

S2 — Episode 3 — The Respect, Inclusion, Safety, Equity (RISE) Hub

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Tara talks to Catherine Taylor and Christopher Campbell about the RISE hub for LGBTQ-inclusive education research at the University of Winnipeg.

Tara: Hello, and welcome to Gender Sexuality School. I'm Tara Goldstein, and we're podcasting from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Today we are interviewing two colleagues from the University of Winnipeg, Professor Catherine Taylor, and PhD student Christopher Campbell. Catherine and Chris have worked together on several large-scale national research projects that have helped build inclusive and welcoming schools for sexual and gender minority students and their families. Their latest project is called The RISE Project on LGBTQ inclusive teacher education in Canadian universities. RISE is an acronym for respect, inclusion, safety, equity. Catherine and Christopher, welcome to Gender Sexuality Schooling. We're really excited to have you with us here today.

Catherine: Thank you, Tara, wow, we're really glad to be here.

Chris: So glad to be here.

Tara: Yay! So, to begin our podcast about your really, really exciting and ground-breaking research. Can you tell us a little bit about RISE, which has become an extremely important hub for LGBTQ inclusive education research in Canada?

Catherine: Yeah, well, as you indicated, we've been doing national studies on this topic for over 10 years now. The first one was a student project where we surveyed 3700 high school students, and the next one was a teacher project where we surveyed over 3000 teachers and, and then we did a national study, surveying school district officials. And then finally, this current project, which is working with education professors. So, in the course of doing all of that work over the last 10 years or so we've had to negotiate a great many different school systems and school system organizations. And we've had to network with many people. So, we, and we've had a number of different research teams on the go too, so we wanted a hub to bring everybody together and create a space where people could get project reports and keep track of what we're up to. But also make a space where, you know, semi-reluctant or sceptical organizations could check us out, see that we were the real deal and make up their minds to support the project.

Tara: Right. Tell us a little bit about the funding, because as you said, this kind of research is very new, and it took a while to establish credibility. How did you find funding for RISE?

Catherine: Yeah, that's— that's a really good question. Our first funding did not come from SSHRC.

Tara: Interesting. Interesting.

Catherine: I think, Tara, you were probably one of the first people to get a SSHRC funding for a queer ed research project. And back when we were working on putting the national climate survey project together, say about 2007, I think maybe there have been one or two SSHRC funded queer projects in Canada, right that maybe Becky Ross's work with sex workers in BC or no, the house that Jill built might have had some SSHRC funding, but anyway, so there was going to be none of that. No. So funding for the national climate survey of students came from Egale Canada Human Rights Trust. And then on the strength of that, and you know, Egale provided over \$50,000 and the University of Winnipeg kicked in about \$10,000, and we got finally I think Manitoba Teachers Society to contribute about \$8,000. So, you know, we really, we really had to be scrappy to pull the money together. But that meant that once we devised this Every Teacher project and wanted SSHRC funding, we had something to fill in that application on the track record for research funding in the area, we could claim the Egale funding. And then we got SSHRC funding for the ET project and CIHR funding for the school district project and SSHRC funding, again for the ed project.

Tara: That's so wonderful. Let's go to the first survey, the first big one, which has actually become the piece of research we all quote in order to show how important additional new research around issues of sexuality and gender in schooling really is. And you managed to find a way to survey youth about their experiences at school, LGBTQ youth. Can you tell us a little bit about how you designed that project and some of your key findings?

Catherine: Yeah, sorry. I'm just jotting a note here to remind myself. The project started before I did. Back about 2005, Egale Canada had an education committee of about 10 people, and some of them were already well known in the field of, well in terms of advocacy for LGBTQ inclusive education. So, some of them were well known at the time, and I think they're all well-known now. James Chamberlain from the Surrey book banning case was on the committee. Chris Wells, who's now a Canada Research Chair in queer youth studies at McEwen, Liz Meyer, who is now an associate being at Boulder, and who's written and published extensively, Jane Bully who was a Vancouver School Board member advocating for queer ed. Joan Bancroft, a teacher from, from Bluewater School District in, in Ontario, Noble Kelly, who's now with Teachers Without Borders, I think were the core group. And by this time, they were getting really frustrated with their own experiences of advocacy where they and other activists, students, families would go to school boards and say, children are being hurt by phobia, children are being beaten up, they're being harassed, they're hearing insulting things about themselves. And schools are doing nothing to help. We need some action here. And the reactions that they were typically getting at the time, were "Oh, jeez, that's a very awful story you've just told us but surely that's rare. You know, there's no need to develop policy or anti homophobia education, there's no need to change the curriculum, all we need to do is, is console the rare victim and punish the rare perpetrator." And the activists would say, "But we've got statistics! GLSEN in New York has done this big climate survey showing that homophobia is hurting kids and school boards need to act." And school boards would say, "well, that's America, not Canada at all." So, this committee was determined to do a survey in Canada in order to develop the statistics. One of the things that I like to quote is something an elder said at a research conference I was at a few years ago, he described statistics is our stories cleansed of tears. And I think that I've learned in the past 10 years that you need both the stories and the statistics. If you're

going to, you need the stories to move hearts, and then you need the statistics to move policy. So, at that time, Egale got in touch with me and asked me to join the committee so that we could design a survey that would be methodologically rigorous. And that would get through research ethics boards, so that it would have a chance of getting implemented in schools and would be difficult to disregard once we published our report.

Tara: That's exactly what happened. Because once the 2011 report came out, that gave the rest of us in the community the statistics we needed to do all kinds of things, including design other research projects, that could then begin to create change in schools. Tell us a little bit about how you recruited the youth, and then maybe we can move into some of the key findings.

Catherine: Yeah, well, recruitment, as you suggest, is a challenge in this area, we had some, you know, in the process of doing this work, I had some pretty ugly accusations through email, and through right wing Family Protection sites, and all of that, that, you know, was distasteful that, you know, grown up homosexuals were acting, asking children about sex. And there was a lot of the discourse of, of homosexuals recruiting children that we had to fight against in order to recruit children for this study, so before trying to before trying to get the survey implemented anywhere, I sought a waiver of parental consent, right? For youth who did not have a supportive parent or guardian. And that turned out to be key, and the University of Winnipeg approved that waiver. So that meant that we were able to go forward to youth organizations across the country, asking them to implement the survey, and asking youth to please get parental consent if they had someone who supported their queer identity, but that they could self-consent otherwise. And that worked really well for community organizations with youth members, it didn't work so well in most school districts. The vast majority of school districts still insisted that every participating student had to have full signed parental consent in order to do the survey. And, you know, of course, that's too bad. We asked for the waiver, because the research had made it abundantly clear that it would put queer youth in harm's way to require them to approach parents to whom they were not already out, to get permission to do a survey on this topic. Right. You know, the research is a grotesque litany of hostile reactions to disclosures of LGBTQ identity by teenagers: getting thrown out, getting evicted, getting beaten up, getting humiliated and insulted, getting outed to their churches, getting outed to other faith communities, getting outed to their extended families and so on with a corresponding increase in depression, anxiety, dropping out of school, suicidality, suicide attempts, the whole the whole nine yards, so. So, yeah, we, we worked through community organizations across the country. And I think we had about 1000 students that way. And then we implemented the survey in 15 school districts across the country. So, we had about 1000 queer kids represented in the study and an awful lot of cisgender heterosexual students as well, which turned out to be really, really important, I think to, to the impact of the study.

Tara: Excellent. If I asked you to talk about, you know, two or three of the most important findings from the survey, what would you say they were?

Catherine: Two or three? Well. Number 1, 58%. The survey showed that 58% of cisgender heterosexual students were distressed when they heard homophobic comments at school. 58%. Not when they were

victims of homophobic comments, as of course, some straight gender conforming students are. But when they were witness to homophobic comments, either made as asides or directed at individuals. And I was so surprised when I saw that statistic. And I was not only surprised but delighted. In that 58%, I saw a great deal of untapped solidarity.

Tara: And allyship, potential allyship.

Catherine: Exactly. Yeah, I think other things that surprised us, you might be surprised that they surprised us in 2019, but back in 2009, 2010, when we were analysing the results, you have to remember that the survey was a survey on homophobia in schools. And when we looked at the results, we saw that the report would have to be on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. And the reason I say that is that we found that not only were bi and trans students also experiencing harassment at school, they were experiencing it in different ways. And to different degrees. So trans students were more often harassed than LGB students. Gay boys were more likely than lesbian girls to be sexually harassed and sexually humiliated. Bisexual students were more likely to be sexually harassed than either gay or, or lesbian students. So, you know, some, some findings that defied the usual narrative. So, who's at risk. Yeah, and, and we also, of course, found that the more outnumbered you are, the more at risk you are, the more likely you are to be suffering discrimination and to have weak school attachment as a result. So, we learned that Indigenous queer students had even lower school attachment than non-Indigenous queer students, and it wasn't that they were necessarily experiencing more homophobic, biphobic or transphobic harassment, but that they were experiencing that in the context of already experiencing often poverty and racism and, and so on.

Tara: Right, right. Right. Right. Thinking about those preliminary results, how do you think they've been helpful to teachers and school boards and policy developers? How have some of the folks used your statistics to do interesting things to make things better?

Catherine: Well, I, I think primarily, people have used the study to open the door to get permission to do this work at all. To make the case that it's needed. And one of our main findings was that queer kids who were being harassed were, would have stronger school attachment if they had even a bit of exposure to queer inclusive education. So, a very powerful argument there for ending the ban on the entrance of "homos" into— into the curriculum.

Tara: Huge, huge. And I think your research also gave people who wanted to start a GSA space to begin to do that.

Catherine: Yes, yeah. And there's been a lot of terrific research on GSAs.

Tara: I agree. I agree, it started a whole, a whole new area of research. Now your current project is about creating sexual and gender minority inclusive teacher education in Canadian universities, something that I'm in the middle of myself. How do you see the project, this current project being related to the first survey project? And what do you think you hope to achieve with this new survey?

Catherine: Yeah, so at this point, I'm going to invite Chris to start jumping in. The reason Chris hasn't been talking so far as he was— he was, he was quite a wee lad during the original survey. But he's been, he's been my, my right arm and my left brain. Since the Every Teacher project, and certainly now with the, with the RISE project, as well on teacher education.

Chris: Yeah, I came on board right at the tail end, just as Catherine was wrapping up with Egale climate survey. And so, it was really right at the beginning of the next stage of research that the camp was getting into, which was, as you mentioned, the teacher survey, right, which eventually became the Every Teacher project, which is really awesome. We operated under. But over that time, we sort of developed a sense of the broader school system. So, we were working with students initially and thinking about, what are they experiencing in schools, then we thought, well, the obvious next step is looking at what teachers are, are experiencing, because, because they're the ones that are sort of delivering content, right? Mediating students a lot of the time. And then from there, we realized that a lot of students, or a lot of teachers, I think it was 85%, approved of LGBTQ inclusive education, but for various reasons, they weren't practicing it. So, we realized that there was a real gap between sort of attitudes and what practices teachers were actually able to do. And so, where's — where's the obvious intervention points? Teacher education, right? Really makes sense there. And so that was really part of the initial thinking around the RISE project on LGBTQ inclusive teacher education, is where can we, or how can we help teachers and educators build some capacity around this topic?

Tara: Excellent.

Catherine: And, you know, teacher education, it's just a wonderful opportunity. It's the single biggest system wide structural opportunity to effect widespread change in in the practice of teaching. So, it's a, it's a mercifully small community when you get right down to it, too. So, it's a bit of a change for us. We've been used to having 1000s and 1000s of participants in our studies and now we're dealing with 65 faculties of education across the country, and perhaps sadly, but still in terms of numbers a much different feel to the project. I know that at the summit of the RISE project that that you participated in Tara, we had just about every expert on inclusive teacher education in Canada at that meeting.

Tara: It's true. It's true.

Catherine: And it wasn't that big a group, was it?

Tara: No, it wasn't. And in fact, as we took pictures of us on the bus to and from our retreat location, they were going on social media and our colleagues outside of Canada go, oh, we wish we were on that bus. Everybody in Canada, who does our work is on that bus. And it really was true, right? We, we couldn't believe how exciting it was to— to be with each other. And that gave us, I think, a sense that, you know, as a community, meeting face to face, there was a lot that we had to share with each other. And it was a lot of ways that we can help each other make more progress. It was really quite exciting.

Catherine: Yeah, well, that's great.

Chris: It was one of the most exciting parts about that summit, I found in some ways is we're seeing these people. And a few people expressed this throughout the two days we're together, is these are people we have been reading for years, have taken a lot of strength and solidarity away from the things that they've been doing. And it's so great to finally sit in the same room, to finally meet them face to face and be able to have these conversations and talk with one another. It was really well-done.

Tara: Can you talk to us a little bit about, you know, the connection of the summit to the design of the study? Because in some ways, you're anxious to get a read of our teacher ed climate, right? What was going on? What were people trying? What were people doing? What was working? What wasn't? What were other possibilities? Did any of our conversations at that summit impact your thinking about the design of the next survey that's about to go out?

Chris: Oh, certainly, yeah, we've, we've really been able to make quite a bit of hay, if you will, from the conversations that we're having, because there's— people are doing this work, and so often, it feels like we're doing this work in isolation, because we're at different institutions. And we're working within different climates. And a lot of times it feels like we're the only one that's doing it. And a lot of times, we are the only ones that are doing it within our individual institutions. And so I've had people that have been doing this work in their own contexts and be able to bring that to sort of the larger, the larger group, and hear about how they've navigated certain difficulties or challenges or the windfalls, if you will, that have come their way or enabled them to do this work is really energizing and has really given us a sense of different directions we can take in developing sort of further consultations and with what we'll eventually be delivering, which is a curriculum framework that will offer up some of these findings to various parts of teacher educational programs. Because it really gives us a broader sense of what's going on across the country. But also, within sort of a much smaller group of teacher education professors and experts who do this work on a day-to-day basis.

Tara: Wonderful.

Catherine: One of the frustrations for me and having to, having to miss that summit was not being able to participate in conversations on something that, you know, again, we have a kind of unique opportunity to do something here that I think hasn't been attempted before. And that's not only to develop a framework for LGBTQ inclusive teacher education and try to encourage faculties of ed to implement it across the country, but to go beyond inclusion. And that could be, I'm sure, the subject of the whole -- perhaps you've already done a podcast or two on the trouble with inclusion.

Tara: Yes, we've had a number of people talk about it, but I'd love to hear you talk about it.

Catherine: Well, I mean, this focus on inclusion is the old Adam stirred. I know originally at UBC when they, when they began the Education for All project a few years back in their faculty of education they had planned to do curriculum mapping right up there whole B.Ed. program, looking for insertion points,

where the existing curriculum could be opened up just a little bit to let some queer content in. And you know, that's a really, really good strategy for inclusive education. But it pretty much leaves the curriculum as it is. If the curriculum is cisnormative and heteronormative, and, for example, wedded to, you know, binary gender models, then it really isn't opening up much space for queer people to, to live our lives unmolested. So, we want to go beyond, we want to go beyond that. And we conceive of what's required there as being to "queer" the teacher education curriculum. And I know that not every faculty of education across the country is going to say, "Oh, fantastic. Let's queer the teacher" – even at OISE they wouldn't say that!

Tara: No, they wouldn't, they wouldn't. My, my queering of Teacher Education exists in a space of an elective course for a small number of the teacher education students, and we have everywhere to go to imagine, you know, more than just that one space being set aside to queer teacher ed. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, no, for sure.

Catherine: That's, that's very difficult. And I would say the same thing about my university, too. I mean, people expect the faculty of ed here to be, you know, all LGBT all the time. Because it's the faculty that I've been associated with. I became Associate Dean of Arts, stopped teaching education courses, and that was pretty much the end of, of the queer education courses in that faculty, a few colleagues try to make a little room here and there. But, but yeah, so we want to, we want to do both, we want to offer a framework for people to just get LGBTQ stuff in their, in existing teacher education courses. But we also want to offer some recommendations for going beyond that, towards a queered teacher education program. And not only a queered, but an Indigenized teacher education program. And we're so excited to be able to work with Alex Wilson, at University of Saskatchewan in doing this work. And yeah, we'd love to come back and talk to you about it before I retire in another year or so. And by that time, I hope that we'll have a good solid framework ready and on our website.

Tara: That sounds absolutely wonderful. We'd love to hear more about that framework, which really is going to be innovative in so many ways. So, we will make sure that we come back to, to visit in, in about a year's time when, when you're ready. So, before that moment happens, what needs to happen next, what are some of your next steps?

Catherine: Well, we're working now to develop the website, maybe Chris can speak more to that. We've identified, you know, we've done a system scan of all the Bachelor of Education programs across the country looking for a manageable number of core courses. And now we're in the process of developing the descriptions for those core courses. So, they might be things that are called Foundations of Education in one university or Foundations of Teaching and Learning and another university. What are, what are the courses that share common elements and how could we include queer content in those core courses and how could we queer those core courses?

Tara: Fantastic, fantastic. Well, we're going to be so looking forward to the website being developed, and to your work being unveiled. And we, we are a very, you know, close community, as you said, and if

there's anything we can do to help move the project forward, just let us know. Because I know, my colleagues and I really are looking forward to seeing what comes next.

Catherine: Once we've developed our recommendations for each of these core courses, we are going to be reaching out to the field so you will be hearing from us. We'll be asking for feedback on, on some of our recommendations.

Tara: That sounds wonderful. Another place that might be interesting to connect to is there's a group of folks who have started a special interest group called QSEC, Queer Studies in Education and Culture as part of the Canadian Society for Studies in Education Field right at, at the annual Congress, SSHRC funded Congress conference. And I'm, I think, the co-president with Lee Airton at the moment, and we're trying to create a space where a national gathering can happen at least once a year. So, this year, of course, Congress is in London, and there will be a small group of folks gathering together, exchanging papers, some social events. But maybe what we need to be talking about is when you're ready, using that QSEC space as a space to feature your work and, and have multiple conversations about different aspects of it.

Catherine: Oh, that's a brilliant idea. We'd welcome that.

Tara: Terrific. Well, I'm going to take that one back with me. Catherine Taylor, Christopher Campbell, thanks so much for joining us today. It was absolutely terrific to hear you speak about the RISE project and all of the work that you've done over the last several years. It's quite a legacy. The legacy continues and the community is looking forward to being involved.

Catherine: Okay, well, thank you so much, Tara.

Chris: Thank you. It was my pleasure.

Tara: Professor Catherine Taylor is the lead researcher of the RISE Research Program, Associate Dean of Arts and professor in the Faculty of Education and the Department of Rhetoric, Writing and Communications at the University of Winnipeg. Christopher Campbell is the RISE research program coordinator, also located in the Faculty of Education at the University of Winnipeg. Chris is working on his PhD in Education at the University of Manitoba studying two-spirit LGBTQ inclusive education policy. Alright, that's our podcast for today. You can find this podcast at www.LGBTQfamiliespeakout.ca. This episode was produced in the 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 the LGBTQ Families team-member Kate Reid, sound engineer Lisa Patterson and musician Doug Freisen for creating the music that opens and closes the show. I'm Tara Goldstein. All the best.