



Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium

PANEL D SUMMARY: Equity for 2SLGBTQIA+ Students

PANELISTS

Ilana David

Social Worker,
[Gender & Sexual
Diversity Team, Toronto
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Jo Jefferson

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During the two-day symposium focused on enhancing equity for elementary students, a panel was held to explore the topic of equity for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and other gender and sexually diverse (2SLGBTQIA+) students. First and foremost, the three panelists emphasized the importance of recognizing the plurality of identities, communities, and countless affirmative names that 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals may choose for self-identification. Further to this multiplicity is the use of an intersectional lens of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality with many other aspects of a person, such as race, religion, socioeconomic status, and more.



“We have safer space signs in our classrooms, but the work of making schools actually feel safer for our students and families comes from the staff... So, while a poster on the wall is great, we need to actually do the work behind it.”

- Ilana David

“I also think a lot about all the queer and trans kids of the future who are waiting for us to keep doing this work, to do our part in advancing equity.”

- Jo Jefferson



From a school environment perspective, having safe space posters on the wall supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion is a start, but there needs to be a lot more work beyond these signs. Professional development to foster competency among teachers and staff about 2SLGBTQIA+ identities is invaluable, and helps remove the fear that can exist towards discussing or making 2SLGBTQIA+ identities visible in the school, due to transphobia and homophobia in our communities. Furthermore, this training should prepare educators to foster safer spaces for students and to communicate with families who may have different understandings.

From a curriculum and policy perspective, 2SLGBTQIA+ history is often erased, and subsequently, there is a need for more mainstream curriculum documents that integrate 2SLGBTQIA+ topics. When school boards and classrooms integrate 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, lives, issues, histories, and realities into the curriculum in a normalized way, positive changes and outcomes are often witnessed. For example, Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) have become a popular resource in schools, and have been noted to be especially impactful when they are student-led. Visible representation among staff is also powerful, but before individuals can feel comfortable making their 2SLGBTQIA+ identity visible, there needs to first be a safe school environment where hetero- and cis-normativity are not equated with professionalism.



“The only wrong thing to do is nothing.”

- Malissa Bryan



Other powerful approaches include engaging 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in policy development and using a [rights-based approach](#) (i.e., all humans are equal and entitled to rights without discrimination of any kind), explicitly addressing homophobia and transphobia and not necessarily in a punitive way, but with restorative learning opportunities, and collecting/reporting data whenever possible to inform our understanding about our current conditions.

RESOURCES SUGGESTED BY PANELISTS

- [The 519's Education and Training Department](#) (workshops, trainings, materials/information)
- [TDSB Gender & Sexual Diversity Team](#)
- [TDSB Equity, Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism](#)
- [TDSB GSA Network](#)
- [Rainbow Diversity Institute - Services](#) (training, strategic planning, restorative justice processes, policies, and more)

To cite this document: Patel, S., Hopson, R.L., & Saeidpour, S. (2024). *Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium: Equity for 2SLGBTQIA+ Students - Knowledge Mobilization Summary Report*. Toronto, ON. School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University.

For more information, visit: torontomu.ca/educational-equity-symposium/