

S2 — Episode 4 — Teaching Gender Diversity: Teacher-Tested Lesson Plans

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Tara talks to Lee Airton about the book they are co-editing with Susan W. Woolley called *How to teach about gender diversity: Teacher-tested lesson plans for K-12 classrooms*.

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 for the second time this season to talk about an exciting new book they are co-editing with Susan Wooley called *How to Teach About Gender Diversity, Teacher Tested Lesson Plans for K to 12 classrooms*. Lee, welcome back to Gender, Sexuality and Schooling. Oh, I'm so happy to welcome you back. So, your new book is coming out this June in 2020 by Canada Scholars Press. Tell us a little bit about the new book: why you decided you wanted to create a book on lesson plans for teaching gender diversity in K-12 schools?

Lee: Well, I think there's a couple of reasons. Well, first of all, it was my friend, Susan's idea, Associate Professor at Colgate University in New York state, then we've known each other for many years now through the Queer Studies SIG of ARA. And so, Susan wanted to do this book and asked me and I immediately said yes, because Susan is an emerald, so I was— any opportunity to work with her I was grateful for. And so that was about two years ago. And so, my interest in getting involved and I think I share this with her was the fact that there's so many resources that float around about why it's important to think about gender diversity as a teacher, why it's important to think about who your learners are, you might have trans, gender nonconforming students, etc. Here are stats we have on how things go for those students. And here are ways that we can think of offering them extracurricular opportunities. But what we didn't see was a book that was aimed at teachers that actually modelled how you can integrate issues of gender diversity into your taught curriculum, right? So we have an incredible array, I think, upwards of 30 lesson plans in the book, yeah, we just we put out a call, we worked pretty hard on the call for chapters, because we wanted things that were not only about how to teach about trans people, right, or how to teach— how to teach— how to teach trans people, or how to teach about trans people. We want to keep gender diversity very open, right? Because it's so often a misnomer that the only thing this means is transgender. But actually, there's a lot of ways that, like I say, in my other work, when gender gets rigid, it doesn't do very, doesn't do well by anyone, right? So we have an incredible array of lesson plans that do everything from teaching— teaching kids how to sort of think differently about gender stereotypes, to have, so to show, so, to modelling for a teacher, how you teach about the existence of trans people using a storybook, to how you teach about the existence of different types of girls and boys and different gender nonconformity and conformity using a storybook, we have things that are like how to teach about different kinds of variables and senior stats, but using— using data on the ways that trans people identify ourselves on census. We have things in there like how to begin this conversation in Catholic school. We have all kinds— like how to do this in the literature and language arts and in social studies, and in an advisory or homeroom. And in health and physical education. It's a book that isn't just about how do you teach about gender diversity? But how do you actually teach content in these disciplines, using gender diversity as a concept, as an example, as content for your lessons? So, it's a really, it's a book that, that shows that it's very possible, right? No

matter where you're teaching, we have Elementary, we have middle school, we have secondary lesson plans. And each lesson plan is prefaced by a one- or two-page preamble from a teacher or an educator who's actually taught this before. So, talking about their entry point into the work, where they teach, how it went, thoughts they have on the work, and the lesson plans are very developmental. So, there's advanced prep for the teacher. There's things to think about before you teach, and we have a bunch of— few different introductions in the book too that really situate the work and offer some advice and some further reading so it's a very much a, you want to try this out? Here you go.

Tara: Wow. Yeah, it has, that's exactly what has been missing and I'm going to look forward to using it as soon as it comes out with my next group, right, next— next fall. That will be wonderful.

Lee: How might, how might a book like this help you in the courses you teach?

Tara: Well, I do teach a course called Gender, Sexuality and Schooling --

Lee: The oldest one in Canada!

Tara: —The oldest one in Canada. And, and it's in its current moment, we have teachers who are part of our Master of Teaching Program, who are learning to be teachers who are getting this certification, mixed in with mostly Master of Education students who are already teaching in the classroom. Increasingly, we have folks who are teaching from places outside Ontario, outside Canada. So, there's a real range of experience, both in talking about gender and sexual diversity and a range of teaching experience, generally. And the course really looks at theories to help us think about practical issues and practices of teaching and practices that need to be theorized. So, we can see how well they're working. And I can just imagine, linking the general theory practice articles and book chapters and letters that we're reading around a whole range of different topics, to actual lesson plan. So, I'm imagining dealing with an issue, talking about it in all kinds of ways, from all kinds of perspectives, an issue on bullying, for example, and then I'm carrying that with a lesson plan that would do some work around the issue, right? And I think that would be very exciting.

Lee: Nice. We find when I teach about this stuff, you might find this as well, there's often a sense of like, oh, well, how could I even bring this up? In my elementary class? Well, this is in a way a bit of a bulldozer to get that out of the way and be like, these people do. Here is how you do it. So, let's get ready.

Tara: And here are examples! You know, when we first began to do this work a long time ago, there was a documentary film called, It's Elementary.

Lee: Oh yes there was.

Tara: And one of the things that was so powerful about that, and we used it, you know, for years and years and years and years, was that it showed actual teachers doing the work and part of its power

came from, well, if you're worried about doing it, here's what it looks like, right? And here's how the students are responding. And I think it's perfect timing for something new because the world has changed a lot. I think that film came out in the mid 90s. And the last time we used it, which was only last year, there was talk in the film that began to feel so outdated that the newest youngest generation of teachers felt that it was unacceptable to hear some of that talk and, and it made them so uncomfortable, that they couldn't really engage. Right. And for years, I never thought it was dated. But I think this new generation of, of our students who are teachers have far less tolerance for sexism, heterosexism, and for homophobic discourse. And, and so it is time for new sets of practices.

Lee: Well, I think I told you that when I recently— with, with your doctoral student, Austin, when we recently had a paper out which reviewed, we tried to be as exhaustive as possible, I'm confident saying it was exhaustive, as of about 2018, all the published scholarship on gender and sexual diversity integration in teacher ed, right. We had a whole separate category for pieces that talked about using It's Elementary. As a, as a pedagogical tool. Yeah. So, it has held— that documentary for all its positive points, and all of it sort of anachronisms now, like that has done— that has been like a central text that has informed how teachers have been prepared for this work for 20 years. And its impact is incredible. So, I think we're— we're right for a bit of a study of how that has impacted our practice, because it's very interesting text.

Tara: I think that's actually an excellent idea.

Lee: There's 16 papers that talk about the impact of screening that film on people learning to teach.

Tara: So, there's a generation, yeah, that had been taught on that. And if this current generation is saying, Yeah, but it's, it's not doing it for me because—

Lee: There should be a documentary about the documentary!

Tara: There you go. There you go.

Lee: Not me, someone else.

Tara: It's another project for folks who are looking for a new project! When you think about your book, are there any lesson plans that stand out that you think are going to be particularly helpful or popular?

Lee: Well, it's hard to say because there's, there's so much variety, right? So, we have things for, we have— okay, one of the things, a couple things I'll mention, there is a trio of lesson plans for the elementary years. And one of those, I think I mentioned them earlier and a bit of an oblique way. But one of them is, this is how you teach about the reality and the validity of transgender people in early primary. And that's different than the lesson plan that's about -- this is how you teach about gender stereotypes and gender conformity in early primary because those are very different things. So, when we're doing our guided revising process, we worked with our authors who are really into, come from all

different kinds of educational backgrounds to ensure that there was a kind of focus and that those things didn't come, didn't bleed together. There's also another, there's also another lesson plan that's authored by Jessica Prioletta, who's an OISE doctoral student actually, and that one is about leading kids in exploring gender, using toys, and engaging basically, a data analysis or coding exercise with toys they bring in from home to begin a conversation about gender conformity, and gender norms. So taken together, those three are an excellent series that do very different work together. But— but offers several pathways into having a conversation that most people think is impossible with young children, but young children are already gender scholars. So, there's those ones. And then another thing I'll highlight is our middle years section is overwhelmingly lesson plans that guide people in sort of preadolescence and early adolescence, through that very challenging period of time in one's life. But from a way that is gender expansive, right, so we have a couple of lesson plans, including Benjamin Lee Hicks, who's also your doctoral student, but and how Rubio Gonzalez and Karleen Pendleton Jiménez, their lesson plans, they really lead people through these very meaningful experiences, some ceremonial, some ritualistic, some about engaging with popular culture and sort of identifying like, like a person whose sort of relationship to gender is unconventional inspires you, but really giving people a way to make sense of this transition in their lives and the challenges and the joys of gender and how it can be hard and how it can be wonderful, but also difficult. And it gives people sort of a communal experience in working through that together. Right. So, the middle, your stuff is really rich, and really well guided by the sort of preamble and the wisdom of those educators. So, I hope that a lot of folks will be inspired to take puberty on in a very different way.

Tara: Wow, that sounds so exciting. Well, since you've talked about elementary and middle school, something from your secondary school set of lessons: anything stand out? What can secondary students do that, that is inspiring?

Lee: Oh, sure. Well, I'll I think I'll come back to one that's— a couple that are really sticking with me right now. One is guiding students in carrying out a gender audit of their high school. So our lesson plan author there, and we have 30 names, so forgive me if I can't cite them all on demand, but our— the author there has I think maybe Meg Gardner, she has created maybe four different tasks that— that students can be assigned, that are very sort of research based, right, gathering census data, doing a survey, doing more anthropological sort of observational study or thinking about, like the texts and the images that are, and the different kinds of representations that are in the school and their materials and on the walls and, and sending students out depending on their interests, probably in a social studies class and in social studies to really do a study of how is gender playing out in our high school? And what are some things we think ought to change? So that is, that's the gender audit lesson plan for secondary. And then another one I really love, especially because I can't— I can't do math to save my life, is a really sort of, you know, what, because I can't do math, I think it's secondary, but I actually think it's middle years, it's when students get students get exposed to the concept of different kinds of variables. Right. So, I think it's sort of early secondary. And like I said before, this is introducing things like nominal variable and ordinal variable, and then looking at two different sets of publicly available data that include information how trans people self-identify. And the really cool part there is that there's a very sort of normative math lesson here. And then at this point, the— the sort of evaluate— the explore

section of the lesson plan is, here's the Canadian census. And here's the Trans PULSE. So Canadian census has data on gender identity, and the Trans PULSE which is a very community-connected large-scale study of trans people, network to trans people in Ontario and now Canada, excellent study led by Greta Baur and Ayden Scheim. So that has a very different way of inviting people to articulate their gender identities in the Canadian census. We also have the US Census and then another similar community-based study. So, the activity is basically about learning how to do stats in a very rudimentary way but variables but the material is which is better, right, like a community source, more complex way of using, still using stats to think about people's identities, or this sort of boilerplate way. So, it, it's— we, the books' authors are amazing and they model how you can just teach your content and integrate this in ways that don't have to be, "sit down children, we're going to talk about transgender people", like it doesn't, it doesn't have to look like that. And that is, that is sort of the, the meme. And that's not what we're doing.

Tara: So exciting. The book how to teach about gender diversity teacher tested lesson plans for K to 12 classrooms will come out in June 2020. By Canada - Canadian Scholars Press—

Lee: That's right. And the title might evolve a little bit -- we're kind of in the last— last like throes of the title, but it'll be something just like that. Yeah.

Tara: Very similar. And we can all buy it over the summer and use it in our fall courses. Lee, thanks so much for joining us today. I really truly loved hearing about the lessons our colleagues have created to teach gender diversity in the classroom. And I can't wait to read the book and use the book with my students. So great. 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 focused on enabling individuals and institutions to welcome gender and sexual diversity. Their most recent book, before the book we've talked about today, 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. This episode was produced with 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 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.