

3QTL: Three Questions About Teaching and Learning

Episode 10 – What is queer pedagogy?

Guest: Harper Keenan

Description:

We might not instinctively associate drag queens with teacher education, but for Dr. Harper Keenan, the queer imagination has tremendous potential to help us “unscript curriculum” and think about our classrooms in radically different ways. The Robert Quartermain Professor of Gender and Sexuality in Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Dr. Keenan has initiated an impressive array of community collaborations, including Drag Story Hour and the Trans Freedom School. Join us as Dr. Keenan describes the challenges (and unexpected rewards) of teaching pre-service teachers during pandemic lockdowns; the transformative power of queer, trans, and drag pedagogy; and why it feels more important than ever to celebrate queer creativity and worldmaking.

Bio:

Harper B. Keenan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia. He currently serves as the inaugural Robert Quartermain Professor of Gender and Sexuality in Education. Dr. Keenan’s scholarship examines how adults and children relate to each other within the structures of schooling and other educational contexts. He is particularly interested in what the treatment of social and historical topics as complex and/or difficult in the education of young children might reveal about society more broadly. Dr. Keenan received a Ph.D. from the Stanford Graduate School of Education, a dual M.S.Ed. in Childhood Special and General Education from Bank Street College, and a B.A. from Eugene Lang College at The New School. His scholarship has been published in a variety of academic journals, including the Harvard Educational Review, Educational Researcher, Teachers College Record, Curriculum Inquiry, and Gender and Education. He has also written op-eds or been interviewed by popular press outlets like Teen Vogue, NPR, Reuters, NBC National News, EdWeek, and Slate. Dr. Keenan is a proud former New York City elementary school teacher.

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<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/danielle-smith-unveils-sweeping-changes-to-alberta-s-student-gender-identity-sports-and-surgery-policies-1.7101053>

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Keenan, H.B. (2019). The Trans Educators Network: A reflection on community building and knowledge production. *Teaching Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2020.1714580>

Other resources:

Drag Story Hour: www.dragstoryhour.org

Trans Educators Network. <https://www.transeducators.com/>

Sound clips:

- Rupaul – Supermodel:
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nTI4Rmf6AI>

- Classroom:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/62f4b10419ee0e9fef8451e742c749ead6f419ea3a6275b94f0bef1f952fc52f>
- Talking:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/5308819da1eb019667fc9ee211290c7f785b3e258fb5a0798157e9a01516ad17>
- Footsteps1: https://freesound.org/people/Warrick_Lendon/sounds/542641/
- Zoom: <https://joelgrayson.wixsite.com/joelgrayson/zoom-sfx>
- Stadium crowd:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/d95167eae596a0dbae6dd1b414f25c056912ca4966eaf7b42c7154fa409a7265>
- Riser:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/74659746c058ebb9eae98062f1c07c277a7fa96e1270d6e8c1a616ec2de76728>
- Footsteps2:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/3734a8fd774e42f825bb5b2bc15c3e946c94ed8ee7e6102060bf725bd25f6fce>
- Dog bark:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/c24edd9737a04206abd2c6dfa6a9f95c336e904f7437f111b08b25c8ec89e36a>
- Birds:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/8dc9e1afe38af0fb1329b056cd67e5177d11d2f19cfe6daaa2eb75ac6a16b66b>
- City street:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/dda41b9807dca282fb715fc145ef4b319ac9b13719a5dbea06761223151c098d>
- Playground:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/fc8a90056344e9af383690683ef68ecd7e89d23c85e48ccf6bfef99bfd569223>
- Camera shutter:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/397095ecca95aae53b07cbfd1f8c09d499b9e5dd7ae15f60daedf89bdc0c17d9>
- Keyboard:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/84669972238d1a1421ed7f928f7f38659a34a23cc0e5198e163e4690ca5403f1>
- Casino:
<https://splice.com/sounds/sample/0b75bb6aac2bbde563587c9269fab5b0e61fa4af789c62b182ea6dfda80e7e13>

- Game over: <https://splice.com/sounds/sample/5d234e005c1a0c5f32e77c4c6000e9c4f01c4b7a0661080633c676d225b07575>
- Lecture: <https://freesound.org/people/LG/sounds/22526/>
- Chair: <https://splice.com/sounds/sample/9ac02534ecfb771c83cf03f4411f14859b69422e0db9b7a98837aff91d66e136>
- Footsteps: <https://splice.com/sounds/sample/5a1b35ac34af95ef8d9f8402efb53b4dc2664dc0aa56d72604c73327a328e7ae>
- Kids talking: <https://freesound.org/people/kevp888/sounds/464314/>
- Projector: <https://freesound.org/people/Marissrar/sounds/366914/>
- Rupaul - Cover Girl: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bH9oXA3Maw>
- Rupaul - Cover Girl Acapella: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk6ZQOS79TQ>

Transcription:

[Music Theme in]

HAPER KEENAN: [00:00:12] Part of our responsibility as academics, as queer educators, is to support all young people, but maybe especially queer, trans, Two-Spirit young people, in imagining beyond this bullshit we're living through right now.

DERRITT MASON: [00:00:31] Hello, I'm Derritt Mason. Welcome to 3QTL: Three Questions About Teaching and Learning. This season, we're in conversation with post-secondary faculty from across disciplines, and our three questions focus on how the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped values and transformed classrooms, challenging faculty and students in extraordinary ways while also sparking innovation. Our guest today is Dr. Harper Keenan, the Robert Quartermain Professor of Gender and Sexuality Research in Education and an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia. As we record this episode in early 2024, it feels like a particularly urgent time to reflect, as Dr. Keenan does in his classes, on how adults try to manage or script children's knowledge. While preparing to teach my own classes about the lengthy history of anxiety that surrounds young people and their relationship to gender and sexuality, I came across Dr. Keenan's article entitled "Drag Pedagogy: The playful practice of queer imagination in early childhood." I grew immediately curious about the COVID-

era teacher education classroom, with its many crucial practical dimensions, and how instructors and students alike must have been forced to adapt. In our conversation, in addition to sharing how teacher education was deeply affected by the pandemic, Dr. Keenan reflects on the status of LGBTQIA2S+ education in our contemporary moment and expands on his own impressive and urgent community collaborations and initiatives, including his work with the Trans Freedom School, and Drag Queen Story Hour.

Welcome to 3QTL, Dr. Keenan. I'm really excited to be speaking with you today.

HARPER KEENAN: [00:02:20] Thanks so much for having me.

DERRITT MASON: [00:02:22] I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind, just to start things off, introducing yourself to our listeners.

HARPER KEENAN: [00:02:27] Yeah, my name is Harper Keenan, and I'm the Robert Quartermain Professor of Gender and Sexuality in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia.

DERRITT MASON: [00:02:37] Wonderful. And can you say a little bit more about the kind of teaching that you do? What do your classes look like in a given term? How many students do you have, and so on?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:02:46] I teach two courses right now. One is called Critical Pedagogy and Young Children, and that is more for Masters-level students. It's a pretty small class with just about 15 to 20 students. And it focuses on the question of: how do we think about children and childhood? And then, how do we teach them from a critical perspective? I also teach a course for students in our B.Ed. program on the methods of teaching social studies in the classroom.

DERRITT MASON: [00:03:17] Wonderful. And I know from being familiar with your work that you do some work in the community as well. Can you say a little bit more about that?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:03:24] Yeah, I do a variety of different projects in communities. One is that I founded the Trans Educators Network that now has more than 800 members across North America, specifically, mostly the US and Canada, who are all trans-identifying pre-K to 12 educators. And then, I've also done some work with a variety of different queer and trans educators and educational projects

happening outside of educational institutions, things like Drag Story Hour, various film and media productions, Freedom School Toronto, which is a queer-run freedom school for Black youth in the city of Toronto. Things like that.

DERRITT MASON: [00:04:06] Fantastic. And again, I know from reading your excellent work that there are three key concepts, I might say, that are central to some of the work that you do. I know that you write and teach a lot about queer pedagogy, trans pedagogy, and drag pedagogy. I know these terms probably resist definition in a lot of ways. But can you say more about how you understand perhaps the distinctions between these terms and what's so vital about them to the kind of research and teaching that you do?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:04:34] Yeah, I appreciate your framing there around the reality that these terms do resist definition. And for me, my first academic article that I wrote was called "Unscripting Curriculum." I, myself, am somewhat resistant to scripting any kind of definition for these terms, but they are concepts that I use, so I can say a little bit about how I use them. [D.M.: Yeah, great. Thanks.] So, queer pedagogy was a concept that was mostly introduced in the 1990s, in part by some of my colleagues at UBC and others. And essentially, it is thinking about education through queer knowledge, which is not just necessarily about queer people and their identities or anything like that, but thinking about the production of normal and abnormal in society and doing that thinking through looking at queer experience. Trans pedagogy is sort of similar, and I think is strongly informed by the history and tradition of queer pedagogy but is more about the specific material experiences of transgender people and is a kind of pedagogical framework that tries to actively resist the scripting of institutional gender frameworks that are transmitted to young people through educational settings. And then, drag pedagogy, I introduced that term with my wonderful colleague, Lil Miss Hot Mess, who is one of the founders of Drag Story Hour. And when we introduced that term, we were mainly trying to think about what kind of teaching and learning and educational experience is happening in a project like Drag Story Hour and what might educators in more traditional settings have to learn from that example.

DERRITT MASON: [00:06:37] All I can think right now is how much I wish I could have taken one of your classes as a student. They sound so exciting and also so urgent.

So, why don't we jump into the three standard questions that we ask on 3QTL this season? The first of which is, I'd like to know, what were the core values that guided

your teaching and learning practice before COVID? And how, if at all, did you find these values shifting during the pandemic?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:07:16] Yeah, I really appreciate this question. Pedagogy is really important to me; it's at the center of everything I do, both in terms of the writing that I do, the research that I do, and the teaching that I do, and I try to apply the things that I write about and theorize about when I teach in the classroom. So, broadly speaking, I really try to think about the classroom as a gathering place where everyone who enters that space brings important and unique forms of knowledge. For me, as the instructor, I bring a certain kind of knowledge, but so do my students. And my role is primarily to facilitate a conversation with that group of people, that group of knowledge holders, in such a way that brings student experience and knowledge forward to be shared with others. In other words, I try not to be the exclusive holder of knowledge in the room that is sort of delivering knowledge and ideas to students, but instead, facilitating a set of experiences that help us to better understand each other and generate new knowledge together. And then you'd asked about how this changed during the pandemic, right?

DERRITT MASON: [00:08:30] Yeah. Did COVID kind of cause a shift in the way that you thought about the values that are central to your teaching and learning practice?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:08:36] COVID didn't necessarily change the way that I thought about teaching, but it opened some exciting new possibilities, I would say. Of course, nothing was exciting or good about the pandemic. I want to be really clear about what I'm saying here. But, online instruction did allow for some new ways of learning together. For example, even just the design of Zoom, which was the primary platform that I was using to teach, arranges people into a grid, where one person is not necessarily elevated beyond another, which is different from the design of a lot of physical classroom spaces that might even be something like a lecture hall that students are sort of in stadium seating, where the professor is down at the bottom meant to be the focus of everything. I really appreciated the flattening of hierarchy that was made possible through this model of online instruction. I also really appreciated the opportunity to send students off into breakout rooms, the way that they could converse through the chat and the kind of privacy that that offered to students. I know that that wasn't everyone's experience. But I think that often when students are having conversations in a physical classroom, the instructor can hear them. And the students know that the instructor can hear them. And that creates a kind of self-consciousness that I think, started to

dissipate a bit in online instruction. And then, the other thing that I found really, really valuable about the kind of online instruction that was happening during the height of the pandemic was that my students were all over the world, and instead of them coming to my campus and meeting in a familiar space to me, I got to see more of their worlds outside of the classroom; so, their homes, their neighborhoods, their pets, their children, their partners. Sometimes, in my classes, I had students actually take their cell phones out into their neighborhood and share footage or video or images of the place where they live. And so often, it's a real struggle to conjure any sense of what the rest of a students' world really looks like in physical space. And so, this was a really, really cool experience of being able to be far more direct about that.

DERRITT MASON: [00:11:11] I so appreciate that reflection, because I found that, especially when it came to COVID-era online teaching, this question of privacy surfaced quite often, and generally it was framed around, very reasonably so, the fact that a camera into a student's world might not be a welcome view into their private and personal life, and that it was important to, I think, respect student privacy. How did you manage that question? Because again, I love the way that you're framing this as: it was actually a gift to be able to see into students' worlds. How did you manage questions of consent and privacy?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:11:45] Yeah, I think that's a really important point. And one of the thorniest issues in thinking about online instruction, even in your phrasing of the question, you highlight a central tenet of this approach, which has to be consent. Students have to actively consent to participating in that way. And there's a long history in Canada, as well as elsewhere in the world, where particular communities, particularly those living in poverty, and communities of colour, Indigenous populations, have experienced disproportionate surveillance. And so, this kind of exchange between an educational institution, who I'm representing, and a student, could be loaded more for some students than others. And so, it's really important to be mindful of that. We had a conversation about that, in most of my classes at the beginning of the class about, you know, "you get to decide when your camera is on. If we are doing an activity that requests your camera to be on or invites you to share some footage or etc., and you don't feel comfortable doing that through live video, here's a few other options: you could give me a sketch, you could do an audio-narration," things like that. And again, this isn't a fundamental shift in my pedagogical orientation or practice. I've always tried to offer students multiple ways of accomplishing the same goal. I think that's good teaching, but it was a new way of implementing that.

DERRITT MASON: [00:13:18] I love this so much. And if I can ask just one more question along these lines, I'm curious to know: you're in a unique position relative to the other guests that we've had on 3QTL this season. You're the only one from a Faculty of Education that we've interviewed. And your position is unique because you're working with preservice teachers, students who are themselves interested in questions of teaching and learning. Did you find at the same time as you were contemplating the values that were at the centre of your classroom and reflecting these values in the way you engage with students in online classes, was there a kind of meta-conversation happening with students about how your values were shaping your own classroom? And then they could consider how their own values would then in the future shape their own classrooms?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:14:04] Yes, absolutely. I mean, that's one of the things that I love the most about teacher education, is that meta-conversation is constant all the time. I think that the best instructors in teacher education are constantly making their pedagogy really transparent to the students so that they can then think about, well, what does that mean for me; how does that shape my pedagogical philosophy? One of the most important dimensions of all of this, particularly because I work in elementary and early childhood teacher education, is thinking about issues around power because there's a power differential between me and my students, certainly, but there's an even bigger one between my students and the students that they will teach because they will be adults and their students will be children. So, thinking about things like online education, where a teacher might be in one place, and the students are children at home with their families, it raises all kinds of ethical power issues that are really, really rich to think through with teachers. And again, this is not a fundamental shift in what it means to teach or how to think about teaching, but it magnifies existing issues because I think there was a lot of active conversation around the ethics around consent and even what teachers witness in their students' homes when they're on video, things like that. And I think that's really interesting because those issues are always present even in a physical classroom. There's always issues of power. There's always issues around what teachers learn about their students' home lives, or exchanges that they witnessed between their students and their families. But we were all kind of thrown into this very novel environment where those very same issues were in a new setting. And that was all brought into stark relief. So, my great hope for the field of education is that we take that knowledge with us that we gained when the familiar became strange and think about becoming better educators with that knowledge.

DERRITT MASON: [00:16:34] So, why don't we jump to our second of our three primary questions. It's kind of two questions in one. What best supported and what did you find hindered your teaching and learning practice during COVID?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:16:46] One of the things that the internet has made possible even before COVID hit is that so many marginalized communities of people who might feel like or be the only one of their kind in a typical classroom, like queer folks, people of color, people with disabilities, etc., they find each other and build community across geographies on the internet. There was a real flourishing of that during the height of the COVID pandemic. And there were all kinds of really cool educational opportunities opening up where I went to lectures by colleagues of mine in other far-flung places that I could never have imagined being able to go to. My students went to those lectures. They went to all kinds of cool activist dialogues. So new conversations were opening up because, you know, as I was talking about before, the knowledge holders in the space changed, right? So, the conversation then changed in that online space because, for the first time, there were things like many more opportunities for trans people to gather in the same Zoom room and think about questions around education or schooling together. That was exciting. And a lot of those opportunities were made free and publicly accessible. I do hope that endures. Another thing that was happening during the pandemic is we also saw this growing rise of backlash against trans communities. And so, my graduate students and I thought through, you know, what is something that we can do to intervene on that from our vantage point in education. And so, we developed a project that we called the Trans Freedom School with a couple of other colleagues, specifically Z Nicolazzo, at the University of Arizona, and we brought in community leaders, activists, scholars, all kinds of folks to give presentations designed for children that were related to Trans Justice. For example, Jules Gill-Peterson, who is a trans historian, made a lecture designed for children on the histories of transgender children. And that was just such a beautiful thing to witness and then have kids ask her questions, for example. That was really exciting. So, that was some of the good stuff about teaching and learning for me during COVID.

DERRITT MASON: [00:19:23] I love the sound of the Trans Freedom Project so much. Can you say more about how students were involved in this project? What kind of role did they play in helping this take place?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:19:33] At the time, I had two graduate assistants working on designing the series of lectures. So, they did everything from thinking about who do we want to invite? What order do we want to put them in? Who do we want to do

outreach and advertising to, to make sure that it's really kids that get to attend this and young people. And then I also had another student who was focused on communications, thinking about messaging, graphic design of materials, to go out to let people know about the events. And then, we followed up to every event in the series with a mini syllabus that was resources for further study and learning or perhaps materials from the presenters themselves. So, the students were very, very involved throughout the entire development of the project.

DERRITT MASON: [00:20:31] It's such a, again, timely and relevant project. I have to ask, you know, we live in a time with a tremendous amount of anxiety and pushback, and we could also say anger and hate directed at things like Drag Story Time, and folks who want to provide a contemporary and scientifically accurate sex education to young people. You and I, we live in different provinces with what we might say, different political climates. You're in BC; I'm in Alberta. We've recently had some very challenging potential legislation come down the pipes that would include anytime, quote, unquote, third party, sex education resources are going to be used in the classroom, they're going to require government approval. There are attempts to limit trans children's access to medical care. When you were undertaking this Trans Freedom Project, which again, is so urgent and needed right now, did you encounter any resistance in the idea that you would be even just bringing trans folks into contact with young people, which seems to produce so much stress and anxiety today?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:21:37] Yeah, we did not experience a great deal of pushback or backlash to that specific project. But I have certainly encountered a great deal of harassment, hate, threats, etc., in response to my work overall. And that has meant that in every online initiative that I have undertaken, we have had to have a safety plan, thinking through how are we going to maintain this space as a safe space for young people to the best of our ability. That can be really difficult because it's hard to have 100% safeguard against some very transphobic, or anti-queer person entering the space and harassing people. But we've had really clear protocols for every event and initiative that we've done online.

DERRITT MASON: [00:22:52] Thank you for sharing that. This is probably a good segue into the second part of the second question, which is: what were some of the challenges that presented themselves during the era of COVID online teaching?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:23:03] My job is unique, maybe in some of the ways that you've already spoken to and we've already talked about, but I think about

education, both within schools, which are these very institutional, pretty structured, one might say regimented spaces, and then I also think about community-based education, things like the Trans Freedom School, and Drag Story Hour, et cetera. So, on the one hand, I'm hanging out with drag queens and talking about Drag Story Hour, and on the other hand, I'm teaching social studies methods to future K to 12 educators. I'll focus more on the latter for right now. There were so many challenges in teacher education during the height of the COVID pandemic because, essentially, we were teaching teachers using a modality that was unfamiliar to many of the instructors. And like I said, one of the key elements of really good teacher education is the instructor making their own pedagogy really transparent to the students so that they can then think about how they might transfer that to their own teaching or their own pedagogical philosophy. But that became really complicated in a situation where all of these instructors were thrown into a situation where they're using instructional methods they are totally inexperienced with, or at least many of us were, and then our students, were mostly not then going to use those online teaching methods with their K to 12 students in the same way thereafter, because most of them are going to be teaching their young students in person. And so, the question of how do I prepare someone to teach elementary school in person from my living room at home is so complicated, even simple things about how do I set up the room? How do I support a group of five-year-old students to navigate the room and moving around safely? How do you demonstrate that? Those things became really, really complicated and really fundamental and basic to having a successful elementary school classroom, for example.

DERRITT MASON: [00:25:18] Yeah, that's a great point and it makes me think, too, do you find in your discipline, is there a push now post-COVID, as I think we're seeing in a number of different disciplines, and I think rightfully so, because online education opens up access for students who might not otherwise be able to attend school; as you've pointed out, it opens up classes to students from around the world. How do you think about managing or how is your discipline talking about managing the need and the growth of online education, alongside the fact that when teaching future teachers who are going to be teaching in person, you can't necessarily accomplish all the things that you might want to accomplish in online spaces?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:25:58] Yeah, it is definitely a conversation that is happening. And like most things, in most disciplines, there's a lot of different ideas about it. I think it's a real flashpoint for a lot of people in education, because there's so much to be gained from young people actually spending time together in the same room,

physically. And we have worked for so long to think about how to do that in an equitable, thoughtful, caring, rigorous way. And I think there are some that are concerned about losing the benefits of that in person, social learning that happens for particularly young children. If we were to make more of a move toward online education, it all comes down to a question of: how is community built? How do people learn? What settings do they learn best in? Questions of accessibility are really central to all of this. To be more explicit, there's an active conversation about how much teacher education should happen online, as well as how much of children's education should happen online. And those two really go together because of the centrality of this kind of meta-teaching that happens in teacher education, where when we are at our best, instructors are modeling for our students how they might teach. So, if we are doing that, then we need to be teaching in a similar modality to our students who will then teach their students in that modality.

DERRITT MASON: [00:27:49] When we were all compelled to do all of our teaching online, were you struck by any particularly noticeable gaps in what students were learning in the class online compared to what they might be taking away in person?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:28:01] Yes, absolutely. I think there were great leaps forward in thinking about educational technology and making that educational technology really interactive. There was so much generative work happening around educational technology. I think we have to be careful about the use of educational technology, in particular, because educational technology is so often connected to private companies who stand to get a profit from it. In a place like British Columbia, and in Canada, where there has historically been such a strong public value of education for the public, the question of, you know, what does it mean to start integrating all these ed tech platforms that stand to profit from it is a thorny one. In terms of gaps, what I saw a lot of were very beautifully designed online lessons, things like PowerPoint presentations, really cool interactive stuff on platforms like Google Jamboard, then being implemented in person in ways that just didn't work in person. So it might have worked online, but it doesn't work in person, in part because then you're dealing with the reality of having, say, 25 five-year-olds in the same room, which is really different from 25 five-year-olds on 25 different screens that they are totally mesmerized by looking at because they're glowing at them, or their parent or caregiver is standing behind them and making sure that they're focusing on the screen. So, if you then try to teach a PowerPoint lesson to 25 five-year-olds who are in the same room, some of those five-year-olds are gonna get up and walk around the room; they're gonna start talking to their friends; they're gonna go up to the projector screen and start touching it and I think a lot of our graduates

were not quite as well prepared for how to respond in those moments and make in-person teaching really engaging and exciting for kids. So, there's been a bit of catch-up around that.

DERRITT MASON: [00:30:16] That makes sense. So, our final of the three primary questions: if there's one thing that you started doing during COVID, that you hadn't been doing in your classrooms before and think you're going to continue doing into the future, what would it be? And if you'd like, you can list more than one thing, if there are a couple.

HARPER KEENAN: [00:30:33] I have always tried to get my students out of the classroom and into the world as much as I can. The realities of that, in practice, are challenging, especially on a campus that is pretty geographically separate from the rest of the city. So, I really hope to carry what I did during the height of the pandemic forward in trying to connect more with students' worlds off campus. And I don't know that that will necessarily be through live video, but thinking about things like photography, sketching, interviewing, etc., but just really trying to connect more with students' lives outside of the classroom in a meaningful way and thinking about what does education really look like in the place where I live? And what are the unique educational possibilities in my neighborhood, and community, etc.? I think, too, it has broadened my toolbox of different paths toward the same educational goal; instead of just relying exclusively on whole group discussion, really thinking about using our online course software and platforms to do more things like actually meaningfully engaging discussions that happen via text, or things like looking at those pictures that I was talking about, or audio descriptions of various places where the students might be in their communities, and having the students respond to those images and videos, etc. My hope is that it just pushes me to keep thinking creatively about the methods that I use to teach.

DERRITT MASON: [00:32:38] Thank you. I kind of want to close with a big question, which is a question I posed a little bit earlier. And it's one that I find myself thinking about a lot in the current political climate. And if it's too big a question, I think that's, that's fair enough. I just find I'm personally, as a queer educator who teaches courses on Gender and Sexuality Studies, mulling this question over and over again. As you know, we're coming out of teaching and learning in the context of a global pandemic, which was challenging enough. But now, I feel like the kind of work that we both do in different contexts, which is work on queerness and gender and sexuality, is again being done under increasingly fraught political conditions. And you're doing such incredible work collaborating with drag queens. When I saw an

article co-authored with Lil Miss Hot Mess, I was like, “Oh, my God, I have to read this immediately. This is so fun.” Assembling this amazing Trans Freedom School with your graduate students, which is such a cool and, again, important project. The impossible question is like, how do we move forward as educators committed to queer and trans rights and the rights of historically marginalized communities in this kind of climate? And I just, I find myself wondering how it’s possible. And on some days, it feels impossible to me, despite the things I’m trying to do in my own classes, which, you know, were on young adult literature and can kind of contextualize the history of book banning, which is something else we’re seeing right now. But do you think about this at all? If so, what does that conversation with yourself or with your colleagues look like in increasingly difficult times?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:34:17] It’s a really big question. [D.M.: I know] And an important one, and it is so, frankly, devastating that we are at this point politically, where queer and trans people are really being used as political scapegoats to distract from very serious issues like climate change, widening income inequality, the difficulty of most Canadians and people in the US to be able to afford to buy a home, for example, and I think that’s really important to pay attention to. Like, what are the haters trying to distract us from? Because I do think queer and trans people are being positioned as scapegoats for a whole lot of other issues that play into people’s fears around being able to raise their children in the world we live in today, which is an increasingly scary and precarious place for a lot of people because of the economic and climate forces that I just talked through, among many others. So, I don’t want to make light of that. It’s devastating that we are here. And, of course, recognizing that racism and transphobia, queerphobia are not the same thing, but they are interrelated struggles. You know, Toni Morrison had this line, and I’m going to paraphrase, around the function of racism being distraction. I think the same is true for the anti-trans, anti-queer climate that we are living in. And one of the best ways of navigating that is to try not to get distracted as much as we can, because I think what has happened is that we have ceded a lot of political ground, and the discourse, for example, in education, has become so regressive that we are now having conversations that we had not been having since the 1980s. Part of our responsibility as academics, as queer educators is to support all young people, but maybe especially queer, trans, two- spirit young people, in imagining beyond this bullshit we’re living through right now, quite frankly, and thinking about: how do queer and trans communities share knowledge with each other? What kinds of beautiful knowledge and creativity have we developed by forming communities with each other? What can we learn from that? How can we build solidarity with other marginalized populations? And really focusing on that, because I think when

we think about, you know, what are the questions that matter to us, what do we want to learn about, what we want to do together, we go to much more interesting places than we do when it's just constantly about fighting back. That's not to say we don't need to fight back; we do need to fight back. But we have to do both. And where I find sustenance is in thinking with other queer and trans people about the kinds of worlds we actively want to live in.

DERRITT MASON: [00:37:42] I love that so much. Thank you so much for sharing that really rich reflection. I really appreciate it. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you wanted to talk about or mention?

HARPER KEENAN: [00:37:53] No, I don't think so. But this has been really lovely. Thanks so much for having me.

DERRITT MASON: [00:37:58] Oh, I really appreciate your time. Thank you so much for being here.

3QTL is recorded at the University of Calgary, which is located on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty Seven region in Southern Alberta. The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis nation of Alberta, districts five and six. This episode was produced by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz and edited by Eric Xie, who also composed our music. Our consulting producer is Stacey Copeland. Support for 3QTL is provided by the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary and a generous financial gift from the Flanagan Foundation.

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[Music out]

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> and copyedited by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz and Derritt Mason.