; Egale Canada, 2024; Luneau, 2023) and, as Venet (2024) claims, the “education system is not doing what our students need it to do” (p. 22). Venet (2024) goes on to argue that “kids are not broken,” so we must address “the conditions, systems, and structures that harm kids” (p. 13). Queer kids in schools are under attack, and every day it becomes increasingly important for teachers in the field to support their queer students (Hansen & Hubbard, 2025; Leung et al., 2022). Teachers “do not feel confident about respectfully engaging with LGBTQ+ issues in the classroom” (Hansen & Hubbard, 2025), and “a norm of LGBTQ silence exists in the school environment” (Leung et al., 2022). Echoing these challenges, according to Meyer (2025), “...many LGBTQIA+ students do not feel safe at school” (p. 3). Considering approximately one in four students in K–12 schools identify as queer (GLSEN, 2022), this is a significant cause for concern, making Meyer's text a sorely needed response in this political climate, especially.

While Meyer's text is situated in an American legal context, and there is a need for Canadian readers to reflect on their own legal context alongside this work, the way Meyer models the translation of legal frameworks into classroom contexts serves as a valuable example. In similarity to other North American contexts, in Saskatchewan, the “legal strategy of leveraging

parental rights has been effective in advancing individual rights over efforts to promote educational opportunity and equity in public schools” (Meyer, 2025, p. 99). Teachers, students, and families in the province are currently grappling with the effects and implications of Bill 137 (the “Parents’ Bill of Rights”), which aims to increase ‘parental involvement’ in their children’s education, including what is taught in the K–12 classroom. In addition, the Bill requires parental consent before teachers and staff in schools can use a student’s chosen name or pronouns if the student is under 16 years old (Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, 2023; Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy [JSGS], 2023). The implementation of Bill 137 is problematic, especially because it uses the notwithstanding clause, and raises significant concerns around the impact on, and rights of, the children in our province, although “the clause was meant to be used sparingly, as a ‘last resort,’ not as a routine tool to override the Charter rights” (JSGS, 2023, p. 3). Because of these public policy challenges that students and teachers in Saskatchewan are facing, the opportunity to learn from and engage with *Queer Justice in Schools* has been a timely and necessary endeavour.

Although many educators feel inclined to support queer students, there are also a significant number of educators who are not confident in what that *actually* looks like (Hansen & Hubbard, 2022; JSGS, 2023; Leung et al., 2023). Meyer (2025) offers practical insights into how teachers can approach this work in meaningful and safe ways. As a former high school teacher, Meyer saw the challenges that queer students and their advocates and allies faced in schools every day. Her goal was to respond to what the educators around her were regularly asking for: “more resources, accessible research, support, ideas, and information about how to do this kind of work with their students” (Meyer, 2025, p. xi). Suggestions are offered for a variety of situations and contexts, allowing the text to be accessible to a variety of folks. Importantly, Meyer approaches important topics with knowledge and humility.

This text is not just about supporting queer students, but also about approaching education differently. Meyer’s discussion around *queering* the curriculum (Chapter 3) and our schools is a necessary one, but begs the question – what does *queering* our schools even mean? According to Meyer (2025), “it means questioning the ways that heterosexuality and gender binaries work together to produce *cisheteronormativity* by being presented as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’” (p. 1). Queering schools involves “rethinking and pushing boundaries” (p. 33), fighting against the “banking model” of learning that “describes traditional approaches to schooling where the teacher deposits facts and knowledge in the minds of students, who are seen as passive receptacles” (p. 33), and “encourages learning that disrupts normalcy” (p. 38). Although central to the conversation, this work is not just about supporting queer kids specifically; it’s about demanding better for *all* students, recognizing curriculum violence, or “the result of classroom content and pedagogy that harms students intellectually and emotionally” (Venet, 2024, p. 32), while further recognizing the ways that teachers and school systems can perpetuate harm so that we can do better. So, while the suggestions in this text alone won’t fix the injustice that educators and students in schools are experiencing, they can help people to feel grounded and supported in the work that they are doing, while supporting *all* students in accessing a more just and equitable educational experience.

*Queer Justice at School* is Meyer’s (2025) research-informed practitioner’s guide, organized in a way that allows the reader to learn the important background of the topic first, followed by different areas of a school that can be ‘queered,’ ending in some salient strategies for action. Although many scholars agree that supporting queer students in school is a challenge,

Meyer guides readers beyond the *problem* and into some solutions that can be realistically applied in K–12 settings. Of particular interest is the way she provides ideas for teachers in multiple contexts and at a variety of stages in their own journeys of advocacy and activism. Within each section of the text, she offers theoretical information and data-informed knowledge; personal stories and experiences; concluding thoughts; discussion questions; and key terms. The structure of the text makes it easy to read and accessible to academics and educators alike, which aligns with her experience that demonstrated “that many educators and mentors want to better support youth doing this work but don’t have the time to extensively research, plan, and prepare for every meeting” (Meyer, 2025, p. xii).

Meyer is effective in her goals, providing readers with well-evidenced reasons for the importance of the work, along with data-driven information to support teachers and students in convincing others of that importance. Additionally, the strategies she provides support many different contexts and will be helpful to teachers at all levels of advocacy and allyship. Although the book reads as a collection of anecdotes, her claims are regularly supported by relevant research and experiences of others in the K-12 field. One of the ways that this text diverges from other scholarly research on the topic is that there is a heavy focus on the importance of *joy* in this work. Meyer (2025) asserts that “*Queer pedagogies* also invite us to focus on joy, pleasure, and desire or *eros* in learning” (p. 33), and she consistently models this throughout the text through her ideas for advocacy, examples of joy and resistance, and her stories of the positive impact doing this work can have. Rather than generating new information or research around queer pedagogy and the practical implications of queering curriculum and schools, Meyer offers a text that puts research into practice in a way that is accessible to folks whose hands the book should be in: classroom teachers and youth activists.

Although the text is accessible to and a strong guide for practitioners in the field, it needs to be noted that in order for *real* change to occur within our K–12 schools, the *system* needs to change. Meyer’s suggestions for teachers are practical, possible, and hopeful, but if we truly want to see safer spaces for queer youth and a queering of the way we teach, we must see systemic change within these workspaces. We must demand a more “ecological approach” (Venet, 2024, p. xv), where we pursue system shifts that address not just the needs of individuals, but “also the structures, systems, and inequalities” (p. 8) that harm both educators and students in the K–12 system. Despite the helpful strategies in the text, there are some questions left unanswered about how to truly sustain this work amidst systemic resistance and political hostility. The importance of the work in this climate is clear, but for educators and students in particularly conservative contexts, more tools for navigating that *institutional* pushback would be invaluable. This book will be especially valuable to classroom teachers, teacher educators, and youth organizers seeking practical strategies for queer-affirming educational spaces and folks who are looking to challenge the idea of what school *is* as they begin working towards turning it into what school *could be*.

Despite these minimal shortcomings, the strength of Meyer’s text lies in her ability to bridge theory and practice, what Venet (2024) refers to as tying together “research, philosophy, and rubber-meets-the-road strategies” (p. xix). Additionally, the focus on joy as resistance plays a significant role in the text, placing less emphasis on what Meyer refers to as “risk narratives,” or discussions of the harms done to the LGBTQ+ community, and more emphasis on “queer joy, rest as resistance, and freedom-dreaming” (Meyer, 2025, p. 131). Ultimately, *Queer Justice at School* is a text not meant to be analyzed from a theoretical standpoint, but one to be carried into classrooms, staff meetings, and other spaces where organizing and queer allyship live. It is a call

to action for all educators and youth allies, and activists who are ready to move away from silence and into more joyful, collective forms of resistance. Meyer leaves readers with the motivation and excitement to do the work, so “as Margaret Mead reminds us, ‘a small group of committed citizens can change the world.’ Now let’s get to it!” (p. 12).

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