



Out at School: A Verbatim Audio Play
by
Tara Goldstein, Pam Baer, and Jenny Salisbury
Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Performers and Characters

Alec Butler:	Performs himself
Brendan Chandler:	Performs Garrett, Evan, Nazbah
Sandakie Ekanayake:	Performs Mita, Kiran, Julia
Max Cameron Fearon:	Performs Dan, Ky, Skye
benjamin lee hicks:	Performs Max, Syn
Tsholo Khalema:	Performs Darian, Nim
Jorie Morrow:	Performs Mary, Brenda, May
Alanis Ortiz Espinoza:	Performs Alicia, Chantale, Jess, Nicole
Yasmin Owis:	Performs Karleen
Destiny-Mae Ramos-Alleyne:	Performs Catherine
Ryan Singh:	Performs Mohan, Michael, Ryan
Charlotte Stewart:	Performs, Sara, Shelby
Amaka Umeh:	Performs Victoria, Dawn
Ty Walkland:	Performs Ernst, Kevin

Opening music

Introduction

TARA

Hello, and welcome to *Out at School*. My name is Tara Goldstein and I am one of the creators of the play. We call *Out at School* a verbatim play because it was created from excerpts from interviews undertaken with 37 LGBTQ families living in the province of Ontario, Canada, about their experiences at school. I was the Principal Investigator of the research project that collected these interviews.

Out at School is divided into 3 parts, with each part ending with an original song composed by queer folk musician and composer Kate Reid.

At the beginning of each scene most of the characters introduce themselves and their families before beginning their monologues and dialogues. All of these introductions responded to my interview question “Tell us about your family.” Some of the names of the characters in the play are pseudonyms while others are not.

Through the audio-recording of the play, each of the performers embody people of different backgrounds, nations, identities and experiences that are not their own. They have entered into this performance with a deep respect, mindful of the families they are representing and the importance of the families’ stories.

To find about the people performing in *Out at School* please see the audio play notes on the LGBTQ Families Speak Out website: www.lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca

One final note: The recording of *Out at School* in November 2020 took place during COVID 19, at a time when the cast was not able to gather together in person. The audio sound of the play reflects our decision to virtually record the play through Zoom.

Part 1

Scene 1 – We Still Have to Fight

Jess Swance-Smith and Evan Smith

JESS

So, we have two children who live at home. And, um, Liam is our other half, um he, or -

EVAN

Other third.

JESS

Other third. (*General laughter*). Yah.

JESS

I'm really excited for your project. And, I really hope that it has, um, a really big impact for the future teachers. Um, because they're getting a group of kids who are growing up in this kind of weird society where, you know, there's lots of identities around. There's lots of family makeups, community makeups. So, they're really going to have to navigate themselves around what society has presented them and what community they're in at that point.

EVAN SMITH

I mean, it's especially important work, because I think sometimes in Toronto, we think that, you know, we're so accepting and everything's great. And, um, you look at the protests and stuff that happened around the sex ed curriculum change, and, I mean, it just sort of drives home that really, we still have to fight for our families to be recognized and legitimized. And I think, like Jess said, the kids that are sort of coming into the school system now are growing up in such a different culture than, you know, someone our ages did in terms of queer acceptance. I mean, in our friend group, I'd say eighty percent of our friends are poly, right? And, lots of them have kids and are raising kids together and so I mean it's just – it's so different than what it was. But, the institutions that I think our families have to interact with, I mean, are still, I mean, it's going to take a long time to catch up.

Scene 2 – It's a constant questioning
Catherine Hernandez

CATHERINE HERNANDEZ

Well, our family is a blended queer family. Uh, we have a thirteen-year-old daughter, and there's us two who are monogamous partners. And, we're married.

Because we are an Indigenous household, we have to be constantly unlearning things. And thankfully we have a kid who is perfectly fine with unlearning. She's grown up in a household where she knows when she comes home she's gonna be getting a completely different story, and that's part of being queer, you know. It's that queer is not just our sexuality, it's a constant questioning of where we are placed in society.

I remember when my daughter was about, um, seven-ish, I think, her teacher said, when they were doing Aboriginal Studies, they said, um, "Indigenous folks live on reservations because the government put them where nature could thrive."

Who says that? I mean, I cannot believe that a teacher would believe that. That there's some sort of place with like rainbows and unicorns and, and, you know, pastures and clean water that they are imagining are happening on reservations. I'm just appalled that a teacher would believe that, that 'nature thrives on a reservation.' I'm just, like, I'm really concerned about, like, what kind of education this teacher received.

So of course, my daughter, being a queer spawn, decided "I would like to do a project that is the complete opposite of this." So she made a project, presented it to the teacher, about residential schools and, like, that's what she wanted to focus on because she felt that other kids would connect to that particular subject matter when it comes to Indigenous history.

And the teacher refused to acknowledge it. Thankfully the daycare we go to, where there is a very high Indigenous population, put it up. And, my daughter was very proud of herself.

Scene 3 – When it’s unsafe for trans kids to be out

Dawn, Julia, and Ky

DAWN

Um, so like, in my family that I live with, it’s me and I have two daughters. My older daughter is 10, and she’s cisgender, and my younger daughter is 8 and a half and she identifies as a trans girl. And then, they have a dad, but he doesn’t live with us.

Kids are smart, they really pick up on the cues from the adults. Like, some kids, especially if their parents don’t support them, they will change themselves if they pick up any kind of cues from the adults that the adults aren’t comfortable. So, the kid will think, “Well, this adult’s not comfortable with me being trans, so I’ll just present as cisgender to this person.” They can tell who is a safe person and who isn’t a safe person a lot quicker than you realize. So, you may have lost your chance if you don’t--if you create an unsafe space.

There are a lot of things that people do without realizing that they’re doing it that make it unsafe for trans kids to be out. Like the language that you use, like saying “boys” or “girls” instead of “kids” or “children.” And, dividing the class, like, boys over here, girls over here. Because that happened to my child. I was on a field trip and it’s like, “Okay, boys line up here and girls line up here.” And then, my child was, like, literally standing in between the two lines with this frantic look. And then, stood in the girls’ line. This was the first year of her transition, when she was only six, and everyone kinda laughed. Like, they didn’t laugh at her, but, they laughed thinking that she was just being funny. But, I think that’s a difficult situation because not everybody identifies as a boy or a girl. So, divide people in groups in different ways. Also, talk about these things, have the books in the classroom. Somebody may feel safe talking to you if you make a safe environment.

JULIA

Um well, I have two moms, And a step-mom, and two older sisters. Who are like, half-sisters, but full sisters. But I’m the only person that I know who had a known donor.

So, my school, because we’re so small, we don’t have a super official GSA. Um, but there’s a lot of kids who identify in some way as LGBTQ plus. There’s a lot of kids who, um, especially in such a small school, don’t really feel like they can come out or say who they are. And there’s a lot of gay kids and a lot of bi kids. Over the past two years one of my friends realized that they were trans, or um, non-binary, and they wanted to go by a different name, and they didn’t feel very comfortable, like, telling the teachers that. I found that a lot kids who didn’t grow up with [two moms like I did] or perhaps don’t have parents who would accept them, don’t know how to speak out for themselves. I tend to be very aggressive and help use my voice of confidence that I’ve always had to help them with their situation.

KY

I came out as a gay trans man. My best friend and I restarted the GSA. We took the teacher that was running the social justice clubs and we said to her "we need to have a proper GSA and if you don't have anyone to run it, if that's the problem, we will do it." So, we created a student-led GSA.

I think that the teachers and principals need to stop viewing themselves as the authority and start listening to and learning from the students. They could help them make the school a better place. Help them access the resources that will help improve the school. But unfortunately, it doesn't get done that often.

Scene 4 – I need you to respect my family
Catherine Hernandez, Nicole Tanugay and Mita Hans

CATHERINE HERNANDEZ

When my daughter told me she was being bullied in elementary school, I went to the principal and told her what was going on, and that my daughter was a little scared to be able to come forward and to express her situation--that she's being bullied at school for having a mom that was queer. I said, "She's a little scared. She's a little bit worried about coming forward, so I'm coming forward to you on her behalf, so could we have a meeting."

Now, instead of having a meeting with me, she goes behind my back, takes my daughter out of class and sits her down in her office, as though she's in trouble, and says, "Your mom said this, this and this, so I need to know all the details now" as if she's in trouble. And, my daughter, of course, she's just a little kid, she just froze and she says, "I don't think my mom knows what she's talking about. That's not true". So, the principal calls me and says, "So, she said that nothing happened, that you didn't know what you were talking about." And so, when I talked to my daughter again she, of course, said, "It's just 'cause I'm scared."

NICOLE TANUGAY

My sister found herself pregnant and said, "I'm very nervous about this." She said, "You're the mom figure in the family, I am so not a mom and I will only have this child if you decide to be a part of this process--for the whole process." So we said, "Okay." And um, then she had her first child. And um, three years later, she had her second one.

Bullying. It happened to both of our daughters. Yeah, and it's, um, the older one was a little afraid to talk about it 'cause she didn't want to make a big scene and stuff and decided to deal with it on her own. And sometimes, the teachers wouldn't take them seriously about it, like, they would tell them, "Go deal with that. Stop coming and telling me things."

CATHERINE HERNANDEZ

So, I went back to the principal and I said, "This is the reason why." I said, "Please, can we have a conversation first before talking to my daughter?" And she said, "Well, I deal with things the way I deal with things, I've been doing this for many years." (*Laughs*) It was so frustrating. And at that point, I just gave up. I was like, "I don't have it in me." My daughter doesn't have it in her.

NICOLE TANUGAY

It was difficult for a while there. 'Cause our daughters are both very vocal, too. They'll say, you know, "So-and-so has been bullying me." And the teacher would sometimes say, "Well stop," you know, "coming to me with these problems. They'll call you a tattletale."

MITA HANS

“You need to sort it out and figure it out.” And, um, yeah, we ended up having to get involved, and say, “Okay, this is how you navigate this particular incident. This is unacceptable.” And, our daughter didn’t want to come to us, because she said, “Which one of you is going to go deal with this? I don’t want you guys dealing with this, I didn’t want you mad at me, or this person, or--” you know, “so I didn’t tell anybody.” And, she was dealing with some pretty heavy issues.

CATHERINE HERNANDEZ

But, then my daughter’s teacher happened to ask me, “So, I heard that you’re a writer, would you be interested in doing a workshop?” And I said, “Sure.” So I go in, I do a writing—not a writing workshop but a theatre workshop. So, we learned some staging, I taught them some songs –blah, blah, blah. So, it’s two days of workshop. At that time, I also owned a home daycare. So, you can imagine, I was doing both these things at the same time, having these very small children including a baby on my back. It was intense but we got through the workshop. The kids really loved it.

Then, at the very, very end, uh, when we were doing our checkout, I said, “So, I hear that some of you have been making fun of my daughter.” Because I was like, “How else am I going to get to these kids? If the principal doesn’t want me to speak to these kids directly, like, you know, what am I gonna do? What am I gonna do? How am I gonna get rid of this problem other than just speaking to them directly?” And, they had just gotten to know me. They liked my, they liked my theatre workshop. We had a relationship and that’s exactly what I said, like, “I need you to respect my family.”

I was very clear. All of them had red faces. My daughter was a little embarrassed, but I didn’t care. They just all had red faces. And I said, “I want you to understand that what you are doing is actually unconstitutional. It’s illegal, and I need it to stop.” And, the teacher had a red face, they all had red faces, and I was, like, “Thank you very much everybody, okay,” and grabbed up all my daycare kids and left. It never happened again.

MITA HANS

I would have liked to have seen an earlier intervention from the guidance counsellor, to have a - talk about, um, what’s going on and come up with creative problem solving, and perhaps have that person who is bullying them in on the conversation. And say, “What’s going on with them that’s causing this behaviour?” Behaviours don’t come up out of vacuums. So, “What is it about this kid that’s making them act out like that? Is there something going on at home for them? Are they having challenges? Are *they* being bullied? Or, or not feeling empowered somewhere? If so, how do we build them up? So that they don’t need to do this.

Scene 5 – Who’s in the room?—Part 1
Garrett Metcalfe, Syn Scully, Alicia

GARRETT METCALFE

I’ve been teaching in alternative schools probably fourteen years now. The most disengaged students are the ones we end up with. Poverty is huge, but I think most of it is just not seeing themselves in mainstream, the mainstream not meeting racialized queer students’ needs.

SYN SCULLY

Our family is pretty super queer. Teachers need to be taught how to bring up queer issues, because if they have absolutely no understanding, no background, no personal history with anybody who’s trans, they might not have any understanding of what that kid could be going through.

ALICIA

So, we’re in St. Thomas, it's a community that's about 40,000 people. So it's, it's definitely in a lot of ways still a very small town, rural kind of orientation. Every person's experience is their experience and they're the expert about that experience. I can say "I understand what transgender is, I understand transition," but I don't understand your experiences until I ask you.

GARRETT METCALFE

I don’t touch curriculum for two to three days, ever, in a course. Two to three days in just “identity.” Who’s in the room? What’s our location, right? Intersectionality of those identities, you know? “I see you. You have articulated who you are, and I see you.”

SYN SCULLY

One of the biggest harms that I think people in education can do is nothing. Caring and wanting to act, just that alone, could make a difference.

KY

I would tell the new generation of teachers that they need to take ideas and thoughts from the students and listen to what they have to say. They need to make sure the classroom is a safe space for anyone to voice their ideas.

SYN SCULLY

There’s such a spectrum with trans identities. So, I think having some of that background going in is really important. The only way that you’re going to find out is ask them. “What are your pronouns?” And, normalizing that. Not using gendered language is sometimes really hard to learn.

GARRETT METCALFE

You can call it the “getting-to-know-you,” “hug it out,” those sorts of things, but those are powerful, right? Those relationships can develop if you affirm that you see someone. Right? “I see you. You have articulated who you are, and I see you.” The identity really, really, matters. And, I think the best gift we can give students is to articulate their identity. Let them navigate those things, um, and appreciate and value them from that moment on. Then, they’ll come to school.

Scene 6 – Who’s in the room?—Part 2

Victoria Mason, Ky, Nazbah Tom

VICTORIA MASON

Um, okay so, my family, um, right now, I have one daughter. She’s thirteen years old. And um, so she’s my only nuclear family, that I live with right here. Um, other than that, I have a partner, that uh, we’ve been together since 2012, and she has two small children um, but we do not live in the same household.

We really need to create a space where LGBTQ people and families are normalized. That means that it’s talked about. It’s not that thing that we don’t talk about. It’s part of the curriculum, it’s part of the fabric of, of the school, just like the straight families are. You know what I mean? I think there has to be some intentionality.

KY

Like, I knew I was queer before I knew I was queer. I was picked on for all of my school career from - right from grade 1, up until I came out. And then even after that, I was picked on. But, I stopped giving a shit. That’s the difference. I just decided I was going to be myself. I wasn’t going to care about what anyone else was saying about me. But, for the Grade 1 to Grade 11, where I was bullied constantly every year up until then it’s - it’s very bad. Like, it is it stunts your development. It makes you feel like you’re unwanted, unheard.

NAZBAH TOM

I grew up as someone who actually was a bully in school. Um, you know, I bullied actually another girl, um, and I called her a lesbian, because I was queer, right? And, I didn’t know to put the two together. What the principal actually ended up doing, which was not a way to also handle it, was they brought me in, and they basically were like, “You either apologize here and quit this, or we bring your dad in.” And, they didn’t know my dad. Like, they didn’t know how violent he is – he was. So, in my mind I’m like, “Oh, you’re threatening me with a bigger bully, so I’m definitely stopping.” Right? So then, I totally went into like a shell. Um, and what I wish had happened was that they would have brought us in, you know, in different ways. Definitely given me the message that, you know, “You’re a good person but this behaviour needs to stop, and all of us together are gonna support you.”

Scene 7 – So far so good

Mary Evered

MARY EVERED

Sure. Um, I always want to talk about my family. Um, well I have uh, uh a wonderful partner, and we've been together for 18 years. And uh, we have a just turned 12-year-old daughter. And, a dog named Timothy. I would get in a lot of trouble if I didn't also name Timothy as a family member. So, that's our family!

My daughter is enrolled in grade 7 in a Catholic Arts High school. I have to say, um, it's been fantastic. It's always just been very positive. I, I can't think of a single instance where, where it wasn't.

When my daughter started at the school, one of the very first things I did was I, I made an appointment to see her religion teacher, a wonderful person. Um, so I sat down with her, probably in the third week of September, and, and um described our family to her. And uh, because I know, I've taught grade 7 religion before, and I know there's a component of it about family life, and human sexuality, and, and all of that kind of thing. And, I wanted the teacher to be aware of uh, the situation, you know, in my daughter's life so that any teaching around family would be inclusive of our family as well, so that my daughter would not feel like, you know, there was something bizarre about her family.

So we thought, "Okay, well, here we are pioneers, we will have to do a little extra to make sure we educate them" and it was never a huge amount of trouble.

The teacher was very receptive and very open to it. My daughter recently had to do a project on, on types of families, and that kind of thing. There was a letter that came home about, that you know, they would be discussing different sexualities and family and relational, relationship issues, and that kind of thing, just to get our permission to proceed. And you know, my daughter, like a typical pubescent 12-year old was like, "I don't wanna talk about it! Just sign it! I don't wanna--" you know. Um, which was kind of funny. But, we noticed that in, in the whole thing of, of um, of gender language and that, there was nothing about transgender people.

So, we just penciled that in. And um, you know, I haven't heard back from the teacher, I'm sure she, she's the kind of wonderful person who just, "Oh yeah, I should have done that!"

So, we just, you know, it's in those kind of quiet ways that we just, we just want to keep pushing the envelope.

Kate sings the first song of the performance: Pushing the Envelope

Pushing the Envelope by Kate Reid

Written and performed by: Kate Reid, 2017
Recorded by: Stew Crookes
Produced by: Kate Reid and Stew Crookes

Musicians

Kate Reid: Vocals, acoustic guitar
Stew Crookes: Pedal steel
Doug Friesen: Stand-up and electric bass
Roger Travassos: Percussion

Verse 1

The same old question runs around in my mind
Should I speak or should I just keep quiet?
As though I owe them some kind of
Disclosure or explanation
Every single time and in every single situation.

Verse 2

Some people don't even have think about it
They don't look beyond their own realities
How can we make sense of ourselves in this absence
That's present everyday?
It's like we're fighting something bigger than we can name.

Chorus

One day we won't need to be
Pushing the envelope
We won't be represented by
Permission slips home
And it won't be trendy
To advertise our families
And we won't be legitimized
By posters on a wall.

Verse 3

I don't see myself amongst these pages
The people I love are nowhere to be found
Will someone please explain all this controversy around the word "family"?
Because I know that love and community create kinship, too
Anytime you bend the gender rules folks tend to notice
They always want to put you back in the box
What would it mean to live without the fear of being interrogated
To be free to articulate our bodies any way we want?

Chorus

One day we won't need to be
Pushing the envelope
We won't be represented by
Permission slips home
And it won't be trendy
To advertise our families
And we won't be legitimized
By posters on a wall.

Verse 4

And I still feel this tension between
Wanting to be accepted
And wanting to let my freak flag fly
But I'm not a character in their narrative (focus in on the intensity)
And I won't rehearse their lines for them
I'm writing a new script for you and me
About the beauty
Of non-conformity

Verse 5

We weave ourselves into the fabric of this world
Disrupting constructions of "boy" and "girl" and "boy-meets-girl"
Changing language and policy
Celebrating families, loved ones, and identities
If we raise our voices strong, we shall overcome.

Chorus (twice)

One day we won't need to be
Pushing the envelope
We won't be represented by
Permission slips home
And it won't be trendy
To advertise our families
And we won't be legitimized
By posters on a wall.

End of Part 1**Outro**

Thank you for listening to Part 1 of *Out at School*. Part 2 continues with scene 8. If you are interested in hearing more about the experiences of LGBTQ families at school, please go to our website: www.lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca

Closing music.

Part 2

Introduction

TARA

Hello, and welcome to *Out at School*. My name is Tara Goldstein and I am one of the creators of the play. We call *Out at School* a verbatim play because it was created from excerpts from interviews undertaken with 37 LGBTQ families living in the province of Ontario, Canada, about their experiences at school. I was the Principal Investigator of the research project that collected these interviews.

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Scene 8 – Outing my kids
Karleen Pendleton Jiménez

KARLEEN PENDLETON JIMÉNEZ

Um, okay. I have my girlfriend. We've been together actually since she was pregnant with my 17-year old step-daughter, and we also have a 19-year old who is going to be 20 this month. And, we also have a 5-year old.

Looking the way I do, most people presume that I am lesbian. I mean, you could just not say it and have everybody whisper it. I'm just out in every aspect of my life, okay? So, I find it the hardest when I go and pick the kids up or take them to school. Because then people, the other kids would start, they were just on it right away: "Oh who's that?" "Oh, well," you know, "why does that person look like a boy?" You know, "How is that person related to your family?" And, so, um, I felt like, just picking them up as a butch, outed my kids. And, I felt bad about it. I wanted the power to be out or not to rest within them. And, if they wanted to tell about their family, fine, and if they didn't, fine. But, if I was picking them up, there was no way to avoid it. And, you could tell--the kids just start staring at you right away.

I do workshops in schools all the time, from kindergarten to university. And, kids stare at me and ask me questions, and that's fine because I'm going there to educate them. And, um, I like that kids are honest, particularly around gender, and I feel like we can get a lot of work done, a lot of learning done, interacting with kids. So, I actually really enjoy that. But, with my kids, I couldn't, I couldn't, you know, when I left, I couldn't be there to watch out for them. I don't mind fighting my own battle. But, you know, when you have somebody that you love, and they're smaller and more vulnerable than you, and you can't be there to defend them, it really sucks. That hurts. Probably in all the things that I do, that's the hardest.

Scene 9 – We were terrible parents

Evan Smith

EVAN SMITH

When my oldest daughter was growing up, and uh, I was with her mom at the time, we ran into nothing but problems. I mean, so this is sort of, you know, like 1999 and onward. I, and, you know, they wouldn't let my partner sign any forms. They were always referring to me as the biological mother. Um, and I, I feel like that continued through her entire schooling experience, and um, and with her schooling we always had to fight.

We were trying to fight to get learning disability assessments and stuff done and it was always that *we* were terrible parents. And, I wonder how much of that had to do with, well, we were young, we were both teen moms, but also that we were lesbian moms. And back then, I mean we didn't really know other queer people with kids or very few, so it wasn't so much the norm as it is now, in many ways. And yeah, so we weren't able to access services for her.

I mean, she dropped out by grade eight, um, um, because of any lack of support, and I think that a lot of that had to do with our sexuality. And I think that, you know, there was just so much homophobia. I mean even in terms of working with guidance counsellors in schools who would only talk to me. And like, it was constant, right? So, we could never get over this, like, hump of, like, being queer parents, to actually get the services and access.

Scene 10 – Putting lipstick on a pig

Victoria Mason

VICTORIA MASON

At my daughter's request, I have not come out at school. But, there are other same-sex couples at the school. We're everywhere. Um, I think individual teachers will engage in conversations and will work around all kinds of different equity issues. I shouldn't even say that. Um, I don't even think that's true. Teachers reading LGBTQ children's books in the school? Probably not. Inclusion of historical figures in the curriculum? No. What I see is positive space posters on the wall. I think it does nothing. I think it provides lip service to something that's trending right now and is popular. And it makes us look as if we--it's putting lipstick on a pig. We have the things, the accoutrements of equity on the walls, right? They really are decoration without any substance. And, I don't see active talk about programming or curriculum. Um, I, I, I see posters and lip service.

Scene 11 – Mother’s Day and Father’s Day: Part 1
Shelby, Mary Evered, Michael Mancini and Ernst Hupel

SHELBY

So our family consists of myself and my partner, and we’ve been together 20 years, and we have 2 kids.

Let’s talk about Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. So, that came up because what do schools do? You know, they celebrate these Hallmark moments, and kids get to make you something. And so, right from the get go, you know, our son had to deal with well, “I’ve got two moms.” Right? But, luckily Mother’s Day is in May, so the teachers said, “Okay, um, you can either make them both something for Mother’s Day, or you can choose to do one now, and one for say Father’s Day, so you’re not left out when the other kids are doing something.” And that’s how they, right from the beginning, that’s what pattern emerged. And every year, it was kind of the same thing. It worked up until grade five. In grade six, he chose not to do something at Father’s Day, and I also got a card on Mother’s Day.

MARY EVERED

One of the very first things we always did was to meet the teacher on, you know, the curriculum night they have in September and say, “This is our daughter’s family.” And that, that our expectation was that her family would be treated, in any discussion of families, that we would be a part of it. And, and for the most part, I think that happened. But, you know, there was inevitably some discussion about you know, how it all worked, and things like, “Oh, it’s Father’s Day coming up, let’s make a Father’s Day card!” Her teachers were, were so wonderful when she was so young. They said, “Oh, it’s Father’s Day. Oh well, here make, make a card for your Granddad.” So, they dealt with it that way. And, they would give her extra time on Mother’s Day to make two presents, and two cards. So, you know, I’m, I, I’m not really sure how much more we could have expected. She was the only child in that situation and they did take some very positive steps to make sure that she was included.

MICHAEL MANCINI

Mother’s Day and Father’s Day was really interesting because early on, the teachers would feel they were supporting us by having our children make Mothers’ Day presents for us. But, our daughters have birth mothers and they have a relationship with them.

ERNST HUPEL

We are in touch with their birth mothers. So, early on our eldest daughter would go and say, “My teacher said I don’t have a mom. But I do. Her name is Heather.” So, you know, the teachers were doing it to actually support us but after our daughters said, “No, I actually have a mother,” they began to make Mothers’ Day cards for their birth mothers and we send the cards to them and yeah. So, we get double Father’s Day cards.

MICHAEL MANCINI

It's a big day.

ERNST HUPEL

It is! It's like Christmas here.

Scene 12 – Mother’s Day and Father’s Day: Part 2
Jess Swance-Smith and Evan Smith, Victoria Mason

JESS SWANCE-SMITH

Teachers shouldn’t assume what a child’s family may look like. Take their word for it. I mean, if they say they have multiple people in their family, let them make those, you know, ten Mother’s Day cards that they need to make. (*Evan and Jess laugh*). Or whatever, five Father’s Day cards because maybe there’s, you know, maybe an aunt or an uncle who’s like a father or a mother to them.

EVAN SMITH

I think one thing I really appreciate is that, for instance, at Mother’s Day, the school wasn’t sure who identified, you know, as a mother, for sure, and so they just sent out, like you know, a blanket message through our, you know, we have, like, an app we use to communicate with teachers and they sent out a message saying, you know, “We need to know who in your family identifies as a mother and should be getting a Mother’s Day card.”

VICTORIA MASON

There are things that should be happening more consistently like the honouring of LGBTQ people and their lives, and their families as part of just talking about our world, and who we are, and our normal lives.

Scene 13 – Dad or Dad

Garrett Metcalfe, Mohan Sharma and Kevin Robertson

GARRETT METCALFE

So, I am an out, gay male. I'm also Mohawk. So, I've got the Indigenous and the queerness. I was married to a woman for nine years, had two biological children with her. And, after I came out and my world changed, I then realized there were many conversations that needed to be had with teachers who just made assumptions about the type of families that both my kids had.

I had an elementary teacher call me once, in fear, but trying to just get information, um, because apparently, one of my children acknowledged to the entire class, that "I live with Mommy, Daddy, and Daddy's boyfriend." And so, I got the call of panic. It wasn't, um, it wasn't malicious, it was just "What do I do?" And, "What does this mean?" Some of it was a little bit, "Are they telling the truth?" Like that, kind of, "mom, dad and boyfriend are all living in the same house." And, I found myself in the position of having to...explain.

MOHAN SHARMA

So, there's Kevin, and me, and our two kids. We have five-year-old twins, and they are very different in very many respects, but also, five-year-olds. They're five-year-olds so they just do what five-year-olds do. Lots of fun, lots of energy.

KEVIN ROBERTSON

We co-parent with their mom who lives around the corner. So, our kids spend some of their time living with us, and some of their time living with their mom.

MOHAN SHARMA

What I don't want for them is to be treated, um, unkindly. I was going to say "differently." I don't mind them being treated differently, I don't want them to be treated unkindly.

GARRETT METCALFE

In school, there were those, just those – what teachers think are innocent or harmless, but you know, names or permission forms. And, I remember, um, at one point – this was high school, grade nine or ten – the teacher was reminding, "Make sure you get your permission form signed for the field trip." But, he wasn't saying it that way, he was saying "I need mum or dad's permission." And, apparently, my kid put their hand up and said, "Or dad or dad". And my kids are activists too, right? "Or dad or dad!" And, it was kind of "Yeah, okay. Or dad or dad." And then, said it again the next day. And, my kid put their hand up again and said, "You mean, 'or dad or dad.'" And, the teacher actually responded, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. But, I was referring to those with normal families." (*Pause.*)

It's interesting because now that my kids are adults, I'm learning more about what their experience actually was like. They sheltered me. They protected me from a lot of it. They didn't want me to worry, they didn't want to hurt me, right? I mean, it's homophobia. It hurts.

MOHAN SHARMA

My parents were immigrants. My father's from India, my mother's from Denmark. I ended up going to a Catholic school, because we had Irish neighbours who thought that's the best place to get an education.

I found it, like, it was very difficult. There were times when, as much as I loved my father and the cultural aspects of our family, it was tough at times, you know? I had friends come over and they would smell Indian food at our house, or see my father's shrine, so it's that – those sort of dynamics, and I think kids can be mean, and I was picked on at times about that aspect of my background and my diversity.

KEVIN ROBERTSON

And, I think, building on that, I would say my hope for our kids is that they would come out the other end of the school system and not regard themselves as fundamentally different than anybody else because of the composition of their family. I mean, I hope they're different, as well, in all the wonderful ways that we are all different, that wonderful diversity, but I wouldn't want that to be a burden for them, because they have two dads, or because they have three parents. Like, I would want them to think of themselves with the same advantages and the same opportunities as anybody else.

MOHAN SHARMA

I would imagine that our kids might be treated differently, I – I'm a little less concerned about that, because I just think it makes them stronger, open-minded, more alive people, more alert to different people, viewpoints, tensions that can be at play, um, but what I would not want is for them to be treated unkindly. It's amazing what a five-year-old – like, how much of the world that you can see they already grasp. And they're – they have a real sense of pride. We'll go to the park with the kids, and our son, in particular, will go up to another child who might be playing there, and he's done this often – they have both done this – but he'll say, um, "I've got a papa *and* a daddy." And so, there's a real pride in it. And so, I hope that they carry that sense of pride with them as they get older.

GARRETT METCALFE

Today, both my kids are amazing. Today, they're both activists in their own way. Not like me, um, but they will stand up. They do speak up when things happen, as well. They're great. They're great people, and I think that's the result of their lived experience, of the type of family they grew up in.

Scene 14 – We did our studies all by ourselves

Darian and Skye

DARIAN

There were, you know, there were kids who were nice, but would still kind of throw around, you know, racial slurs and racist things or say homophobic things. (*Skye nods*) Even though they were friends with us, they'd still, you know— especially in the beginning. Like it was really hard to stand up for ourselves. Like, we kind of just let people—

SKYE

Right! We didn't even have like, the language—

DARIAN

No, no.

SKYE

to do it. And, we didn't, we hadn't really found our community yet or anything.

DARIAN

No, yeah.

SKYE

We didn't feel that, like, confidence yet.

DARIAN

Hmm. Yeah, yep. (*Nods.*)

SKYE

And, it was really hard. It was hard at first. Like people were like, walking all over, like all over us.

DARIAN

We did our studies all by ourselves, you know?

SKYE

Mm-hmm! (*Laughs.*)

DARIAN

You know, we didn't go out much because you know, we didn't have a lot of friends ... we would read all these articles read all these books. (*Turns to Skye*) We would, we would go, um, with you know, with her Granny or her Grampa to Toronto every time they would go and visit the city because they had to pick something up or whatever, so, we'd tag along. And you know, we, we'd (*turns to Skye, Skye nods.*) go to some queer things. We'd see like, Catherine Hernandez—

SKYE

Mm-hmm. (*Nods.*)

DARIAN

and Kim, Kim Milan. We'd see all these cool queer people and, you know, get all these queer—we'd go to Glad Day! And get like, ten books and bring them back and just like—

SKYE

Mm-hmm.

DARIAN

read a lot. (*Turns to Skye*) And, read up on queer theory. You know, be a part of like, Facebook groups or like, little forums, and all that. Kind of like, trying to get connected, you know, even though we were super young still, like, teenagers.

SKYE

Yeah. Yeah for me, it was really about like, finding like, uh, mentors in the community—

DARIAN

Yes!

SKYE

that I could look up to. Like, there was a lot of trans women who I really uh, um, looked up to at the time and they were like, activists and they would post a lot about what was going on in the community and just what was going on, um, like, all over the world. (*Looks at Darian*) And, I felt like that was a really good place to start—

DARIAN

Yeah.

SKYE

I felt like we, I, got a lot of confidence from those people—

DARIAN

Like, just seeing them.

SKYE

and also Lucas Silveira was somebody who we would go, we actually would make the effort to go to his concerts. (*Darian nods.*) Like, um, it was really important. Um—

DARIAN

Before we moved here.

SKYE

before we had come into any sort of trans identity or gender identity at all, like, we were already really drawn to Lucas. (*Laughs.*)

DARIAN

But yeah, definitely the queer Toronto scene was really good for us when we were living up north (*Skye nods*) because it just gave us something to look forward to—

SKYE

Mm-hmm!

DARIAN

We'd go to like, Crews and Tango's, just to be surrounded by drag queens—

SKYE

It also just gave us that language—

DARIAN

Yeah.

SKYE

and gave us that education—

DARIAN

Yes, yes.

SKYE

we weren't receiving or getting anywhere else.

DARIAN

Or that community, you know?

SKYE

Mm-hmm. Like, even just learning about Two-Spirit people and history. And um, like, so many that should really be in the education system, we discovered on our own.

DARIAN

Definitely, like queer communities definitely made me more aware of my Blackness—

SKYE

Mm-hmm.

DARIAN

and the oppression that I was facing.

SKYE

Right.

DARIAN

And, all of this, cuz it all intersects—

SKYE

It all intersects, yeah! (*Laughs.*)

DARIAN

It intersects, right? So, it was really—

SKYE

Say it together now! (*All laugh.*)

DARIAN

It all intersects! But yeah, you know, it just, it really made me feel proud to be a queer, trans person-of-colour (*Skye nods*) who you know, I've just never been able to you know, accept my identity and just feel comfortable in it. And, I could see other people doing that. So that just really made me feel good and I really needed that.

SKYE

Hm-mmm. It's like about discovering the complexity and also the value—

DARIAN

Yes, yes! And the beauty in it! That it's not a bad thing, you know?

SKYE

Yeah, and just allowing you to just feel those things with yourself—

DARIAN

Yeah.

SKYE

That was this, like, that was the biggest gift from all of that.

Scene 15 – The harm we’ve done

Alec Butler, Nazbah Tom, Karleen Pendleton Jiménez

ALEC BUTLER

I think it’s very important to acknowledge what--the harm we’ve done. And um, try and do something about it. I was considered “slow” in school, ‘cause I was quiet and shy and I knew I was different, you know, from a young age. But, I had a good connection with an English teacher, who picked up right away that I wasn’t stupid. Um, so I got really good marks in his class. Every time I wrote something for him, he’d be like, “Wow, so good, so good.”

And um, and then I had a conversation years later with somebody who said, “Were you considered ‘slow’ in school?” “Yeah, I was.” She said, “Yeah, it might have something to do with your First Nations background, because First Nations children when they’re learning in school, they take a long time to answer because they’re thinking about their answer. But, if you go to a regular school, they want you to answer right away, right?” This is why I was considered slow. Because I thought carefully about what my answer would be.

We’re losing a whole generation of Native Two-Spirit kids, right? Who still have to go through this system, and it’s not helping them. I think it’s set up that way, it’s set up to make them fail, right? And um, yeah, I’m hoping that will change in my lifetime. I mean, they’ve been talking about this for how many generations? Two or three generations? Fixing this? And it has to happen now. Don’t put it off any longer.

NAZBAH TOM

It really begins with folks who are in the system to really be like, “We’re not going to stand for this, we’re going to do something about it” and if this project is one slice of how to do that, I really appreciate the work you guys are doing. But I think it’s a whole bunch of different systems working together and all of us really pushing back against those systems.

KARLEEN PENDLETON JIMÉNEZ

Um, okay. I have my girlfriend. We've been together actually since she was pregnant with my 17-year old step-daughter, and we also have a 19-year old who is going to be 20 this month. And, we also have a 5-year old.

You have to start the work at the beginning. I say, even the earliest, the earliest thing that happened with my son, was when he was in, maybe preschool or daycare or whatever they call it. You know, he was four and they did this chart, you'll see this in the kindergarten curriculum. You know, my, you know, about family, and he had to write my mom's name is "blank," my dad's name is "blank," my siblings names are "blank." And, up until that time, he didn't ever think anything was weird about our family. And then, when he had to fill that out, he just started crying. And, he fell apart. He was a wreck, probably for a month over that, because the little chart didn't match. So, we went to the teacher, not angry with her, but just, like, "Hey, you know this isn't just a gay issue, like, there are many different kinds of families." And, she started crying. She was really upset that she had hurt his feelings. But she just didn't know, you know?

Scene 16 – Upping the game

Max Redecopp and Ryan Redecopp, May Addley and Sara Addley

MAX REDECOPP

Okay. Well, Ryan and I met in 2007?

RYAN REDECOPP

Yep, 2007.

MAX REDECOPP

And, we met playing ball hockey. And, then we moved in together, and then we conceived in France, on vacation.

When I began to transition, I approached them, the school, and I said, “This is the new reality of our family. And you're going to be hearing different names and different pronouns, different experiences than you may have heard previously. Going forward, this is our family. And if you need more information, I am more than happy to meet.”

That first week, there was a little bit of--a few hiccups here and there. But now, it's all smoothed over. And, my son was in junior kindergarten and so I said to the school, “When you discuss families you are going to hear, ‘my dads’. You're going to hear, you know, if you ask, ‘What about your dad?’ they'll probably ask, ‘Which one?’ And, there's going to be language that you may or may not be used to hearing.” We're not privy to any other families', you know, other families' make-up in terms of orientation or anything like that. So I just assumed that, you know, this was the first time they'd ever heard about having two dads.

MAY ADDLEY

There's many of us.

SARA ADDLEY

We're a family of 7.

MAY ADDLEY

Yes. 3 Parents. We call ourselves polyfidelitous.

SARA

You can google it.

MAY ADDLEY

This is as far as the, the family goes. No more kids. No more adults. This is the core, this is us.

MAY ADDLEY

When our trans daughter, Violet, wanted to wear her Elsa dress for the first time to school, I didn't have the guts to do it. But I sent it in her bag, and her teacher, Ms. Richards put it in - put her in it. And, she called and said, "She's in it now, she's in it now!" And, I was like, "Oh my god, what's happening? Is it okay?" But she was the one to really have, like, the guts. And then I thought from that point on, "Oh my gosh, I need to up my game here." I would buy dresses, but they were pyjama dresses. So, you know, I was putting my own kind of labels of what was okay.

SARA ADDLEY

And so you know, Violet would be so excited in the morning. Like, "Can I wear this to school?" And, we'd be like, "No. No you can't. You can put it back on when you go home." Finally, we were in this space like, "You can bring it with you, and show it to your teacher." Because it was so important to her. She was even like, "I won't even wear it. Just let me show it to Ms. Richards, please!"

MAY ADDLEY

And, that's the only way I could say "yes," which was ridiculous.

MAX REDECOPP

They were so supportive, I was just taken aback. I couldn't believe it. I got messages of support from all of the--all of the administration, just saying, "This is fantastic, thank you for letting us know. We are going to be doing as much as we can." In fact, the next day, one of the women at the daycare, and it was like pre- and after-school care, so it was either before or after school, took all the children and brought them on the mat and started talking about families. And she used different dolls, and things, and figures and said, "Show us your family. And, when it finally got to my son at one point, you know, he was discussing, "This is my papa, and this is my other papa." And then, it was just like without a beat, other kids were like, "Oh, you know, I have, like, two aunts." And so, it started a conversation and the woman at the daycare said that she had never seen children so happy to discuss their families. And, it was a very, she even said that it was a safe space and they knew that they didn't have to worry about any judgement. And she-- the kids were just like, "Oh that's--really? Oh, that's great!" "And, what about you?" "Wow, really neat!" So, it was really interesting because it opened up a whole new dialogue, I guess that they hadn't done that before. But I felt that the way they approached it was just so top notch.

SARA ADDLEY

"You can bring the dress, you can show it." And then, we got the call from Ms. Richards saying Violet wanted to put it on right now. Right now. And, it changed her.

MAY ADDLEY

And it changed us! I never anticipated that she would become Violet. I just thought you know, she's a boy who wears pink. But I think upping the game is just questioning ourselves at all these little points that we are blocking her from being herself. Not worrying about what other people are saying. If you wear a dress and you feel great in front of the mirror, and you feel different leaving to school, that's like, that's not okay. You know, you have to know outside is safe too. Right now, Violet's got confidence. And, all we gotta do is keep it. Raise it up.

Kate sings the second song of the performance: Let Love Be the Way.

Let Love Be the Way

Written and performed by: Kate Reid, 2018
Sound engineer: Stew Crookes
Assistant sound engineer: Andrew Scott
Produced by: Stew Crookes and Kate Reid

Musicians

Kate Reid: Vocals, acoustic guitar
Andrew Scott: Drums, percussion
Kurt Nielsen: Bass
Todd Lumley: Piano, synth

Verse 1

Hey there, hello, you don't know me
And I don't know you
But I have a question or two
Thought I'd turn the tables
On you.

Verse 2

What's it like to walk down the street with your partner
And never wonder "what if"?
To know that wherever you go together
You're safe because your love blends in?

Could you imagine being unexpected, unforeseen
In the grand scheme of things?
And have to reveal yourself, describe and define your love
Your children, your family?

Chorus

What would it take to let love be the way
Could you listen to people and raise them up
Could you up your own game and say, "no big deal"
Be inspired instead of afraid?

Verse 3

How would it feel to live two separate lives
To hide your true self away?
To have to conform to someone else's arbitrary rules
And always be asked to explain?

Have you ever had to carve out a space for yourself
Because there was no room for you?
Imagine there were only five choices to line up at school
LGBT and Q?

Chorus

What would it take to let love be the way
Could you listen to people and raise them up
Could you up your own game and say, "no big deal"
Be inspired instead of afraid?

Verse 4

Have you ever had to try and justify your body
To people you've never met
Or tried to translate yourself into someone else's language
To make yourself legible?

Do you have to defend which public bathroom you use?
Have you ever thought about that?
And felt them attempt to decipher your intentions
While you're standing there washing your hands?

Have you ever been told that you don't know who you are
Your pronouns are wrong, they don't match, they're grammatically incorrect,

Your name is wrong, your clothes are wrong, your hair is wrong
Your feelings are wrong, your love is wrong
You are wrong?

Chorus

What would it take to let love be the way
Could you listen to people and raise them up
Could you up your own game and say, "no big deal"
Be inspired instead of afraid?

What would it take to let love be the way
Could you listen to people and raise them up
Could you up your own game and say, "no big deal"
Be inspired, could you be brave?

Verse 5

Has someone with good intentions worked to accommodate you
And tried to fit you in
Have you ever considered how accommodating someone
Doesn't really change anything?

End of Part 2.**Outro**

TARA

Thank you for listening to Part 2 of *Out at School*. Part 3 continues with scene 17. If you are interested in hearing more about the experiences of LGBTQ families at school, please go to our website: www.lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca

Closing music.

Part 3

Opening music.

Introduction

TARA

Hello, and welcome to *Out at School*. My name is Tara Goldstein and I am one of the creators of the play. We call *Out at School* a verbatim play because it was created from excerpts from interviews undertaken with 37 LGBTQ families living in the province of Ontario, Canada, about their experiences at school. I was the Principal Investigator of the research project that collected these interviews.

Out at School is divided into 3 parts, with each part ending with an original song composed by queer folk musician and composer Kate Reid.

At the beginning of each scene most of the characters introduce themselves and their families before beginning their monologues and dialogues. All of these introductions responded to my interview question “Tell us about your family.” Some of the names of the characters in the play are pseudonyms while others are not.

Through the audio-recording of the play, each of the performers embody people of different backgrounds, nations, identities and experiences that are not their own. They have entered into this performance with a deep respect, mindful of the families they are representing and the importance of the families’ stories.

To find about the people performing in *Out at School* please see the audio play notes on the LGBTQ Families Speak Out website: www.lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca

One final note: The recording of *Out at School* in November 2020 took place during COVID 19, at a time when the cast was not able to gather together in person. The audio sound of the play reflects our decision to virtually record the play through Zoom.

Scene 17 – A really big gift

Dawn

DAWN

Teachers can make a big difference. Some kids, they don't have either parent that supports them, and so the school becomes the only place where they can be safe. And, any place that's safe is a really big gift for a trans child because they may not feel safe anywhere else. It's really just listening, and being aware of how you interact with people, and not always assuming that people are heterosexual. Like, don't assume that everybody is cisgender. Don't go with the default all the time. Listening is what I think what a lot of people *don't* do. People sometimes get caught up in "I can't support this person because I don't know about this," or "I don't know anything about trans people, so I'm not going to help." But it's not really that complicated, it's actually really very simple. To start, you just have to listen to somebody and treat them with respect.

Scene 18 – They wrapped her in the flag
May Addley and Sara Addley

MAY ADDLEY

Parents have to advocate for their children. Just after my six-year old daughter became Violet, I found out there was the first trans flag raising at City Hall. So I thought, you know, this is perfect. We need something fun where we can go and celebrate this! So, we got all fancied up, and we went down, and we saw the flag go up. And, we saw other trans people who were like, encouraging her.

SARA ADDLEY

They wrapped her in the flag.

MAY ADDLEY

They wrapped her in the flag!

SARA ADDLEY

It was the cutest thing.

MAY ADDLEY

And she uh, we arrived at City Hall and she said, “We’re going to a flag raising, because I’m transgender!” And, it was the first time she said it out loud! And I’m like, I could feel it coming out, “You don’t have to!” But I didn’t. I was just like, “I’m proud of you!” Because it was, it was great. It was just weird for me. So, we did that, and uh, you know, we’re leaving and she’s looking back and she’s seeing that flag that represents her, and she’s like, “We should come back tomorrow and see it!” And I’m like “It won’t be here tomorrow.” But um,

SARA ADDLEY

You met a lot of friends.

MAY ADDLEY

Yes, we met a couple activists, and then we saw things that were going on in the community. Cheri DiNovo was trying to ban conversion therapy with people under the age of 18. So, we went for the second reading. I actually brought all the kids, so we could all see what was going on. And then, um, they invited us back for, for the justice committee meeting. So, I was whispering into Violet’s ear, “Okay this person is this person, and this is what they’re saying about this, and this person is opposing it because they think this.” And just trying to simply explain it to her. So by the time it was like third reading, she knew what it was, she was passionately against it. She was like, “I hate reparative therapy!” And she’s, you know, like really, really like serious about it.

SARA ADDLEY

She came out with better speech material than I did.

MAY ADDLEY

So, we went, and um, you know, and they were clapping and I was like, "This is the moment." And she was like, "I can't wait until this isn't just Ontario, this is, like, Canada!" So, she was thinking like beyond herself. And um, and then, yeah, a reporter showed up and um, put his mic in her face and he was like, "Why are we here? Maybe mom can help you?" And, she's like, "Um, I was in the chamber to hear the third reading of Bill-77 to ban conversion therapy for um, people in Ontario." And, he's just like, "Whoa!"

SARA ADDLEY

"You're six?"

MAY ADDLEY

But, it's so important to me that she knows why she's there! She's not some puppet.

SARA ADDLEY

Yeah, exactly.

MAY ADDLEY

She was the only kid there representing something that would affect people just like her. And she had to know why. I wanted her to know why. We discussed it on the way there, on the way back. It's a long journey. So, when it happened, we just, we squeezed each other's hands because you're not allowed to clap. It was just such huge deal. And, she knew what it meant.

Scene 19 – Use my name

Dawn, Chantale and Dan, Ky, Brenda and Nim

DAWN

Last year, the teacher didn't allow my trans daughter to use her preferred name. So, sometimes she didn't write any name on her paper. And, her teacher would write the name that she was given at birth, in pen. So, my daughter didn't feel like school was a very safe place. She told some of her friends, like, "I'd like it if you use this name." But, I think without the leadership of the staff, like, it's a bit hard for kids to understand.

So, I kinda looked into what the actual rules were, and this year we made a meeting with the principal before school started. And, my daughter said, "I want you to call me by this name at school." And the principal was like, "What bathroom do you want to use?" And, she was like, "I'm gonna use the girls' bathroom" and the principal was like, "What're you gonna do when the kids say--?" And she said, "Well I'm just going to say--and use my new name now." So then, the school had no choice. Because when they hear it from the child directly, they can't say anymore, "We can't make an accommodation."

TARA

So our first question always is, tell us about your family.

DAN

We're -- how do you -- I'm Dan.

TARA

Hi Dan.

DAN

(Laughs.) I'm sixteen. I'm in grade 11. This is my mom.

CHANTALE

Chantale.

CHANTALE

Pronouns are difficult. And, it's hard with somebody like Dan [who] is fluid. So, as a parent, I kept asking Dan, "Are you sure that you don't mind that I'm still using 'she' pronouns?" It's a habit as a parent, right? She would tell me, "No, I don't mind. It's fine."

I want to be supportive--not *want* to be. I *am* supportive. So, if Dan is telling me I need to get used to something else, I need to work on it.

But at Rainbow Camp last summer, she got to live and experience using 'they/them' pronouns.

DAN

Rainbow Camp is a great place. It's a week-long summer camp in August where you can go with a bunch of other queer youth and allies. And there, it's very open to playing around with different names, different pronouns. You pretty much always have your little sticker with your name and pronouns and you change stickers everyday if you want and people respect that and will, you know, change. It's very fluid, and very open to experimenting, and playing around.

CHANTALE

Yeah. It's a great place to discover who you are. Be more comfortable with who you are. So, when she came back from camp--I still say 'she.' When *they* came back, I asked, you know, like "Do you want me to use 'they/them'?" And, I think with Dan it's still a, Dan is still a realist. *(Laughs)* She's a realist. She's like, "Mom, the world is not aware of 'they/them' pronouns."

And we're francophone. There are gender neutral French pronouns but they're known even less than 'they/them.'

KY

The Internet's a great resource. People are always going off about the Tumblr genders and the Tumblr identities. But, it's not a made up thing. Some of them, I think, might be going a little too far. Like the people who aren't using it as something that's actually relating to them. But, people who are using neo-pronouns and like other genders like "demi", "a" - all those types of things, they're still valid. They are also part of the community. They're not making things up. They're not faking it and it's just finding things that match how you feel.

BRENDA

Well, I've been living in Oakville since we moved there, mid-90s. And, Nim left me a note about two years ago about his identity, and that started the journey of being a parent of a transgender child.

I was coming home from walking my dog and that started the journey of being a parent of a transgender child. It said "Mom remember when if I ever need to tell you something important, I can write you that news? I'm not a girl. I'm a demiboy and just wanted to let you know so we start with next steps." And, I went to bed like "Aaahh!" *(laughs)* And the next morning, we had a discussion, "What does that mean?"

NIM

It was definitely difficult. I didn't come out to the whole school. I just came out to some friends and when I had new teachers. I actually found I preferred having new teachers to older teachers because the older ones would know me and they know me by the wrong name and pronouns. If I had a new teacher and it was easier to go up and say, "Hi. I use this name, or I use these pronouns." It's a lot easier, kind of, just introducing myself instead of having to come out.

I remember from my report card, one teacher from the GSA came up and said "Is it okay if I use like your pronoun, he/him, in your report card? Like, do your parents know?" He was definitely really good about checking that that was okay, that I was safe at home and it wouldn't, like, cause any problems if he used my pronouns on my report card. I think definitely be mindful of the name and pronoun piece especially with attendance. That created so much anxiety for me because there was attendance every day. I was like, "The wrong name is going to be called out and I'm going to have to say, 'Here.'" And, that kind of like, if I was in a class of new people, that's broadcasting the wrong version of who I am to these new people. So, I think definitely being aware of, you know, like, if a student comes up to you after class and like, "Hey, I use this name," like, definitely one of my teachers just wrote it down, like, right next to my name on the attendance sheet. So, every time she knew which name to call, which was right. So, definitely yeah. Keeping in mind just that, like, name and pronouns are huge way of how kids are broadcasting themselves to other students and that teachers have a huge role in that.

Scene 20 – Don't be the thing we should be afraid of
Kiran, Dan, Brenda and Nim

KIRAN

Yeah. So, I have a pretty diverse family, not in terms of ethnic background, but I have my mom and my dad. They don't live together. And then, I have a stepmom, a stepdad, and a half sibling, on each side.

When I tried to come out, one of the things that kept coming back to me from my mom was that she was worried about what was going to happen when I went into the world. And, she was like, "This is going to be so difficult for you. Why are you doing this to yourself? It's going to be so hard." And, I think an important thing for parents to remember, especially if it's unfamiliar ground, is that, don't be the thing we should be afraid of. If it's going to be hard for me out there, make sure I'm comfortable, at least, in my own home. And, I think that's something that can be really scary for parents. They're like, "Oh no. This is so new to me. I'm so terrified." But you have to remember, your kid is also probably equally scared, if not more so terrified, especially if you can't have those conversations with your parents. Because I know a lot of families who come from traditional backgrounds won't talk about it. But I think that's the important thing, is to talk about it and listen and just be willing to have the discussion in the first place.

DAN

I came out as, kind of, as lesbian in grade seven. Our school goes from grade seven to grade twelve. And word got around, as it does in high school or middle school. Um, everyone was pretty supportive. Then, I came out as non-binary and changed my name to Dan. Um, that was kind of tricky but the school was really good about it. I was able to go to the office and get my name changed within the school. Um, right away I had a talk with the principal. She was "Yeah, let's do this." Right away, she asked me which bathroom I would like to start using. I chose to use the, our gender-neutral bathrooms, which are the staff bathrooms. Um, yeah. (*Laughs.*) It was pretty smooth. I had a couple of people that were like, "Oh I've known you forever, so I'm just gonna keep using your old name." And I'm like, "Well, no, that's not how that works." But everyone's done pretty good at, like, switching names and getting used to it and stuff. But now we just got a new principal. I'm still feeling out, like, how he is.

BRENDA

Wait, tell them the bathroom story.

NIM

Oh, okay there is a bathroom story. There was a gender-neutral washroom at my high school, but there was only one and it was like a repurposed single-use teacher's bathroom. The bathroom's kept locked a lot of the time, which meant if I wanted to go use the gender-neutral bathroom, I had to go find a teacher to ask them for the key. They started keeping the key in the office, so I had to, you know, be wandering around the school to go to the office and then back to the bathroom and then out of class for too long. And then, one day, I went to the office to ask for the key and they asked me to sign my name. And I was like, "Okay, come on! Like, none of the cisgender kids have to do this. They just go in the bathroom and it's nobody's business."

So the next day, I kind of I arrived to school early with one of my friends, and we went to all of the gendered bathrooms and we locked the doors of the stalls except for one...I'm not a monster. On each of the locked stalls we put up a sign and said, "Do you think this is unfair? Because we do, too. Help keep us," like, "help keep our gender-neutral bathrooms unlocked, because this is like the reality for many of our trans students who go to use the bathroom and it's locked and they can't access it." So, after I kind of did that thing that day, we were talking to the equity coordinator at the Board.

BRENDA

He said signing your name and having the key log was not a way for people to live with dignity. And, I was blown away, I mean, this was basic human rights. And, the guy from the board hit the nail on the head. And, I believe he did talk to the principal. The bathroom was kept unlocked.

Scene 21 – Wait
Darian and Kiran

DARIAN

Over the years, I had had issues with my mom about coming out as a lesbian. At the time, and um, you know, she was, at the time, you know, I don't think so anymore but at the time, she was very religious. She would say things like, "Oh, you're going to go to hell!" Just really awful things, you know, that we've all heard before, yeah.

And then, um, she decided to, I only had, like, maybe a week or two of school left, um, but then she, uh, towards the end there—which is crazy to me now that I think about it because my mom is all about education and stuff—for some reason she couldn't put her prejudices aside. And she, you know, she was like, "Okay that's it!" You know, "You're too much for me!" You know, "I don't like this lifestyle (*does air quotes*) that you're living," you know. "It's making me uncomfortable, I want you out," pretty much. And um, which was really unfortunate because I only, like I said, I only had two weeks left and I would have been done high school.

And, what ended up happening was I had to do three years of high school in order to make up for the time. Because, like, some of my credits weren't valid up north for some reason. I'm not really sure how that worked but yeah. I ended up having to do like, (turns to Skye) was it like three years? We were there for a while.

KIRAN

I think the advice I would tell my younger self is that I don't have to rush to come out. And, that I don't owe explaining my own identity to anyone. And, I think a big, I would just tell myself to wait, because I think that a very White, sheltered understanding of what coming out and being queer means is that you have to tell everyone. And, I think for me, being in a household that wasn't safe at the time to, you know, talk about it, I think I would have said, "Okay, relax, wait till you're on your own, on your own two feet. And then see if you can come out." Because I very much could have waited and it probably would have been better. So, I think just taking my time to figure things out and making sure that I was in a good space to do that would have been very helpful. Yeah.

Scene 22 – I have hope for the future
Darian and Skye

SKYE

Teachers should know every single person who is in school is an individual (*Darian nods*) and you have to like, acknowledge the intersections that everybody is living with, and the oppressions, and give people justice, um, when they need it so they can feel safe. Um, I think it's important to just explore gender, and explore—

DARIAN

And just be open to that discussion—

SKYE

Right.

DARIAN

and open to listening, right? Because—

SKYE

Also, be, be willing to like, protect the vulnerable.

DARIAN

Yep. Yes, always, always. Yeah, just always look after the kids who seem like they're not thriving because there might be something wrong and it will change their whole world if you just ask them what's going on! And, just take that time to talk to them. Because it is different growing up, you know, as a trans kid, a queer kid, a questioning kid, you know? It's different than just being, you know, a, considered a (*does air quotes*) "normal" child by society's standards, right? So, just always, you know, take that extra time to check on them, make sure they're ok. And yeah, bring up lots of discussions about race, about gender identity, sexuality, racism—

SKYE

I think all those things, like, it's really, really important to have the history of all of those things taught. Like, that's what I said. Like even Two-Spirit history and history of Stonewall, and queer history—

DARIAN

Yeah. That's a big one because a lot of people still don't know about Stonewall! (*Laughs.*)

SKYE

Yeah! And, also history about like, civil rights and stuff. Like, I think we need to get more in depth about that, and less about all the White explorers who conquered, like—

DARIAN

That's right! That's right! (*Skye laughs*) I'm very hopeful for the future—

SKYE

Yes! Yep.

DARIAN

for the next generation coming up after us. People are queer and trans—

SKYE

People are voting and people are being so political—

DARIAN

Yes!

SKYE

and, um, progressive—

DARIAN

Yes! Yeah.

SKYE

Like, even if we are not being educated in school, we are educating ourselves and we are taking care of each other.

DARIAN

Yeah, yeah.

SKYE

So yeah, that's a really positive thing.

DARIAN

Yeah, so, I have hope for the future.

Kate sings the third song in the play Risk Hope which is accompanied by a video that features still photos of all of the families who were interviewed.

Risk Hope

Written and performed by: Kate Reid, 2019
Sound engineer: Lisa Patterson
Assistant sound engineer: Meg Warren
Produced by: Lisa Patterson and Kate Reid

Musicians

Kate Reid: Vocals, acoustic guitar
Doug Friesen: Bass
Matias Recharte: Drums
Lisa Patterson: Piano

Verse 1

A poet in the 60's used to sing,
"the times they are a-changing"
Well, that's still true today

This old road is rapidly aging
Because we are advocating for ourselves
And for the ones that we love

Chorus

We believe taking action
Is an enactment of hope
Of the way things ought to be
Making art makes a new world
Possibilities unfurl
In the space of a story

Verse 2

Standing up can look a hundred different ways
Refusing to explain, changing our names
Finding labels to match how we feel

Resisting erasure is a statement
Insisting they listen to what we say about
Who we are and what we desire

Chorus

We believe taking action
Is an enactment of hope
Of the way things ought to be
Making art makes a new world
Possibilities unfurl
In the space of a story

Bridge Verse 3

These words, these colours, these songs
Embody our critical collective longing
This is an archive of our lives
A queer refusal to not be silenced
And José Muñoz reminds us
That we can go off script together
And, if we want to change the world
We must risk hope
We must risk hope

Verse 4

A poet in the 60's used to sing,
"the times they are a-changing"
Well, that's still true today

This old road is rapidly aging
Because we are advocating for ourselves
And for the ones that we love

Chorus

We believe taking action
Is an enactment of hope
Of the way things ought to be
Making art makes a new world
Possibilities unfurl
In the space of a story

When Kate is finished singing, each of the performers stand up and share their hopes.

TSHOLO

Hi, I'm Tsholo and I played the roles of Darian and Nim. I hope to live in a world where transwomen live a full life without fear of losing it because of ignorance.

MAX

I'm Max and I played the roles of Dan, Ky, and Skye. I have hope that the words we've shared of acceptance and love will help to drown out the silence of shame.

SANDAKIE

I'm Sandakie and I played the roles of Mita, Kiran, and Julia. I hope everyone can be an ally, starting where we are and doing what we can.

YASMIN

My name is Yasmin, and I played the role of Karleen. I have hope for queer and trans students to feel empowered by their experiences and to use their voice to spread love and light.

JORIE

I'm Jorie and I played the roles of Mary, Brenda, and May. I hope that this beautiful, multicolored garden we planted here today continues to grow.

BRENDAN

My name is Brendan and I played the roles of Garrett, Evan, and Nazbah. I have hope that from an early age everyone is taught self-love and to love one another.

ALANIS

I'm Alanis and I played the roles of Alicia, Chantale, Jess, and Nicole. I have hope for a liberated youth, who feels welcomed, supported, and represented in schools.

TY

I'm Ty and I played the roles of Ernst and Kevin. I have hope that queer teachers like me will never second guess whether to pin up photos of our partners and families by our desk at school.

RYAN

My name is Ryan and I played the roles of Mohan, Michael, and Ryan. I have hope for the truths of our lives freeing us to be ourselves in all spaces

CHARLOTTE

My name is Charlotte and I played the roles of Shelby and Sara. I have hope that current and future educators and families will work together with open hearts to make schools a safe and empowering place for everyone.

BENJAMIN

I'm Benjamin and I played the roles of Max and Syn. I have hope that the sharing of stories can help to build compassion and care.

AMAKA

My name is Amaka and I played the roles of Victoria and Dawn. I have hope that with our continued patience, passion, and compassionate action, every precious member of our global community will live their most authentic truths in peace.

DESTINY

My name is Destiny and I play the role of Catherine. I have hope for a future where marginalized youth obtain a liberatory and equitable educational experience.

ALEC

My name is Alec Butler. I play myself. And I hope Two-Spirit students will be treated with dignity and are celebrated and affirmed in their rich identities.

KATE

I'm Kate, and I am the composer and musician of the songs in *Out at School*. I hope that someday all people's identities will be validated and embraced.

JENNY

My name is Jenny, and I am the playwright and the director. I have hope that telling our stories makes new futures possible.

PAM

I'm Pam and I am one of the writers and directors of *Out at School*. I have hope that my children will only ever know love.

TARA

I'm Tara and I am also one of the writers and I'm also the producer of *Out at School*. I have hope that the queer acceptance we are seeing outside schools will find a place inside schools.

When Tara is finished sharing her hope Skye and Darian finish the scene.

SKYE

Like, even if we are not being educated in school, we are educating ourselves and we are taking care of each other.

DARIAN

Yeah, yeah.

SKYE

So yeah, that's a really positive thing.

DARIAN

Yeah, so I have hope for the future.

THE END.

Outro

Thank you for listening to *Out at School*. If you are interested in hearing more about the experiences of LGBTQ families at school, please go to our website:
www.lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca

Closing music.