

Source: Season 2, Episode 7

Fae Johnstone on Supporting 2SLGBTQQIA+ Students and Educators

Episode Highlights

With the staggering rise in anti-2SLGBTQQIA+ hate across Canada, what can we do to support 2SLGBTQQIA+ students and educators?

Join Wes Delve, Program Officer of the CTF/FCE International and Social Justice Program, for a conversation with Fae Johnstone of Wisdom2Action and Society of Queer Momentum.

As a leading advocate for queer and trans communities, rights, health and safety in Canada, Fae discusses:

- The harms of changes to school pronouns policies
- The fight for inclusive curricula
- Possible interventions and policy changes
- Being a trans rights defender
- And more.

What is the harm of changes to school pronoun and chosen name policies?

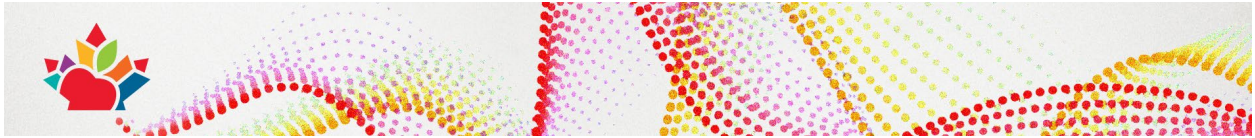
Fae Johnstone (FJ): In the last three months, governments have zeroed in on a trans students' rights to use their chosen name and pronouns in the classroom. The evidence shows that trans students have a lot of mental health issues and they're more likely to be bullied and to struggle. So, we need to make sure that we're doing all we can to keep those kids safe, and to make sure parents are involved in these conversations.

What's happening right now is we're seeing governments saying that they're actually going to stop kids from being able to come out at school on their own terms. What that does to those kids is it tells them that they don't have the right to be themselves at school, that they don't have the respect of their teachers, of their parliamentarians and etc. to be who they know themselves to be.

In contrast, when you allow a kid an environment where they can figure out who they are, express themselves freely, we know that helps kids thrive and grow into a successful and happy adult. When you deny those things, as we're seeing in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan, you contribute to an already difficult and hostile social environment. So, we need to ensure that all kids, including queer and trans kids, can be themselves at school, and that's what these policies that we've had for years are all about. It's disappointing to see them politicized and attacked right now.

What is the *Facts Over Fear* campaign and why was it launched?

FJ: What we've seen is these far-right groups targeting trans and gender diverse kids. We need a better response and we need to show to Canadians, to parents, to young folks all across this country that there is a choice, above and beyond accepting the disinformation that they are



being targeted with right now. That said, *Facts Over Fear* is our effort to clear the air and to foster a school environment where all kids are free to be their authentic selves. So, the *Facts over Fear* campaign is saying, we're going to set their misinformation aside, and we're going to ensure that all kids are safe in the classroom, and able to thrive academically and personally in every aspect of their lives.

How can teachers and educators support 2SLGBTQQIA+ children and youth?

FJ: To keep doing what our teachers and education unions have been pushing for years, which is to create those safe spaces in the classroom where queer and trans students feel seen, where gender and sexuality isn't stigmatized, and where we recognize that all students benefit from understanding the social environment that we walk within as a society. Now in some of these provinces, we are seeing the role of the teacher politicized or restricted by the government. For example, in New Brunswick, we've seen teachers being put in a position where government policy says one thing and their code of ethics and moral obligations say something very different. My message to those teachers is to continue listening to your unions and be ready to stand up for those queer and trans kids in the classroom. As governments play politics with children and youths' identities, those young folks need a caring adult, a teacher who supports them.

What interventions are needed at the federal level to ensure the safety of all 2SLGBTQQIA+ students and staff across Canada?

FJ: We need to recognize that what happens in our schools is an expression of broader social ideologies and social factors. Federally, as we know, education is largely a provincial and territorial matter, but it's time for our federal government to recognize that the hate we're seeing right now is not an anomaly. It is indeed an existential threat to our belief in human rights and an inclusive Canada. I invite the federal government to ramp up and recognize that this hate isn't going anywhere, and that it's not a coincidence. We need partners across all of society if we're going to maintain our impression as a country that is proud to be inclusive of our track record on queer and trans people's human rights, inclusion, and overall equality.