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0:00:08.0 Nathan Cheney: Hello, and welcome back to another episode of Popular Podagogy, a podcast brought to you by the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. I'm really excited today to be able to dive in a little bit deeper into one of the better initiatives that is taking place here at the faculty of education, and we're lucky to be joined by one of the representatives from the Gegi team today. So let's jump right in. So can you tell us what is Gegi and maybe a little bit more about your mascot, which is a pretty unique choice for a mascot.

0:00:42.6 Kel Martin: Yeah, Gegi is the name of our fabulous unicorn. The name Gegi is G-E-G-I, and it stands for Gender Expression and Gender Identity, which are the Human Rights Protections that this project focuses on. Gegi's a humorous, joyful, sparkle unicorn who's eager and ready to help people advocate for Gender Expression and Gender Identity in Ontario schools.

0:01:04.6 NC: And where did this project come from? What was kind of the background behind it, if you can go into a little more detail there?

0:01:10.8 KM: So I joined the project a little bit late. So the project was well underway when I joined. And from my understanding, this is the brainchild of Lee. So Dr. Airton had started this, I think, about a year ago, and it's basically a knowledge mobilization tool, which is a website that provides publicly accessible documents all in one place in a sort of easy-to-understand format for both teachers, parents and youth.

0:01:40.7 NC: And I think that's fantastic. I don't know of any... Everyone should and likely has gone on to a government website or gone on to a university website, and resources are everywhere. The resources exist often, but they're kind of everywhere and they're scattered, and you really have to do a deep dive. And if you're looking for something and especially if you're stressed about something or you're looking for someone to advocate for you, it can be really hard to kind of search through those things. So this is a really great initiative. Who is this designed for? Who are you trying to attract with this type of... With this type of website?

0:02:15.3 KM: So Gegi has a website. It's designed to support anybody in an Ontario school who's advocating for gender expression or gender identity protections, whether it be for oneself as a teacher or a student, or advocating for somebody who is a student or a loved one in an Ontario, K-12 school. And Gegi basically provides education on understanding what gender-based discrimination is. So things like what is gender expression, what is gender identity, as defined by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Gegi shares these definitions in both youth-friendly and adult language with voice clips. Gegi also shares publicly available information, such as school boards policies that are relevant to gender discrimination, research informed tip sheets for best practices for things like washrooms, athletics, overnight field trips, as well as listing relevant community resources and more.

0:03:08.9 NC: Are there any other individuals who might find helpful information through Gegi?

0:03:16.1 KM: Yeah, the website can support anyone seeking to learn more information about gender expression or gender identity, human rights, and gender-based discrimination, or seeking useful tools to advocate for youth in schools in general, but it's also an incredible useful tool for teachers, administration, policy makers and other educational stakeholders to see where their policy stand, and to see some great examples of how other boards have responded to including these protections in their policies.

0:03:45.3 NC: So how do you see Gegi impacting the individuals you just talked about? The teachers, the students, the parents. What do you think is gonna be the biggest contribution out of this type of project?

0:03:58.6 KM: I can see two main major things that could come out of this. One is representation, so seeing this non-binary unicorn who is a very fun and joyous celebratory character, and to see that there are people involved in this project who are trans and who are cis and who are all working together to provide these resources, I think, is really inspiring, and it can really mean a lot for, especially for youth and teachers, to see that representation.

0:04:31.1 KM: And also, of course, the resources themselves. Tracking down this information was very time-consuming, very difficult. A huge team effort. There were over 20 people involved in this project. And so it's definitely not an easy task. And for somebody who is a post-secondary researcher to do this work, taking many, many hours to find things like equity contacts and to go through lengthy 40 and 50 page document, like policies from school boards, things like that, it's a lot of work. And to be able to present that all to somebody who might be upset, who might be struggling, for them to be able to see this all easily displayed in one place, and to be able to take a tip sheet that is a one-pager on something that they're struggling with and to be able to take that to a principal, for example, and say, this is what I need, or this is a research-informed tip sheet, really takes away a lot of the difficult aspects of researching and self-advocating.

0:05:32.2 NC: So you mentioned there that you were working as part of a pretty big team, and your background on this is that you're a graduate student who joined this team. So can you tell me a little bit about what the team dynamic was like, what it was like as a graduate student in this experience, how does this kind of... How has this experience affected you?

0:05:53.7 KM: So when I first joined the project, I was a little bit intimidated because the project had already been going and there were a bunch of amazing professionals involved, but after going to the first meeting, I knew it was a good place to be. The team's been incredibly welcoming, and it's just a fabulous group to be a part of. It's been incredible working with such a dedicated team of individuals across so many different disciplines. So there's law, education, website designers, voice artists, French translators, just all across the board, not to mention all of the teachers, school board reps, legal experts, everyone else who's contributed to this project.

0:06:31.2 KM: So it's been really cool interacting with such a large team and in so many different ways, and I definitely learned a lot from being involved with it, specifically in the area of understanding policies that include gender expression, gender identity protections. My role specifically on this project was pretty vast and varied, so I really liked having the opportunity to do so many different things.

0:06:53.2 KM: I learned a lot of collaborative team building skills, I learned in-depth about content of these policies, as well as new technologies, such as spreadsheets and the WordPress, things like. And just like for anybody considering doing an RAship, I think it's something that all grad students should experience at some point. It's just been such a great... Just a great learning opportunity for improving my own research skills.

0:07:21.5 NC: That's fantastic, and it's good to know that you felt welcome right away. It's good when... Everyone always says, practice what you preach, and I think Gegi's... The background behind it is making people feel included and making them be able to feel part of a community and comfortable both

with themselves and with other people around them. And it sounds like that's similar to what happened here, and it's great that... You mentioned there that there was lots of other contributors and people who are outside of the field of education. This is primarily for students and parents and teachers and people within the field of education, but how did some of these other disciplines become involved and what is the value in having someone with some varied experiences participate in this type of project?

0:08:08.5 KM: Yeah, I think it's incredibly valuable. I think that instead of getting caught up with just education professionals, I think bringing in other people, other perspectives, really helped understand the reality of what's happening in schools and the reality of what people need to self-advocate. So having, for example, in-service teachers attend... We had multiple summits to develop tools and to have feedback from in-service teachers has been just invaluable to understand what's happening on the ground level, what teachers are dealing with, was just amazing, not just higher education folks, but people who are actually in schools, was really cool.

0:08:52.1 NC: So Gegi has launched, we've seen it, it's out there, we'll get to how you can find Gegi in a moment, but before we do, what is the next phase? What are the next steps for this project? How do you see it growing or developing? How do you continue to use this project to help advocate for the people who... Help the people self-advocate for themselves? What is the next step?

0:09:20.4 KM: So at the moment, Gegi is expanding to include French translations. And in addition, people who are involved with schools in various ways... I think as people who are involved in the schools learn more about gender expression, gender identity and what Gegi is doing, I think that their policies and school board level resources that are relevant to these protections, will no doubt evolve. And in turn, the website needs to be responsive in updating those changes as they occur. But also at the moment, Gegi currently shares information for Ontario school boards. So my understanding is that Lee and Kyle are taking Gegi national and expanding it into other provinces and territories, and additionally, it might serve as a model or inspiration for others to do similar work.

0:10:09.5 NC: That's fantastic. And I think it's great that it's going national. We'll be able to have this type of program available to students across the country, instead of just in a more localized region like our province. What would you say to someone who was unsure about how to access Gegi or how to use the site or use the resources available to them? What would be your advice?

0:10:39.0 KM: So right now, Gegi is present on the website, which is Gegi.ca, so G-E-G-I-C-A. But Gegi, the unicorn, is also very active on Twitter at the moment, which is @Gegi_CA, if you're interested in following on social media updates. You can go to the website and sign up for updates, and if you have any feedback or wanna learn more, you can also use the Contact Us function on the website.

0:11:07.6 KM: But with that being said, the purpose of Gegi is not to respond to individual circumstances or to have a conversation, it's a knowledge mobilization tool, so it's providing the resources for you. So in terms of contacting us, it would just be for feedback on the website, for example, or updating policies, things like that.

0:11:28.1 NC: That's fantastic, and I very much encourage everyone to go and check out the website, go to the Twitter page. The unicorn has a much better personality than I do, so I encourage you to go and experience it first hand for yourself. We hope that this project gets to continue to affect people all across the country, and we're very thankful for the work that you did on it. So thank you for joining us today.

0:11:53.7 KM: Thank you so much, Nathan. And I just wanted to take a moment to thank those who made this research possible as, our funding came from SSHRC, so the Social Science and Humanities Research Council. And it wouldn't be possible without their support, as well as start-up grants for the research from Queen's Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa.

0:12:15.5 NC: Absolutely, thank you. That'll do it for another episode of Popular Podagogy. Thank you for listening. If you like what you hear, please be sure to subscribe to us on Apple Podcast, Google podcast, Spotify, Stitcher, the CFRC website, the Faculty of Education website, or pretty much anywhere you can get your podcast. We'll see you next time. Thanks.