

S4 — Episode 3 — Teaching Gender and Sexuality in French Language Schools

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Tara talks to Camille Blanchard Séguin, Jared Boland, and Miriam Greenblatt about the challenges of creating gender neutral language practices in French and the activism of youth in French language schools around issues of gender and sexuality.

Tara: Hello, and welcome to season four of Gender Sexuality School. I'm Tara Goldstein and we're podcasting from Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the traditional territory of many Indigenous nations. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13, signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississauga and Chippewa bands. In Toronto, Ontario, and Canada, we are all treaty people who need to work towards responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action. Today, we have three guests, we have Camille Blanchard Séguin, Jared Boland, and Miriam Greenblatt. All three are here to talk about their work around gender, sexuality in French language K to 12 education. Camille and Jared and Miriam, welcome to Gender Sexuality School. We're so happy to have you here.

Jared: Thanks for having us.

Tara: Oh, you're so welcome. To begin our interview, can each of you tell us a little bit about the work you have done with French language educators and the challenges of talking about issues of gender and sexuality in the French language classroom. And Miriam, I'm going to ask you to begin.

Miriam: Okay. So, my name is Miriam, I use she/her pronouns. In French, I use elle pronouns and I use the feminine versions of words. So, I've been working in education for many years, about half of that as a teacher, and most of which was in French language schools in Ontario. So that's been where the bulk of my teaching experience has been. And I would say in that context, I learned through trial and error how to address gender and sexuality in my classroom, and also how to navigate my own identity as a queer educator. And I also spent many years as an equity instructional lead for a French language school board in Ontario, where I was responsible for training, supporting, and producing resources for all school staff around how to build inclusive welcoming spaces for all students. So, a big piece of that was really focused on 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion, writing resources for that, providing training for that and working with teachers around that. So, I would say it's a topic I've spent some time on for sure. Um, in terms of the challenges, talking about gender and sexuality, specifically, in French schools, for me, I think there are a few. So maybe I'll start with a couple and then we can go back and forth. Sorry, I've never done this before.

Tara: It's great, you're doing great.

Miriam: Great! Okay. So obviously, some of the challenges are the same as they are in English schools in any other context, right, there's a lack of comfort, there's a lack of training, there's a lack of explicit policies that are being communicated to educators to let them know that they're supported, that they

can do this, that actually it's encouraged, a lot of mixed messaging, all of that. I think that that gets compounded in French schools in Ontario, because for one thing, they're much smaller, the schools and the boards are much smaller. So, there's a lot less staff and capacity to be supporting people around different issues. Things that might have, you know, a 10-, 15-person team, or even a five-person team and one board and a French board, often one person instead will have five different files that they're working on. So, there's less support to begin with. There's also a lot more unqualified teachers in the classroom because it's understaffed. So, there's a lot of, I think, staffing issues that go into the lack of resources that are really there to support teachers to help them feel comfortable. That's one big challenge. Another challenge in French is that there are just simply less resources, less books, less videos, less lesson plans, less websites. So, a lot of the time you need to have the time and the capacity and the energy to translate things or to adopt them or to find ways to make it work for you. And that takes sort of an extra level of willingness that is difficult when you are a teacher and you're working really hard, and you're really stretched thin. And so that's a big issue as well. And the last one that I'll mention that I'm sure Camille and Jared will also want to talk about is that French is a very gendered language. And it's really complicated to talk about gender, and particularly to address things in a non-binary way in French. So, you really have to be very intentional, and there's a lot of questions. There's a lot of roadblocks to try to do that much more so than in English in my experience.

Tara: So interesting. Thanks so much. Jared. We'll move to you. Can you start by telling us a little bit about the work that you have done? And maybe talk a little bit to some of the points that Miriam talked about?

Jared: Yeah, sure. Thanks, Tara. Yeah, so the majority of my work is actually sort of predominantly theoretical, to be honest. So it was, it was the focus of my master's work, was on professional development for French as a Second Language teachers on queerness and transness and sort of how to integrate those perspectives and histories into teaching French as a Second Language. And so, you know, to expand on some of the things that Miriam talked about, I think there's an additional layer in French as a Second Language where a lot of the vocabulary is really difficult for French as a Second Language speakers because translating words from English to French doesn't work all the time. One example is the word *allosexual* in English and *allosexual* in French mean different things. And so, or even take the word "queer". In French, it's the same word, it's queer, like pronounced and spelled the same way. But the— the history of that word in English means something, but in French, it doesn't, because it sort of came up in English. And so, the way that even the vocabulary is used, doesn't really translate sort of one for one. And then the additional layer, I'd say, there, too, is along the same lines, is there's a lot of— sort of like sociocultural baggage that goes alongside language that second language speakers and I, like I'm putting myself firmly in that camp, are missing or aren't using the language in the same way. And so, there isn't the same confidence in like, these are the words that the community is using, or communities are using, you know, today, sort of thing. So, I think to Miriam's point, the, we know that there's a significant gap, as far as training goes, even in teacher preparation contexts. And so once in the classroom, there's the challenge of "okay, I have to, personally myself keep up to date on things" because principals and other administrators will tend to, and this is supported by literature, will tend to support PD on— on sort of visible diversity. But things that aren't visible, like gender, sex, sexuality, is not

sort of the same level of priority for administrators. So, yeah, I think there's a couple of pieces as far as how this particular lens of equity lands in schools, and lands in FSL specifically, that makes it difficult for teachers to do this work.

Tara: One of the ways that I know English language teachers keep up is by engaging in social media. Often language around gender and sexuality evolve on social media. Is there in your experience, a vibrant French language set of discussions going on online?

Jared: Yeah, I almost wonder if Camille or Miriam would be sort of better positioned— I know, Camille, probably just thinking about her thesis work probably has insight.

Tara: Fantastic. So, Camille, we're going to go to you. And could you talk us through a little bit of the work you're doing now? And tell us a little bit about your thesis and maybe speak a little more about this very issue?

Camille: Yes. Um, so for my thesis, I was looking at linguistic strategies that teachers who are in charge of GSAs, or just gender and sexuality alliances in French language schools in Ontario, how they've been really navigating the French language, with their role, to kind of see if there were, like best practices we could pull out, challenges we could identify. And so, I heard a lot from— from these teachers about how they are doing it. And there are really a multitude of ways. Some of them, which are what you were just referring to, Jared, like on social media, these conversations are happening. There is more and more, more and more language being developed. Yes. And I think a lot of it is happening on blogs, on Twitter. A lot of it happened. I'm forgetting the name of the, the blog, platform. Maybe Jared or Miriam, you can help me, Tumblr, yes, Tumblr is really the place where a lot of that language I think, like emerged from and so definitely I have seen that there is a community but one of the biggest challenges that the teachers have been telling me about is the fact that they feel very alone in this. Changing a language is not something you can do alone. It— there— there's a bit of a sense of like lacking support. And that if you know other teachers aren't on board, when you're teaching about these new ways of using French, it can be really hard if it's only, like in a very small part of the, of the school. So, definitely, that's one of the challenges that came up in my research. However, one of— one Franco-Ontarian organization, FESFO, which is the, like the youth Federation, has been answering that call and organizing meetings for GSAs, for French schools across Ontario, to have the students as well as the teachers meet up so that they're able to kind of find that community to get together. And they have a series of little trainings, training sessions. And they invited Jared and I to talk about the, like, French inclusive strategies. So that was, that was one of the things we were able to do to kind of get that conversation rolling, because everyone's kind of having it individually.

Tara: So, wait, now, because we are still living in a moment of COVID, was this work virtual? Or was it taking place in person? How are folks trying to connect and build a bit of a French language queer inclusive community?

Camille: These, the event I was just referring to, yes, happened virtually, I don't know what they're going to do for the future. I know, in the past, they were meeting in person, and they were having like three locations across Ontario. But now it is online. I think as— as much as there are downsides, there are pros as well, where it's easier to, to link up. And I think that goes back to what we were just talking about having online communities through social media, and people can connect their ideas to the ideas of others. And I think that's a really big part of what's driving this change.

Tara: Fantastic. So going to the actual work that you do, all three of you do professional development work with teachers. Miriam, going to you now, what are some of the key features of the professional development work you do? What do you think is really important for French language teachers to know?

Miriam: That's a great question. I think I always spend some time just going through, I use the, I often will rely on the gender unicorn as a bit of like a model to help people understand: what is gender? What is sexual orientation? What is biological sex, what is sex assigned at birth. I think even so many people who have really great intentions and want to support are really grateful to have a chance to just understand these, these complicated questions that no one has ever, like educated them on before. So, I definitely think there's just a big piece around educating around still what might seem, from might feel sometimes quite basic, like really basic understandings of identity and how it works, and what is gender and what is sexuality. And then I think the other piece is helping people understand how small actions can have a really big impact. So, you know, there's a, there's, I think another barrier for teachers to really take on this work is this feeling of like, it's scary, it's dramatic, parents are gonna react badly. I don't know what to say. What if I can't answer a question? Like, those are big, scary questions that are legitimate. But at the same time, a lot of the strategies are really small, right, like asking people's pronouns is a simple question. And it doesn't have to be a dramatic conversation and can open so many doors, so many doors, you might not even realize are coming your way. If you ask that question, right? Putting up a poster, I don't think a poster is enough. But it is a sign that you can say like, I care and I'm here for you, right? Like not assuming, not using certain language, assuming like, oh, you know, I bet you got a cute boyfriend, or you know, whatever, whatever it might be that people say or comments about people's appearance, like, it's really not that hard to actually shift these small things and make a space where people really feel like they can be their full selves, and that the effects are just so much bigger than the effort you actually have to put in to create that space, I think.

Tara: Wonderful. I'm just gonna let our listeners know the Unicorn Glossary that Miriam talked about is available in a new publication called *Our Children Are Your Students: Teaching Gender/Sexuality at School*. And the reference for that is in the notes on the podcast platform. Jared let's turn to you. Miriam talked a little bit about understanding terminology and talked about strategies. Is there anything else that you and Camille do in the PD work that you've been doing? That, that you could talk about, that layers that— those very important basic activities?

Jared: Definitely, yeah. So, I think I have to agree with Miriam that, it's funny, like the three of us have, actually, we've done PD sessions together, like we've lead sessions together. And one of the things that I

think is kind of come up for us is that while we expect there's a certain level of knowledge around like, what does the L stand for? What does the B stand for, for, you know, what that actually means, in practice, there's, there's often a bit of a gap there. So, we've had to spend time really sort of digging in and, and adding nuance, which I think speaks to some of the curiosity that's there and the desire to do best by students. Where I think that translates as far as like, where we tried to go with, with different PD sessions, kind of two directions. The first is, like, what are things that I can do, as Miriam was saying, like, in my classroom tomorrow. I want things that that are local to my school contexts, that are local to my policy context, that makes sense with my administration, with the parents I'm working, with the students I'm working with. So we've encountered a number of really specific questions, even doing like, like, I'm giving full credit to Miriam here, like we've done mapping activities with, with teachers around, "okay, where are washrooms in your school?" and realizing, "Oh, they're right next to the drama room", which is, you know, this mean, that means this, or "they're next to the gyms," and that means, you know, different things. And so, really helping teachers kind of locate a lot of their, their PD in their context, really drawing on some like sociocultural, theoretical perspectives. Another thing that has, interestingly, come up, I think, in every session we've been in, regardless of what the focus has been, really comes down to, the gendered aspect of the language, how to refer to non-binary students in the language. And then how especially I think for FSL people is like, how does that translate into the way I teach the language? And I think that there's not, I think, like, I've observed, that there's, there's quite a bit of fear around the professional consequence of teaching French in particular ways that like, if I if I teach my students that there is il and elle and then there's this "iel" thing, which is sort of like "they" equivalent in, one of many, in French, will I get in trouble with my principal? Will I get in trouble with the parents? And you know, am I, you know, will I be accused of brainwashing children, and all these kinds of things and so we've had to have a number of really interesting dialogues around like, teaching the language as it exists. You know, like, these are things, these are grassroots developments in the language, versus like, what L'Academie Francaise, this sort of governing body are L'Office Quebecoise de la Langue Francaise, the Canadian, the Quebec version of the same sort of governing body, are saying is like the official French. So, trying to break some of the moulds as far as like, oh, I can teach French in the same way with like, small additions, and it like makes a big difference. So, I think that's some of what Miriam's getting at.

Tara: And for our listeners who haven't heard the gender-neutral pronoun, could you repeat it and tell us how you spell it?

Jared: For sure. So, it's "iel", which is i-e-l. It's sort of like, "I yelled at the top of my voice", like "yell" is the closest I think like English goes. There's, there's a number of other ones. There's like, "ol", O L, "al" A L, "ul", U L. Like there's, there's tons, in the same way that we have lots of different neopronouns in English. So yeah, I think, I won't speak because this is not my language community. But I think our, my observation has been that "iel" is by far the most commonly used. But certainly, there are lots of others that are— that people will use. Yeah.

Tara: So interesting. Thanks, Jared. Camille, back to you. How would you layer the work that the three of you do together? Is there anything else to add?

Camille: I think so. I think one message we've been trying to give during some of this PD as well, is to not be scared of criticizing French as it exists, and maybe criticizing isn't the right word, but just to, to not be scared to shake it up, that the language belongs to its speakers. And there is a linguistic change happening right now. And you're allowed to be a part of that. And I think it's especially important to show your students that they are part of the speakers of this language, and therefore they have ownership over the language. And they can shape its future and its, its present, really. I think that that's really empowering, especially to francophones in a minority setting. Given that there is so much linguistic insecurity, hearing messages from larger, more majority context where you feel like your French is not up to par. And having, having that empowering... Like those comments coming from your teachers showing you that you can have an impact on how French is spoken. And what is legitimate French is actually just up to us, and not up to some, some higher power, I think is something that we're trying to, to bring forward and to make teachers feel empowered in that as well.

Jared: I think like, there's this, like this fear of like, "Oh, if I like, you know, if I teach French the wrong way, like someone's gonna send me a letter," or like, like, it's not gonna happen, you know, it's, um, yeah.

Miriam: I agree. I wholeheartedly agree with what Camille just said, it was something that I wrote in my notes preparing for this, like, I think the best way to think about it is as an opportunity, it's like, we have this opportunity collectively to make this change. And with students, especially in this minority context, many of my students I've found don't feel as connected to French like, often, when a heavier topic comes up or more personal topic, they'll prefer to talk about it in English. And this is kind of this moment where we can say like, you can take this thing that really matters to you. And then you can take this language that is a part of you, and you can be empowered and be an activist in making it feel more like your own. And I think that's actually like a really cool exercise you can be working on continuously with your students. And I think you know, earlier, Camille, you use the word question, criticize and you changed it to question, and I couldn't help but think about how in the class that I took with you, Tara, we talked about how to, like to be queer is to question, you know, and I just couldn't help but have that come to mind and think like, this is exactly what we're talking about.

So, I was thinking back on your article on the constellation between, like, safe positive and queering, and I think that directly applies to language, there are, you know, these, these safe ways of using the language in order to make sure you're not like hurting the queer kids in your classroom. But then there are positive ways that you're affirming them by using these neologisms, these and these new words and these things like that. And then you can also queer the language, we can like explode it, we can just really turn it on its head and like, make it our own.

Tara: Wonderful. Let me ask all three of you starting with Camille. What are French language speaking youth telling you about what it is that they're thinking about? Or what is it that they'd like to see happen in schools?

Camille: I think that they're really, they're the ones taking the reins, they are the ones leading these kinds of changes. What pushed me to do my master's was a question from a student about gender in French when I was doing my practicum. I think really that they are having these— these conversations, and I can't speak for all of them as to what their, what they, what they want to see. But speaking, having spoken with the teachers who work with students, I really think that there's a lot of, of readiness to change the language and that they're excited to do that work. I think, I think, yeah, I think that we're more ready to— to just dismantle like the rules of French a little bit more.

Tara: Right, right. Miriam, what would you say that youth is saying to about their experiences at school?

Miriam: I definitely agree with like Camille is saying, I think that there's a readiness to kind of say like, enough is enough, like, the washrooms can be inclusive, like, why are we still having this conversation? And kind of saying like, we're the future of la Francophonie in Ontario, so like to follow our lead. We're, we're impatient, and we're ready for change. So, I think that there's definitely like kind of a fatigue of having conversations around homophobia and transphobia all the time and wanting to be more in a place of inclusion and celebration and diversity that is that is less weighed down by a defensive stance, if that makes sense. And there's a, there's an impatience with older generations who are not keeping up with that.

Tara: Excellent. Jared, anything you want to say to add to any of that?

Jared: Yeah, I think I think two things. The first, like, the stories that I've heard sort of second-hand from, from teacher friends from, from colleagues here on the table, I think just sort of echoing a lot of what has been said already around that students are ready and are they're sort of at the forefront and are pushing for things. They're the ones asking questions. A friend of mine teaches at a, at a French, or sorry, um, teaches French at a school in, in London, and was asked by a third grader, how, like, they're like, "I use they/them pronouns in English", or, you know, "a friend uses they them pronouns in English, like, how would I refer to them in French?". And so like, these are, these questions are coming from very young students. So, these are students who are like aware of sort of the shifting sands and want to do right by their peers. And I'm sort of struck by what Miriam was saying around like, taking action. And I'm reflecting on Alex Green on Twitter, who wrote about the having-conversations-industrial-complex. And you know, how much of this is just like, is sort of the endless conversation before action can kind of be taken. And I think the teachers that we've had the pleasure of, of interacting with and providing PD to and having, you know, conversations with, there's a lot of readiness to take action. But I think, as we've pointed out, there's, there's reservation around not wanting to take the wrong action. And I think this is another thing that we're trying to fight back against that, like, you're going to make mistakes. That's just the nature of this kind of work. But it's about, and I think, I think this came up in your classes as well Tara, that I keep with me, is like making better mistakes all the time. So, I think that's the message we've really been trying to get across in some of the PD work we've been doing too. And that, you know, to humble yourself before your students, right, like, bring them into the conversation and like, you're allowed to make mistakes, I'm allowed to make mistakes, you know, as the teacher. So, yeah.

Miriam: That also reminds me, if I can jump in, that also reminds me of something else from your class. Sorry, Tara. But we learned a lot from you all the time. It is what it is. You're amazing. It's something that we talked about was just getting more comfortable with being uncomfortable, I think is also touching on what Jared just said, like, it's okay not to know everything and still try. And it's okay to make mistakes and making better mistakes and all of that, like, we've got to just move forward. Yeah.

Tara: Let me ask a little bit about principals and administrators. Earlier, you were talking about how there often isn't support and teachers need more support. In your professional development work, have you ever had the opportunity to talk to administrators who, after all, have a leadership role in schools? And what is your sense about the kinds of things that we might talk to administrators or school leaders about? And do you think that there is an openness there, there are opportunities there that are worth pursuing? And maybe we'll start with Miriam, because I know you've done some work as an equity, you know, trainer, and you probably had opportunities to work with school leaders and administrators.

Miriam: This is a delicate question, I think. Obviously, there's a huge range of administrators out there and I've worked with like incredible administrators who are willing to do anything for their students. And, and I, you know, I don't want to paint a room with the same brush or whatever the expression is, but I do think, at least in some of the experiences I— I've had, there seems to be this fear around liability and parents, parents in particular, and also a lot, a lot of assumption. So French schools are, in southwest Ontario, are largely made up of immigrant communities, right, newly arriving communities from French speaking countries in Africa, in particularly North Africa, Caribbean, like different places. And there's a lot of assumptions around, that people are coming in that they're homophobic and that they're going to be homophobic and they're not going to understand. So, they're, you know, the misunderstandings have a lot of layers to them that are not just one, right. There's also like racism, and there's also xenophobia. And there's like, a lot of assumptions that need to be questioned going into that. But I think part of the— part of the problem is that there's a, a lot of pressure, I think, put on principals in French schools to please parents, because ultimately, French schools are competing for students, because the majority of our students do speak English and could go to school in English. So unlike in the English boards, where maybe you're competing, quote, unquote, with your local Catholic school, and French schools, you're competing with your local, public, or Catholic, French, and then also your local English, or Catholic English, because really, the families could probably go, most of them could probably attend any of those four. So, there's a, there's a real pressure around recruitment, retention, keeping our students, keeping parents happy. So, I think that there's an extra layer of pressure that happens around that. And unfortunately, I think sometimes that takes precedence over the well-being of queer students. So that's my slightly blunt assessment of some of the issues that come up.

Tara: It's so helpful to hear you speak about it in this way, because then it's clear, one of the things that can be done is to ask people about their assumptions about their family communities. Right. And, and then to begin to challenge some of those assumptions. And in the process of doing work around gender and sexuality, you're also doing anti-racist work. Right. And, and, and trying to figure out, what is it that people are coming with that, that needs to be challenged? So, I really appreciate that. Jared, or Camille, would you like to comment on your work with administration, administration, staff teams at all?

Jared: Yeah, I mean I think for me, this is an area that I haven't had as much sort of experience with. That said, like, there, there is a group that, that Camille and I have worked with, where we've been working with, I guess, like department coordinators, is probably the best way to describe what they do. So still sort of taking on leadership capacities in their work. And sort of in our sessions have been, not only are they the ones driving financing, like, you know, prioritizing this kind of work for their, for their teachers, but also are willing participants themselves. And I think they've done a really great job modelling, like, "I don't know this, and like, I need to get better at this," and are willing to sort of put their own necks on the line, so to speak, and sort of creating that culture of curiosity, and they realize their teachers' gaps, they realize their own gaps, and where those kind of intersect. So, I think the interesting thing, though, is that the teachers that were, or the— the department heads that were speaking of, this is in like an FSL context, so I think different than— than what Miriam is talking about, but nevertheless, like, we have also heard the same kind of like, "I'm afraid to do this because of families". Which, of course, like, there are queer families, y'all. And, and where, where does that fear come from? And as you suggested, Tara, like how much of it is rooted in racism? And classism? So yeah, so I think there's, I think, to maybe, like, vouch for the, you know, the administrators out there who are like, interested in doing the work, I think is Miriam says there's— there's such a range, right? Yeah, like are, however limited experiences, or in my limited experience has been positive in that sense.

Tara: Great. And Camille, finally, anything else you want to add? Lots has been said already.

Camille: I don't think that I've had the chance to work with any principles. But a few people come to mind that have attended some of our PD were in roles that weren't teachers in schools. In French schools, I don't know if it's the same in English schools, we often have [French word] and [French word] if you're in a Catholic school board. And so, these are educators who don't have a role in classrooms but have a role in a school itself and have maybe more, more time for sure, and more power in a sense to be organizing large school events rather than one classroom. And some of them were, were speaking of ways that they could incorporate that into their, their planning for the school year, the types of activities they want to be, they want to be facilitating in school. So, I think that there are different rules in schools where people can bring in these lenses.

Tara: So interesting. We're going to move to resources. And I was going to ask, um, it sounds like, we're really just at the very beginning of having the resources that are needed, you know, for French language education, whether it's French as a first language or French as a Second Language education, but do each of you have some favorite resources, whether they're in French or English and, and if they're in English, do you want to tell us a little bit about the translation issues that that happen? So, Camille, we'll begin with you again.

Camille: Sure, um, my, I think my favorite has, I have to go with Sophie LaBelle, who's a trans author from Quebec. And who does, like comic books, with so much diversity in terms of gender and sexuality. And even in diversity just in general, her characters are amazing, the stories are funny. And she uses different types of inclusive French. So, you can actually read and see examples of it. And I think that's a

great, a great text to start with in a language classroom. Because they, it's— it's compelling. I love the storytelling, but also, we can look at the grammar and all of the different strategies that she uses in order to see examples of all of that. And there's some for all ages, really from like coloring books, to, to, to comic books that have like an older audience. So really, I would say from K to 12, there's, there's something in her repertoire that can be used all the time.

Tara: Fantastic. Jared, to you now. Any favorite resources?

Jared: Yeah, I think this is a this is a particularly tough question for— for FSL. Because a lot of the— the resources that we found, really rely on a fairly advanced level of French, which makes them really difficult to use in FSL contexts. And so, trying to strike the balance between something that is simple without being infantilizing. Because the sort of language level of like an eighth grader learning French, you know, is, you know, similar to say, someone who's in like the first grade, in sort of a French first language environment. And so, finding texts that that kind of cross that boundary is really difficult. And so, I think, and, and one of the things that I that I wrote about, and advocating for in my thesis, and some of the data collection for that work was the resources that teachers are already using, can be modified can be changed can be updated. And even using those as, as entry points into conversations with students relying on there's lots of resources from the 519, even in English and in French, you know, looking at stories that you're reading with your students and asking the question, like, there are no queer people in the story, and what does that mean? And what does that say about, about this particular story, and you know, why aren't there any trans characters in this story? Or can we read, say, Sophie in the story as a trans girl? And what would that mean for the story, right? Like, I think there's ways to use your existing resources that are at an appropriate language level, and intentionally queer them with your students, or ask them to rewrite the story in a queer way or in a culturally sensitive way. Like, I think there's lots of things that you can do with the materials you already have, which kind of feels like a non-answer, but I think the, the challenges linguistically are difficult to overcome at this moment. So that would be my top suggestion.

Tara: I think it's actually very exciting, especially having the kids rewrite materials. I think that's very exciting. And Miriam, do you have a favorite resource?

Miriam: One resource I really love to share with teachers who teach FSL, or in French contexts is a website called Kaleidoscope, kaleidoscope.quebec. It's a collection of books, book titles, sorted by different types of diversity and identity as well as by age. So, you can go by age category, you can look at books that represent queer students or Black students, or whatever it might be that you're looking for, and it's all in French. So, it's just a great place if you're looking for a particular resource for a certain age or certain issue to just find something to fill that gap. I'm a fan. I'm a big fan.

Tara: So great. That's wonderful. And I'll make sure that these get into the website notes too. We're about running out of time. Go ahead, Jared.

Jared: Yeah, I was just thinking. I'm, I was reminded, as Miriam was speaking, of a friend, a colleague of mine, Natasha Faroush, has created a whole website of lesson plans that are sort of based on music videos, that, you know, have all kinds of companion materials that are sort of, at different grade levels and things. So, I can tell you the link for that as well, because the work that, that they've done with that is phenomenal.

Tara: That would be great. I know our listeners would love, would love that. I'm going to ask each of you for some closing thoughts, as we begin to close up our conversation, is there anything that you'd like to say about the future of doing this work? Or your own personal goals around doing this work? What would you like to leave our listeners with? And Camille, we'll start with you.

Camille: Sure, um, I think that I would leave our listeners on the question of— potentially you've heard it before— but how the status quo isn't neutral. Continuing on the way we are, and not questioning our language, and its imperial roots, and things like that is not, like not thinking about it isn't just neutral. And I would invite you to even just, you know, see if you have anything in your life that you refer to that you could refer to in like a non-binary way in French, if you speak French. Just try it out. Call your plushie "iel". Right? And just get used to, or even just like, avoid gendered adjectives for it for a day, give it a try and see that it's not that hard. It's not that scary. And you can make these little changes every day. And, and build on that every day.

Tara: Wonderful. Miriam, any last words?

Miriam: A couple things come to mind. One is, I want to push a bit and say like, we as francophone educators and FSL educators really need to examine our own privileges and examine the way that our systems are built. I think there's been a lot of criticism and discussion around for example, like the way that FSL creates two-tiered schools or creates a kind of a streaming, you know, and I think we can also ask some of those questions around French language schools in Ontario as well. So, I think, let's, you know, let's, uh, yes, it's similar Camille, let's not sit, sit and stay happy with where we are, let's, let's ask ourselves, "How can we do better?". And, and parallel to that, and attached to that, I also have a lot of hope and positivity about what we can achieve with and for our students. I've witnessed and been part of really beautiful moments with students, when they do feel like they can be their full selves, and they can bring their full selves to you and be supported and be completely who they are. And it's so powerful and so wonderful. And I know we can do that for all of our students. And I'm so excited to see how that can continue to evolve and grow.

Tara: Wonderful. And Jared, last words.

Jared: Yeah. Last words, so heavy. Yeah, I mean, I think what I would say is, as always, like, continue to seek further learning. Even, you know, the, the, the perspectives around this table, like we're three cis, white people. And so, encouraging the listeners to seek out perspectives from, from other sort of experts or people who have expertise in this area, which I think really kind of ties into what I think is an important closing message for me is that, you're— there's no teacher that's doing this work alone, right?

There's not just one teacher that's doing this work. And one of the things that we've really tried to do in, in our PD work has been to help teachers identify sort of ally teachers and I don't just mean allies in the like, "I love and support queer people" sense, I mean, like you are also invested in making your classroom more accessible to queer and trans students. And sort of relying on one another and asking each other questions and seeking out information together and building that network. Because I think to Miriam's point, it also helps keep you accountable to, "Oh, I didn't realize like the— the lens that I was missing here, the perspective I was missing, and whose voices I was still privileging even in my attempts to sort of deconstruct some of those layers of power". So, relying on, on one another, relying on policy documents, relying on the curriculum even, because the curriculum, while it doesn't explicitly say, "Yes! Teach queer things!", it doesn't say you can't. It's really sort of broad and so even if it means burrowing your way into a niche and bringing others along the way, I think is sort of the way to go.

Tara: Wonderful. Camille, Jared, and Miriam, thanks so much for joining us today. I absolutely loved hearing you speak about your work in French language education. I think you are all doing cutting edge work and supporting youth who really are anxious for change in the ways that you talked about in so many powerful ways. Jared Boland currently works at the University of Toronto, where they advise student governments, lead academic orientation and facilitate mentorship programs for undergraduate students. Jared's SSHRC funded MA thesis from OISE U of T explores professional development for French as second language as teachers on creating queer and trans friendly classroom environments. Since the completion of their studies, they have co-facilitated professional development for teachers in both English and in French. Camille Blanchard Séguin also recently finished her MA in language and literacies education at OISE with a specialization in education, Francophonie, and diversity from the Centre de recherches en éducation franco-ontarienne. Her SSHRC funded research focused on LGBTQ plus inclusive linguistic strategies in French language schools in Ontario. Camille currently works with a team focusing on civic education, offering free pedagogical resources on democracy. And she also co-facilitates PD for teachers on queer inclusive classrooms and languages with Jared and Miriam. Finally, Miriam Greenblatt is an educator who specializes in equity with particular experience with French language education as well as supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth in schools. She currently offers consultative services and supports for schools and youth-oriented organizations wishing to further understand and implement equity and anti-oppression work. Miriam has an extensive background in teaching middle and high school English and social sciences, both internationally and throughout Ontario, as well as six years as an equity instructional lead for a francophone school board supporting schools in becoming more inclusive and welcoming spaces for all students. Miriam has also obtained a Master of Education in curriculum teaching and learning from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. All three of our guests were together in our gender, sexuality and schooling class several years ago and it's an absolute delight to welcome them back and to hear about their current work. Alright, that's our podcast for today. You can find this podcast at WWW.gendersexualityschool.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 musician 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.