

## **S2 — Episode 2 — Queer Studies in Education and Culture (QSEC)**

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Tara talks to Lee Airton about their work with QSEC, a Special Interest Group within the Canadian Society for the Study of Education.

Tara: Hello, and welcome to Gender Sexuality School. I'm Tara Goldstein and we're podcasting from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Today Professor Lee Airton from the Faculty of Education at Queen's University joins us once again, this time to talk about an exciting new academic organization called Queer Studies in Education and Culture, which is becoming known by its acronym, QSEC. Lee, welcome to Gender Sexuality School and we're so happy to welcome you back.

Lee: My pleasure. Good to be with you as always.

Tara: Thank you. So, to begin our podcast about QSEC. Can you tell us a little bit about the organization, how it got started? What are its goals?

Lee: Well, QSEC was originally started about 10 years ago by Dr. Andre Grace, right, who is a professor at the University of Alberta, and Andre created QSEC from the ground up, so he began QSEC as a special interest group of the Canadian Association for the Study of Women in education, I think it's called, and he has really built it. So, single-handedly Andre kind of created this space for people who do queer educational research in Canada to come together, right. And then a couple years ago, we had some conversations about it. And he was interested in having a bit more support around the organization. So, my colleague, Rob and I, we, yeah, we kind of came on board and this year, QSEC has its first full elected executive, including you and me as co-presidents.

Tara: It's very exciting. I was so excited to be asked and to join a great group of folks. So, what does QSEC do?

Lee: Well, QSEC meets as part of the annual Congress, Canadian Congress for the social sciences and humanities. It's kind of like the academic Woodstock of Canada, that happens in a different university every year. And so, we are a part of the, the education one, which as they tell me is the biggest one. So, the education group, the CSSE, is the largest organization that meets at Congress. But there's also a great opportunity there for folks who do more interdisciplinary work to go to like the Sexuality Studies Association, and CSSE. So that's really good for a lot of people. So QSEC is kind of like the queer CIG of ARA. But Canada. So, we have a lot of people doing work in Canada around gender and sexual diversity. But we don't, oftentimes when we go down to more American conferences, that kind of flies, the international ones, we, it's as a Canadian, I go down there. And I learned very quickly just how different our various contexts are from the realities of many of my American colleagues on the ground. So QSEC, tries to, tries to offer a Canadian conversation, because we actually have a very, very different sets of laws, right? We have different turns that, we have different kinds of social norms and expectations around gender and sexual diversity in Canada. And those can get really drowned out in American forums. So, I'm really hoping that last year, and not coming, and so for the two years that you

and I are co-presidents and beyond that we, we grow QSEC, right, that we involve, we involve folks at all career stages, in the sort of academic gender and sexuality world in Canada. We have a few senior folks, yourself included, who are part of it. And, we had a really successful initiative last year, which was to ask Senior Scholars in Canada, who studied gender and sexuality to be discussants. So that means that they, they just ad-hoc ones, like no, they don't have to read everything in advance in the session they're in, but they listen. And they offer some sort of ad-hoc discussion commentary. So, we're really trying to welcome those folks and have open arms because they want us to meet at a convenient place where, let's say you're a doctoral student, you can go and meet a potential committee member or an external--

Tara: – begin an intergenerational conversation perhaps,

Lee: Right. So, you can meet people who might come to write for you for tenure, who have different kinds of population, or publication opportunities, and who are in the Canadian conversation because our work is different.

Tara: And I do think it's really important to have folks from different generations who are doing work around gender, sexuality and education, because so often, people are the one, or two, or a singular person in their department in their area who are doing the work and they don't have community and they need community outside.

Lee: They do and there's, we have a lot of doctoral students who are queer and or trans people or their work engages that stuff and there being capably and kindly supported in their faculties. But they are the only person doing that work. So, hopefully QSEC can grow, keep growing and become the kind of place where if you're an early career person or grad student, you can come and actually access some mentorship from people who are in this field in Canada, who can share with you like how do you go on the job market as a gender sexuality scholar in Canada, because that is very different than the States, right? So, we– we really want to hone in on like the particularity of this place. And what, what work is happening here and what work is like more possible here than in a lot of other places and give people who are maybe isolated, opportunity to find a community.

Tara: Do you find that there are differences provincially? Or is there enough that we have in common with our Canadian laws and human rights policies that allow for a conversation?

Lee: Well, actually, on the books, right, human rights laws are quite similar. Okay, so I believe 10 provinces or territories have, for example, gender identity and gender expression protections, right. Some of them, the other ones only have gender identity, but it's understood that the gender expression is kind of right into that. And part of the work that I do around that, it's implications for education is thinking whether that's different or not. But that's all digress. I won't digress there. But there's similar law on the books, but the culture, like Canada's like the EU, right? So, we have like, we kind of have a small community of scholars. So, when I think about QSEC, connecting people that way, I think about that much smaller Canada, the academic Canada, yes, but geographically and demographically, Canada is like the EU, right? Um, tremendous diversity. Yeah. So, what it means to be, even though there's

gender identity and gender expression protections on the books in Alberta, and in Nova Scotia and in Ontario, what that actually, what is actually happening on the ground or how other laws impact that is very different. So, I, I believe, if I'm not mistaken, the Alberta United Conservative government has actually enacted a law that would require schools to notify parents if their child joins a GSA.

Tara: Wow, I didn't know that.

Lee: I'm not so up on the Alberta stuff. But that is something that was looming, an election issue, and I'm quite certain that was passed, but you should verify that. And that simply, the— the problems with that are quite obvious. And I just, we would never see that in Ontario, right? Never see that in British Columbia. So same human rights law, but very different, but different thing, other things undergoing that maybe folks can use that human rights law to challenge. But it's it is a very, it is a patchwork.

Tara: And that's why perhaps it's so important to have people from across the country engaged in dialogue, because if there's work to be done, in one place, someone perhaps has had some success in another place.

Lee: Oh yeah, like the Alberta folks have a lot of experience with— they have a lot of experience with thinking about how to do gender and sexual diversity work in a public, public education system where there's a significant sort of like very like right wing and sometimes religious population who has different kinds of feelings about this, about this kind of affirming content in public schools. And in Ontario, we have a situation where, in the past 10 years or so that influence has been felt in our public school system in terms of the like, different, different aspects of the health and physical education curriculum. So, we have a lot to learn from folks in the prairies, especially Alberta about how you do that bridging work and how you, how you do this stuff in a context where that backlash exists. So, there's a lot of things we can learn from each other.

Tara: Lee, are you going to be presenting this year at QSEC? Did you put in a proposal?

Lee: I think there's three in there with my name on it, but not as first. Yeah. So, we have, well, I don't, some of you listeners might be the reviewers. So, close your ears. I hope you are. But yeah, we have three different papers from our SSHRC, our SSHRC funded project that we're in the second year of now on, on gender expression and how it's being constructed by Ontario School Boards.

Tara: Fantastic. Well, we'll look forward to hearing good news about your proposals.

Lee: What about you all, do you have anything in there?

Tara: We, my team, the LGBTQ Families Speak out team did put in a proposal. We are very excited that as we come to the end of the project, the end of our funding, it's time to do some reflecting on the different principles and practices, the ethical principles, and practices that under lied the project. So, we have a proposal that talks about that. And we've looked at some themes that ended up being important

as principles and we're going to talk a little bit about what those themes were and how we created practices to make sure that we were meeting our principles. And generally, the goal was to make sure that we were honouring and celebrating and affirming queer lives. One of the important messages from the entire project was queer lives are a gift to our communities. And although lots of the families talked a lot about very difficult issues, such as bullying, and not being seen, when their families needed to transition, there were a lot of stories about resilience and resistance and advocacy and allyship. So, we wanted to make sure that we had principals that honoured that very deeply. So, if we get accepted, we'll be talking about that.

Lee: I feel positive about it.

Tara: Excellent, excellent. Well, is there anything else that we should talk about in terms of QSEC?

Lee: Oh, my goodness, just if you are listening, and you are a person who does work around gender and sexual diversity in the Canadian context, but not only if you have an interest in sort of dialogue with stuff happening, Canadian context, it's quite cheap to join, you have to join CSSE. And then you join QSEC as a CIG. And the more folks we have joining, the more space we have in the program. The more clout we have, the more money we have, the more things we can do for our community. So please, if you haven't already, please consider joining QSEC if you are a gender and sexuality scholar or artist or researcher, community member.

Tara: And we'll see you in London. We'll see you in London. Lee, thanks so much for joining us today. It was great talking to you about QSEC and the work that we hope the organization will do. Lee Airton is an assistant professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies in Education in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Lee's teaching, research and advocacy work focus on enabling individuals and institutions to welcome gender and sexual diversity. Their most recent book is *Gender: Your Guide, What to Say, What to Know and What to Do in the New Gender Culture*, which is available from Simon & Schuster. All right, that's our podcast for today. You can find this podcast at [WWW.LGBTQfamiliespeakout.ca](http://WWW.LGBTQfamiliespeakout.ca). This episode was produced with support of the New College Initiative Fund and from Doug Friesen who is a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Thanks to LGBTQ Families Speak out team member Kate Reid, sound engineer Lisa Patterson, and musician Doug Friesen for creating the music that opens and closes the show. I'm Tara Goldstein. All the best.