

Foreword

Growing up as a transgender youth in an extremely under-resourced environment, I never had a vocabulary to talk about my feelings. There wasn't anyone I could look to and see my experiences and feelings reflected back at me. There was no discussion about gender outside the strict and binary norms that we were all expected to adhere to. These conversations don't happen for a lot of reasons. Ignorance, intolerance, apathy. But one big reason these conversations don't happen is that there isn't enough education or resources to help guide caretakers, educators, and cisgender peers.

When I came out as a boy to my mother in 2014, the closest support group was nearly two hours away. There were very few books; there were even very few websites. And what could be found often still used antiquated language, or perpetuated bad or outdated information on transitioning as a minor.

Just when I finally got over the anxiety and urgency of early transition and had begun to happily settle in to myself, I was thrust into a terrible situation by my school system. I was banned from using the boys' bathroom for being transgender, and so began a legal battle that has spanned four years and counting. The American Civil Liberties Union filed suit on my behalf, arguing that the school's bathroom policy is unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment and violates Title IX, a federal law prohibiting sex discrimination by schools. The case was granted cert at the Supreme Court before eventually moving back down into the lower courts again. In 2019, the US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia ruled that the school had violated my rights.¹

At every stage where I suffered harm, from the mistakes my mother made early in my transition to the discrimination and public humiliation I faced at the hands of my school board, quality information was desperately lacking. Some information was out there, but very little in the way of helping schools and educators navigate the experience of having a trans student. Nothing showed the humanity of trans people while also outlining how we can best support them in an educational environment.

Melinda Mangin's book *Transgender Students in Elementary School* bridges that gap in a way that is accessible and actionable. Using real-world examples, Mangin introduces you to the perspectives and lives of transgender children and the educators who lead them. She also connects these examples to guided questions, to better frame information that may well be entirely new to many people. She begins with the concept of what it means to be transgender, and goes on to show how we all can use this knowledge to create an equitable space for everyone.

Importantly, Mangin talks about these things in the context of intersectionality, describing the ways in which our backgrounds affect our experiences. She examines power structures and privilege, highlighting the ways that these strict and binary gender expectations harm us all.

I think it is more than fair to say that if a book like this existed in 2014 when I came out, I may well have had a safer and less traumatic transition. The people in my life and in my school system may have better known how to support me and the other trans kids who are in that school or who one day will be.

A single book alone will not eliminate all of these inequalities, but *Transgender Students in Elementary School* provides a baseline for a dialogue that we can all build from. The necessary societal, cultural, legislative, and educational changes all must work together to liberate trans and gender-nonconforming people, and the largest part of that starts with education. If the culture and language in the classrooms that are shaping young minds are changed fundamentally, then the world will quickly become a place where discrimination or pain because of who you are is a thing of the shameful past. Children will be exposed to far fewer instances of rigid gender norms being forced upon them, resulting in less shame, less pain, and fewer restrictions on happiness.

Mangin's book does not just start the conversation, it offers the tools to keep it going. While I transitioned several years before its publication, I remain excited to see how this book and other important resources like it can help change the landscape both within our educational system and within our society. *Transgender Students in Elementary School* will undoubtedly be a valuable and powerful tool in the hands of people who want to build a better world for the trans and gender-nonconforming people living in it.

—Gavin Grimm