

S1 — Episode 2 — Queering Curriculum Through Music

Goldstein, Tara and Audarson Gudmundson, Helgi. (Producers). (2018, November 1).

Tara interviews musician and research team member Kate Reid about her research on queering high school curriculum through music.

Tara: Hello, and welcome to *Gender. Sexuality. School.* I'm Tara Goldstein and we're podcasting from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. In January of this year, the LGBTQ team interviewed parent and teacher, Garrett Metcalf, who talked to us about the Queer Studies curriculum he designed for queer studies in his high school. When it came time to design her PhD research thesis, team member and musician, Kate Reid, decided she would like to work with Garrett and his students on using songs to do gender and sexuality education at school. Today on *Gender. Sexuality. School.*, Kate is here to talk about her research. Kate, welcome to *Gender. Sexuality. School.*

Kate: Hi, Tara, thanks for having me.

Tara: So great to have you here. So, let's begin our interview. Kate, can you tell us about the goals of your thesis research and the research questions you're asking? And the ones that you hope to answer in your study?

Kate: Thank you. So, I'm really interested in using songs as teaching tools in the classroom. I think they're, you know, there's in some ways they're very different than using a text or a movie or a video or things like that. So, it's really interesting, and what, sort of, what is it about music and songs that, you know, open up different pathways to learning? And so, my, my main research question for this study was: what happens when queer folk songs are used in a secondary classroom to invite students to reflect on and discuss issues and perspectives related to gender and sexual diversity?

Tara: Fantastic. And when you were conducting this study, what are the things that you found out?

Kate: Yeah, it was interesting, because I've been, I was going over actually some of the transcriptions this morning. And one of the things that really stood out for me, and this is something that I want to explore, is this idea of, of, you know, queer relationality, right, where it felt like the song, like, I'm reading through the transcripts, and there's like, all these moments of like, laughter, right. And that was something, that's something as a teacher that I've not experienced in classrooms before, like these moments of like, it felt like, you know, a student would make a joke with something related to sexuality, and gender, and like, everyone would laugh, because there's sort of this, it felt like, there's a lot of shared understanding, and shared

experience that like, sort of brought us together as a group. And so, you know, and that in relation to the songs, because we would like, I play a song for them, and then give them some time to do a written reflection on it on their own, like, in their own thinking, right. And then we'd come, we'd be together in a circle. And then we'd, you know, we just say, so, you know, what are your responses? What are your thoughts about this, and so, they had these, this chance to really reflect on it on their own, and then to discuss that with each other. And yeah, this idea of queer relationality, where they would bring up a lot of their own experiences, or things that they knew or heard about, from family, family members, or friends. And just these, you know, people would in the group would like, be understanding and nodding, or, or, you know, laughing and sort of this joking about it, right. And there was like, it was sort of like, insider jokes sometimes, right. And so, so I thought that was really, really interesting and sort of unique about this study. The other thing that I learned, and I already knew this, but it really drove it home is that students are really finding a lot of information online, right, about gender and sexuality, because they're not getting it in schools, right. And so, they have a lot of knowledge already. And in particular, this group, because they are, were 18 years old, so they were more young adults, had an alternative school where they had sort of been pushed out of the mainstream writing system. And so, a lot of them were— had come to this particular school, because they were sort of marginalized in some way. And so, I think they had to find, you know, information about, you know, sort of who they were and sort of their communities and their families online, because those things weren't being discussed in school. So, they had a lot of, they have a lot of knowledge about a lot of these topics. And I also found that you know, on a spectrum of being accepting and open minded versus, you know, you know, and at the end of the road, not accepting and close minded, there is an overwhelming sort of, you know, feeling that students are really accepting and want to talk about this stuff, want to learn about it, want to learn more. You know, and that was very, you know, when I think about my own high school experience, right, and my own early teaching experience, that was really different. You know, we didn't talk about this stuff. When I was first a new teacher, I was in the closet, right? And so, you know, that was, you know, 2000 to 2002. Right. So, you know, a couple decades ago almost. Yeah, I just feel like there's, there's such a willingness to talk and a desire to talk about this stuff. We would-- our sessions, like, would last about an hour, mostly discussion. Right. And they had a lot to say, you know, so. And I think the songs, you know, in terms of a teaching tool, like really opened up. Because there's, I don't know, I don't know what this thing is. But there's something about, you know, music paired with lyrics. That's a very powerful combination. Yeah, it's a really powerful combination. It's a really powerful medium. I think songs get—get into the body in a different way than reading a text does. And open us up to feeling, you know, in a different way than, for me anyways, reading or watching something on a screen. Right. And I think that that opening up, that feeling, and it is a really productive way to open up discussion, you know. So those are some of the big things I found.

Tara: Thank you! I can't wait to read the entire, the entire thesis. Yeah. So now that you're analysing and writing up the findings to your study, and now you have some ideas that you've shared today, what advice do you have for teachers who want to queer their curriculum through music? Do you have to be a musician to his music in your classroom? What might teachers do to take advantage of this pedagogical power of lyrics and music and emotion combining together?

Kate: Yeah, I definitely don't think you have to be musician to use songs in classrooms. You know, they're like any other teaching resource in a way; you have to, you have to be familiar with correct information about gender and sexual identity, but you also have to be familiar with the histories, and the current issues of conversations that are happening. So, you know, it's like, if you're teaching it, any other course, you know, you need to be familiar with the course content, right. And so, in a way, they're just sort of like, they're little, the songs for me are more like jumping off points, right. And to help, you have to have that background knowledge, because one of the things, and I was really glad that Garrett was there with me many times, facilitating conversations, because he has a very particular skill at, because he works in equity and inclusivity, and he's a— he's very heavily involved in his union, he has a very particular skill around helping students see a range of perspectives, because there are many. Right, right. And, you know, sort of also helping them to see that, you know, just because someone identifies with a certain label doesn't mean that their experience is the same with someone else who identifies with a label. So, there's this human experience, also, that factors into the whole thing. And so, I think, you know, one of the things I do think, if you are facilitating discussion is, is having some skill around being able to do that. Garrett had a skill in that area that I think augmented my sort of skill level in that area. But I also think that, you know, I think also, teachers have to recognize that students already have a lot of information. And they know a lot, right, about gender and sexual diversity. And they're— they're finding a lot of information online, they're— they're privy to conversations that online, that are not happening in schools. And I think the key thing for this is that teachers need to be willing to learn alongside the students, they need to be willing to make mistakes, and be okay with that, and correct themselves in public, like in the classroom. And understand that students, you know, bring their own learning and their own life experience into this particular topic. Because it's, I think, with this particular topic, because of the level of knowledge that students are bringing, and some of them don't have this knowledge, right, there's, you know, there are students that don't know what certain terms mean, or, you know, don't— they don't know the history of LGBTQ movements and things. But that, I think, one of the things that this research did in particular, was sort of trouble that idea that teachers teach, and students learn, right, right. And so like, that was sort of messed up a little bit. So, teachers were teaching and learning, and students

were also teaching and learning, you know, we were sort of building knowledge together in these conversations. And I think, I think that's sort of, you know, what the songs helped us do because they, you know, each song was a particular story about a particular sort of person or people and then the students would— would you know, some of them would say, "Yes, I have a story, but that's very similar". Someone would say, "I don't, I don't relate to this, because this is my experience". Right. So yeah, I think, I think that idea of, of teachers teaching and students learning is, you know, got really disrupted in this, in this research. And so, and I think teachers have to be willing to, to do that, like to be able to, to sort of bring that strategy into their classroom.

Tara: Wonderful. Kate, thanks so much for joining us. I really loved hearing about your project and the way music can be used to queer curriculum in the classroom. It's really exciting work, very, very exciting work. Kate Reid has been immersed in, and passionate about arts-based research concerning the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people and families for many years now, both as a professional musician and as a graduate student researcher. As a musician, Kate has composed, recorded, and performed songs related to gender and sexuality diversity since 2005. In 2013, she released an album called *Queer Across Canada*, which is a collection of 16 original songs based on interviews she conducted with LGBTQ families across Canada for our own LGBTQ Families Speakout project. Kate has composed two original songs, "Pushing the Envelope" and "Let Love Be the Way", both of which can be found on the homepage of the LGBTQ Families Speakout website. Kate also composed the music for this podcast. If you have any burning questions about gender, sexuality, and school, send an email to info@LGBTQfamiliespeakout.ca with the subject line, ask Gender. Sexuality. School. In future podcasts. I'll take listeners' questions about issues of gender and sexuality at school and try to answer them with the help of some amazing folks who have been thinking about gender and sexuality for a while. You can find this podcast at WWW.LGBTQfamiliespeakout.ca This episode was edited and produced with support from Helgi Audarson Gudmundson. Thanks to Kate Reid who composed the music for the podcast. I'm Tara Goldstein. All the best.