

## Critics alarmed as Sask. government scales back sexual health education, makes schools report pronoun changes

31 August 2023, Updated 30 October 2023

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### Blue Sky with Garth Materie



Saskatchewan sexual health educator answers your questions



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It's been one week since the provincial government mandated that teachers are no longer allowed to invite third-party educators into their classrooms for lessons on sexual health education. Parents will also have the opportunity to opt their kids out of "all or part" of the Human Sexuality unit taught in the province's schools. However, there is a lot of misinformation circulating about what is actually being taught in Saskatchewan schools. Today we were joined by Caitlin Cottrell, ED of Saskatoon Sexual Health for an informative and thoughtful conversation.

Aired: Aug. 30, 2023

Blue Sky is a venerable Saskatchewan institution, and Garth is a treasure.

<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-189-blue-sky/clip/16006491-saskatchewan-sexual-health-educator-answers-questions>

I missed the August 29 show ("Saskatchewan sexual health educator answers your questions") hosted by Sam Mciag, and listened to it after Garth's next-day recommendation and the the email castigating the second caller.

Yes, she was off-base with a masked half-baked agenda, but so too in some measure, when pressed, was Caitlin Cotrell. The "conservative" caller likely sees this as a Christian religious issue based on Scripture—and don't think many immigrants from different faiths aren't even more conservative—while Caitlin wants to make it about "capitalism" and an "enlightened" reading of "history."

Caitlin also dodged explaining fully her view that "sexuality" is a matter established at birth. I assume she means morphologically; does she think persuasion is also "natural" or innate from birth too? Sexual and gender identities do in fact overlap and interact somewhat, whatever the self-interested "God made man and woman" or the Diversity "experts" may say. Further, as gender is in fact, largely at least, a "social construct," the more it is treated as such, it will inevitably be rendered prey to all sorts of religious, ideological, and

intellectual construction of differing merits, with generous portions of impassioned, eloquent nonsense. An “expert” on the first show framed this issue in terms of resisting the slide into “fascism.” Please.

I nevertheless would gladly have Caitlin come into my classroom. Sex Ed typically is not something teachers are good at teaching—or want to teach—at least with any seriousness (and with humour that does not flop). It can be confined within parameters not stretched into where religion or ideology predominate, or at least, with differences acknowledged and to be accepted (in personal home lives if not the larger society). Kids need some formal instruction from knowledgeable professionals practiced in the political art of presenting such age-appropriate to mixed-constituency audiences.

An emailer asked if we want kids to get their “sex ed” on the playground. More relevant now is the Internet: Have you checked out what anyone can get now online? Search “anal sex” and you’ll promptly learn all about the “joys” and “wonders” of it. Don’t ask anyone not so inclined to think this is a good, or even harmless, thing to promote, let alone tolerate, publicly.

The truth is both sides taking leading roles in this debate are misguided. (Surprise, surprise. Can we not give moderate, reasonable voices prominence in such debates?) Both sides make blunders that cause fallout harmful to kids.

To begin with, news presenters and commentators tend to skate over, gloss over, the fact that this parents-must-be-informed policy applies only with students under 16. Surely early adolescents require more oversight than their older peers?

Kids have rights, parents have rights: How well each exercises them is the question. They each have responsibilities too, and one of them (for both where possible) is to not put teachers in impossible positions. Diversity enthusiasts, especially students in schools, too often overstep bounds of mature, respectful behaviour—we are dealing here with children, adolescents, who can be impulsive and impetuous, prone to naive idealistic simplistic pronouncements. More than the shy and awkward “different” child is a player here: I have seen Diversity kids be aggressive, not just in recruiting members for the Gay-Straight Alliance (or equivalent), but in trying to persuade others to join their sexual persuasion.

As a counsellor, I have engaged with girls in dangerous places who just don't want the pressures, fall-out, and violence that too-often come with being sexual with males. But who is going to admit, or even recognize, that this is why they are inclined to be "transgender?" Yet why should they be "heterosexual" if this is what such would mean for them?

Narrow-minded parents who avoid their responsibilities and act only at the ballot box supporting the Saskatchewan Party manipulating and exploiting them, looking "brave" on their behalf "taking the flack" for them, are also at fault here. We know the Sask Party scarcely listens to Blue Sky other than to monitor "the enemy" looking for slips, dirt, and strategic advantage to be gained.

Diversity advocates have taken advantage of the liminal spaces and confusion in public forums like schools to aggressively advance a self-righteous agenda. Now they see a backlash threatening to curb or turn back some of those gains, and simplistically are pulling out all the moralistic stops with some shady sleight-of-hand deflection to claim back that ground.

One curse of working with troubled, at-risk kids in schools is "Don't tell my parents! I won't talk to you if you do!" Part of the problem can be this very lack of communication. Indeed, some parents are not helpful or tolerant enough, but others can be proven to be not be the ogres or bigots their teenage kids claim they are. But they will not present well at the door of the Principal after hearing on the steps of the Post Office, or in an aisle at the grocery store "Hey, did you know your boy "Larry" says he is a girl, wants to be called "Laura," and is hanging out with the queer kids at school?" This is a recipe for explosion.

School personnel naturally avoid "unpleasant conversations" too, and given the typical divide between home and school—each "needs" the other to blame failures on—staff acquiesce to the child they have to work with, and keep on their side, all day long in school. Kids increasingly have claimed power in schools, and they doggedly resist and subvert ceding it back. Teachers and counsellors are routinely put in impossible positions. Kids are put in impossible positions. Parents are put in impossible positions. An escalation in the "school wars" is not what is needed. Actual submission entering into "uncomfortable conversations" is. Reconciliation can take many forms.

Since when "conservatives" do venture into public forums they take a licking—often it is not a religious thing with them, but something visceral or instinctive

and thereby as-much-as nonverbal, hard and clumsy to articulate—while their “progressive” interlocutors get unquestioned acceptance of their shoddy premises; they stay silent in them keeping to their social media silos.

Sexual identity formation, and gender identity formation, are not simple for some, even many, people, especially young ones in the throes of formative processes. Such may be multicausal, polymorphic, and multivalent, but this does not mean all of such processes and outcomes are equal in health and legitimacy. Further, religious types, however misguided, rightly insist that spirituality that includes “the demonic” should also be included in these equations; the challenge is not the “reality” of this—I have lived in places where the demonic was too evident to dismiss—but rather discernment in this nefarious and bewildering arena. What kids need is a safe place where often-frail young people can work this out, figure it out, quietly, with wise support, without fear or prejudice.

I want kids to avoid as many impulsive or pressured “experiments” and missteps as possible; these can have lifetime harmful consequences. Diversity advocates want kids free to “explore” sexuality and gender, but this has to be done discretely and carefully. Too many “adults” of all persuasions are acting out their personal agendas through children.

I know how hard it is to explore and discuss such matters even in an institution so venerable as Blue Sky, with a seasoned, accomplished host, Garth. I know too well the (professional) cost of defying or sidestepping the “group think” mindset dominating such arenas now. No surprise I hesitate to even contribute an email. When “conversations” are not advanced in truly helpful ways, making any side “uncomfortable” as necessary, no service is done to us. But our kids need and deserve better from us!

A second curse of working in schools is losing a child. Suicide of a student has become an “occupational hazard” enough to intimidate people from risking the dismaying horror of it over a career. But kids need most the very people who can love them best, and they need us to be “adult” and wise, guiding and protecting them (including at times from themselves) as necessary while we otherwise stay out of their way and let them surprise us in ever-new ways.

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