

## Such Stuff podcast

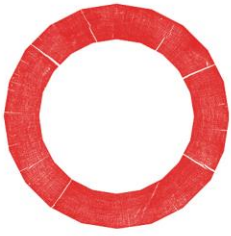
### Season 7, Episode 5: Celebrating LGBTQ+ History Month

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**Imogen Greenberg:** Hello and welcome to another episode of Such Stuff the podcast from Shakespeare's Globe. This month we've been celebrating LGBTQ+ History Month. It's never been more important for everyone, but in particular schools to celebrate, educate, and participate in LGBTQ+ History Month. Now before she became our esteemed Head of Learning, Lucy Cuthbertson was a drama teacher in secondary schools, and a champion for LGBTQ+ rights, visibility and education in the schools she worked in. This of course involved celebrating LGBTQ+ History Month, but also embedding anti-homophobia work throughout the year, through the curriculum, through her teaching, and through creating a safe space in drama for her students to express themselves. So to remind us how important this anti-homophobia work is, and the hugely formative impact it's had, and continues to have on the lives of teenagers, Lucy caught up with eight former students all from the same school, a South East London comprehensive to discuss their myriad experiences of being LGBTQ+ in school. Later in the episode Lucy chats to Dr Elly Barnes, the Chief Executive and Founder of Charity Educate & Celebrate, to find out more about the latest work her charity is doing in schools to ensure they're inclusive environments for everybody. Lucy and Elly have both been working in educational spaces, as educators, teachers, activists and champions of LGBTQ+ rights for years and together they reflect on how far we've come and what else there is still to do to make schools as inclusive as possible.

First up here's Lucy and eight of her former students catching up.

**Lucy Cuthbertson:** Hello Ellie.



**Ellie:** Hello Miss Cuthbertson.

**LC:** No, no, no [laughs]. So hello Theo.

**Theo:** Hello, nice to see you [laughs].

**LC:** Hello Holly.

**Holly:** Hello Lucy.

**LC:** Hello Ellie.

**Ellie:** Hello Lady Cuthbertson [laughs] good to see you again.

**LC:** Thank you, I do like that title. So welcome Jacob and Billy.

**Jacob:** Thank you for having us.

**LC:** So Noah, hello.

**Noah:** Hello.

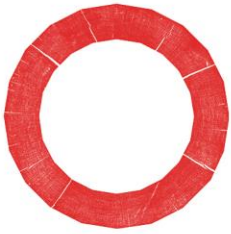
**LC:** Hello Pebbles.

**Pebbles:** Hello.

**LC:** So thank you very much for doing this, and I'm gonna start off straight in there with a question, which is how do you define yourself?

**P:** Erm, I define myself as a lesbian. That's just how I've seen myself for a long time, and I don't feel that there's a need to kind of change that, I don't feel that my feelings have changed in anyway, kind of just defines who I am and how I see myself.

**H:** I would say I am a gay woman, so I don't necessarily say lesbian, I would say gay woman. I don't have anything wrong with



the word lesbian but I would say, oh I'm gay, and I don't know why I think it's just, just how I prefer to say it.

**E:** Just in general I usually say, I don't mind people saying lesbian. But erm, if I'm very informal I usually just say gay, I'm a gay person. But usually a lot of people find it strange when I don't say lesbian in terms of gender, so I kind of always go for the gay.

**T:** I suppose the way I would describe my identity is pretty simple, I'm a gay man and I don't think there was ever much difficulty around that, around identifying myself, and I know that it might not always be so simple for some people, I think for me it was pretty straightforward.

**N:** I am a queer transman. I guess you know, being transgender is a thing that is slowly becoming more widely known. Obviously the word queer is not so because I understand that it was a derogatory word, but to me at least it basically means that I am some point on the queer spectrum, and I, I just don't know how to put a specific label on it yet, so as of now I'm going by queer.

**J:** I'd say yeah, gay, queer, a big queer gay, a big queer.

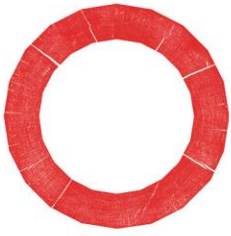
**B:** Gay, I'd say gay, homosexual is probably what I would say, if someone asked me I would say I'm a homosexual.

**LC:** So that's really funny because earlier on in an interview we were talking about the word homosexual and for me I said I tend not to use that because it smacks of the 1950s.

**B:** [laughs] I think maybe it's like the, uh, distance and time makes it feel sort of quaint and ironic for me, whereas you're too close to it.

**LC:** How very dare you.

**B:** [Laughs].



**E:** You know it's weird I think, most of the time I identify just as queer because it's more of an umbrella term that I think that I just use, especially if I'm talking to straight people or like, maybe slightly homophobic people, I like to use queer because it's confusing [laughs]. But I guess I'm bisexual or pansexual, I don't really know, I'm that.

**LC:** What do you mean when you say queer is confusing?

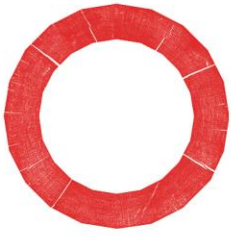
**E:** The way that it's been used historically I think like, like it was a slur against gay men specifically, and then they reclaimed queer, like I think gay men can be queer, lesbian women can be queer, bisexual people can be queer, people who are not quite sure can be queer. I think it's a word that's all encompassing so that's why I like using it, and it is confusing for other people. My parents find it odd that I call myself queer because it's, they see it as a slur but I, I don't because I know it is a slur in a certain context but I don't see it as that. It's been reclaimed enough now I think.

**LC:** Words a really interesting aren't they because I think I, I would use lesbian to describe myself which feels the most accurate fit with who I think I am, and then gay second, yeah I'm fine with gay, I would use gay if I wanted to be less frightening.

**E:** Really?

**LC:** There's something about, yeah I think lesbian is, can frighten some people off. I guess it's about being inclusive which therefore leads to greater nuance and greater number of words and identifications doesn't it. In terms of going through school, and thinking in terms of inclusive, inclusivity, what was your, what are your memories and your experience from that time?

**E:** I remember very clearly like, each LGBT History Month having like a big whole school assembly with like teachers who were out, or students who were out, or people in the school who had LGBT family members. I think because we had it basically every year, I

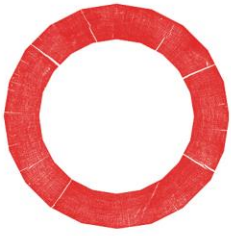


guess like me and like our, my friends who are also out for them it becomes such a thing of like yeah, X is gay, X is lesbian, like who cares. And like for the younger kids especially Year 7s and 8s, having an assembly so explicitly about, and focusing on LGBT people in the school would've been a bit like, something that's probably a bit taboo that they haven't really spoken about before. Because I think the school created such a safe environment for queer students to come out, like lots of my friends came out to me quite early I think compared to like people I met at uni, lots of people they said that their friends, nobody came out at school because they were too scared. I just feel like it became so normalised that, I think it's amazing that I felt like that, I had such a shock when I went to uni and I talk about my experience at school, my friends at uni were like how do you know so many gay people, you probably do actually but they probably just weren't able to come out, or like feel safe around you, and at your school. I think it also, I think it did teach, it did teach the kids about like, it's not an isolated community, the LGBT people are your best friends, your teachers, your, your friend's dad like, they're everywhere and that's absolutely fine.

**T:** School for me as a gay man, and dealing with becoming aware of that, coming to terms with that, realising that I think was a relatively smooth and positive experience. I think there's always gonna be hiccups and it's always gonna be a challenge not necessarily because of school or where you are, but probably because of just the culture that we're in, the society that we're in.

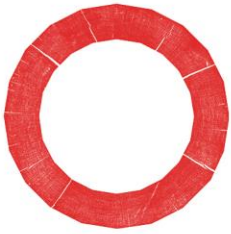
**LC:** So both of you I would describe, if I had to describe the Beswick brothers, the main thing that comes to mind is that you were both just unapologetically yourselves, would that be a fair summary?

**J:** I think it would be a fair summary for Billy, I don't know if it would be a fair summary for me. I'm glad that I came across like that, and I sort of don't really wanna burst the bubble that that's what it was like [laughs]. I remember a lot of like stories where I was kind of like very confused and a bit ashamed at points, and also people not



making me feel very comfortable and finding that quite difficult, that's my memory up until about maybe Year 9. But like at that time anyway all that you would get really was negative, really and so, so you weren't like, you weren't really aware of what your sexuality was, you just new that people were calling you this negative thing and you didn't want to be associated with it. I was, I was scared all the time, and I don't think I really said it publicly until I was like 16, and literally there was reason to be scared, like I've got lots of memories of being hit, and being chased, and especially at that time anyway it was not an environment where if I had been, if I had said I was gay there wouldn't of been repercussions for that, because even just appearing gay, to be honest sometimes I do think if I had been more comfortable and I'd felt like there wasn't anything wrong with it and had put that across and been quite sturdy and confident about it, by you not being comfortable with yourself people and people saying stuff to you and then that like hurting, and then that makes you even less comfortable with yourself, it's just, it's like a spiral of shame and confusion, for a big queer gay like me [laughs].

**B:** It never felt like something that I had to do for myself, and like I never really came out but I do remember when I was 13, I remember thinking, oh you're definitely gay but you don't have to tell everyone because you're only 13. I then I remember being in, were we in Year 11 when we made that video were we spoke about gay members of our family and it was an assembly, it was part of like the whole push towards more inclusivity in the school, and people, staff and students spoke about whether or not they had gay siblings and I spoke about my lesbian sister and my queer, gay brother and I remember at the end of the interview you said do you want to say anything about your sexuality and I remember saying no, and the reason I said no was because I didn't really yet want to be, it's like I knew to myself what I was but I wasn't like yeah at a point where I wanted to like, be in the world that way. And then a couple of years later we did another video where staff and students who were gay spoke about whether or not they were born that way, and I said something very cringe about Lady Gaga but, then I did speak about it, but it wasn't really a process of being in shame and then not being in shame, it was more a process of like being private and then

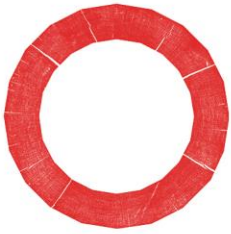


being public, if that makes sense.

**E:** I was not out at school, I probably didn't come out officially until I was about 18, 19 years old. It was also when I got to university that I started having a bit more of a freedom and a bit more of an understanding of my sexuality as a whole. I always knew that I wasn't completely straight, but didn't really understand what that sort of meant, maybe I was just going, the whole going through a phase thing and obviously I was a lot, well the term butcher than the rest of the girls, I think that's when I sort of started to understand more, especially with the group of people I knew at school who I was. You know hanging out with Holly and Pebbles that helped me come out a lot more when I was older, but understanding who I actually was I was always very much trying to please people, I was always a lot more feminine to make other people happy and to avoid a lot of questions, but I felt like I wasn't confused with my sexuality I was just confused with my identity more, so I suddenly realised that it wasn't such a bad thing being that like butcher the way I was, more masculine. Obviously I cut off all my hair, and that's always felt like that was waiting, there was this person waiting to make me feel so much more comfortable.

**LC:** Can you talk to me a little bit about how during the course of being in secondary school your identity has changed, has shifted? Because when I knew you, you would've been labelled a girl so I'm just interested in your own personal journey through secondary school.

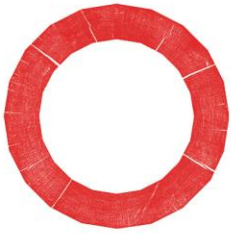
**N:** It was a, it was a crazy one. I went through a multitude of identities at that point which is fine you know, we're meant to question and stuff like that. I thought I was non-binary at the time, I knew that I wasn't cis since I came into secondary school but I kept it mostly closeted because I just, I didn't know how they would react. I realised that I was trans, god I was, I must've been in Year 9, Year 10ish, it was a crazy journey of trying to figure myself out and I was less open about my gender identity I guess, than my sexual identity which also has fluctuated. A lot of things helped me and I think I grew up in a, at a point where things were, I'm not gonna



say they were alright because they're not alright even today but they were better than how other people grew up. When you grow up in a heteronormative state you immediately assume that they're going to be distasteful towards it and they're not going to accept you for who you are. It's hard looking at yourself while trying to hide yourself, and I tried my best to be who I was and you know I'm extremely lucky that I have parents who support me because they let me go through those stages, I thought I was bisexual at a few times, I thought I was pan for a few years you know, it's been a journey. I think I'm lucky with the support system I had with school which is kind of astonishing, they helped a lot especially with my gender identity, when I came out as trans they, you know, they even help me pick out my name, like because of some teachers who were there, they also supported my parents through it because they weren't, they weren't calling me by my name or my pronouns at the time but you know they had a meeting with them and they were like listen, this is Noah, this is who he is please accept that, which really helped. There's the teachers you know who go through it and like who help you, but then there's also the students at the school, they were, when I came out I was given transphobic slurs, they were like oh well you're not really a guy are you, or they were like I'm just gonna call you by your dead name and I got hurt. I would say my experiences at school were more positive than most, even though I had those negative aspects that I still carry to this day, I think I need to count myself as lucky because I know, I know some other stories from people who didn't get any support and who were still dealing through that trauma and because it is, that is what it is, it's trauma not knowing where your school stands and then realising that oh my school stands against me, it's trauma.

**P:** I feel like from a very early age I knew kind of that I particularly fancied women, and that it was probably from the age of 12 I think, I think I was probably out to my friends from probably the age of 13, 14, and I think that from what I've spoken to even my partner being out that early is quite unheard of around people that, who didn't go to our school, but within our school it was pretty normal that people were discovering themselves around that time and they were quite open about discovering themselves, whereas I





think other people didn't have that experience, I think that we were a lot more aware of ourselves in our school and a lot more aware of different types of sexuality and just really discovering ourselves and being who we wanted to be, we kind of created our own little community especially within drama.

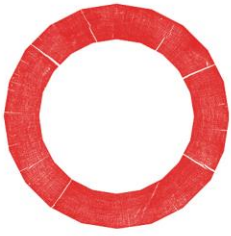
**T:** I was probably given more opportunity than I even took to do that playing through the work that we did together in drama, but also more widely I think through the work that you'd done to try and infiltrate the rest of the school with your homosexual agenda [laughs].

**LC:** Oh I, I, I love that thank you Theo, what an accolade.

**T:** [Laughs]

**LC:** Looking back at your time at school what were the most informative moments or experiences regarding your sexuality or things you particularly remember?

**H:** I think probably like whenever, whenever you went into the drama space it was always a learning experience anyway because it was sort of this like safe gay haven of, of the school. And then within that like, you could talk freely and then you would learn something, and you yourself Lucy you were so well versed, I remember learning about Stonewall and I remember learning about the history of what it meant to so many people to be able to go out and do these things, and just within the productions and stuff that we put on as well, sort of using that as an extra safe space to confront people who may have had bigoted views that actually it is good, it is fun. Like what was it, like Romeo and Juliet when, I think it we, all the women dressed up as men and all the men dressed up as women and we just had this like weird party, everyone just came in, they cross dressed, they had a great time, they listened to weird music and then everyone went off and they felt better for themselves and a bit, a bit brighter I guess.

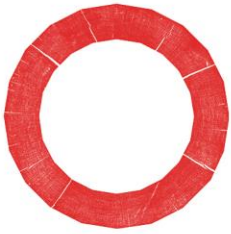


**P:** I don't like to brag but I think we're quite a good cohort in terms of drama and we kind of started that little community and then that kind of grew. There was this big gaggle of a about 50 kids that probably turned up to drama who were able to just kind of be who they wanted to be and doesn't matter if some people stuck out because they knew it was alright, and that's kind of what we liked and kind of how we expressed our self, and I think that, that freedom to do that within school just made people kind of understand each other more and be more willing to accept each other which is really nice to see. So by the time I left it was like this big mish mash of crazy kids who were just really happy I think whereas in some schools they are just so in themselves and they don't get to express themselves and they're so caught up in how they are being seen that they can't be themselves.

**E:** Yeah obviously when we were doing GCSE and A Level drama you made a conscious effort to like have plays that tackled LGBT issues and by queer writers, like Angels in America, yeah also even if they weren't play with explicit themes, like LGBT themes we also had to like, cross-dressing, like in Romeo and Juliet and in Lysistrata, like I guess we did drag at school so that's cool.

**E:** I think the play that really did it for me with feeling how comfortable I was, was Lysistrata actually [laughs]. Where you know we swapped the boys playing the women and the girls playing the men, and that you know again that sort of made me question why I feel very comfortable in this huge army gear, and not having to wear a skirt or, it was , ah you're the leader of an army and I was like yes finally! I would say Lysistrata was the one that made me go aha yes, now I can really be my masculine butch self.

**LC:** Yeah I mean I know my perception of both of you was obviously quite particular to drama and the productions we did but you were both just so up for anything and more, so whatever you were asked to do it would then end up with gold shimmer [laughs], I mean what was the first production you were in Billy, was it something like Ruckus in the Garden where-



**B:** I think I was painted completely gold.

**LC:** That's right and Jacob [laughs], and Jacob when we think back to when you were in Galatea what was your outfit?

**J:** I was playing Diana the Goddess of Chastity and the Hunt, and you were like I think that she should be a nun and be very chaste, and I was like no she's got to be really really sexual, so I ended up wearing like a skin coloured, skin tight bejewelled number that only covered half of my chest [laughs], and then the other half of my chest was exposed and I had nothing but a gold nipple tassel.

**LC:** This is why I think it's, it's bemusing that either of you thought anyone thought you were, might be possibly heterosexual.

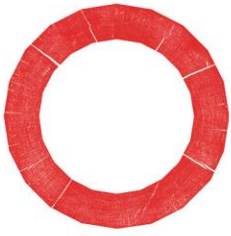
**J:** [laughs] And I was so ashamed [laughs].

**LC:** So I think this is an ongoing theme of you taking perfectly good heterosexual plays and making them into queer productions.

**B:** I think that is like, I never ever ever ever, even though really, although Ruckus in the Garden I was Cupid though wasn't I, but I never really enjoyed in my fantasy life either as I child, or once we got into, once I started doing drama, I never wanted to play a man, it wasn't something I was interested in doing, it didn't feel like, like it somehow felt dishonest.

**LC:** Are there, are there kind of good memories about being able to be yourself or do you look back on it and do a bit of a shudder?

**J:** It is mixed feelings I think, but I do, I do I definitely reflect on everything that I did in the drama department as an absolute joy and something that was really unusual, I absolutely loved that. I then on the flip side I just found school, I just didn't really like school, I dunno it just all felt a bit uncomfortable.



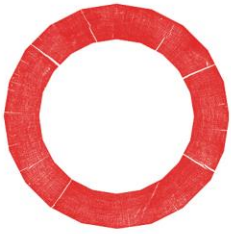
**B:** I loved school, I always talked to everyone all the time, maybe it's because I, I loved school, I loved drama, but I also liked school generally, I found my peers funny, even if they, even if it wasn't always easy to navigate being with them I really enjoyed school. But I do think part of the reason I enjoyed school so much was the like release valve of having the drama hall, when we weren't doing productions sometimes I would read Harry Potter sometimes in the library alone. But I did have a nice time.

**J:** If school were a microcosm metaphor for the outside world the drama hall was like a big gay bar [laughs]. It was actually a kind of utopia away from all the like judgement.

**LC:** What should practical things that teachers can do other than saying we accept everyone, everyone is equal, how do you make that happen?

**N:** Obviously it depends on the subject you're teaching and the nature of the class, but I think one of the main things for me at least would be to A) Do what my teacher did and ask for your pronouns you know and accept that. If there is someone in your class who identifies as LGBTQ+ listen to them, let them talk to you, let them complain to you if there's anything going on and you know if someone says you know, hey people are bullying me because of my identity you know take action. And make sure other people understand that homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, acephobia it's not, it's not OK, it's not a cool trend, it's genuinely hurtful and it leads people to question themselves, and you know hate themselves for a long time. You know it is really detrimental for people's mental health.

**LC:** You are absolutely right, and the statistics are actually really frightening aren't they, so it must feel that gender comes up all the time in a way that doesn't relate to you in every class, in every text book it must be a constant stream of inappropriate gender references that you can't, that don't represent you.



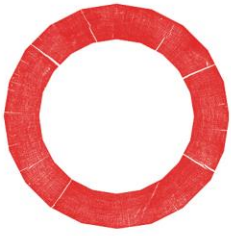
**N:** Yeah it's a, it's a constant struggle. It's always a cisnormative idea, and it's always, it's always binary, it's always within the binary which is horrible.

**LC:** You know did you see yourself reflected in lessons, in the curriculum, outside of drama where you felt safe.

**B:** It's important to have representation partly because having representation will force you as a teacher to have to think about things in a more complicated way. If you're not gay, or trans, or bisexual, if you're not LGBTQ then there's just gonna be certain ingrained patterns of thinking that you might not even be aware of that can feel quite excluding. But having representation it isn't even really for the purpose of so that I would have someone, oh you know Alan Turing was gay I could be a computer scientist, it's more that if you have a curriculum that includes representation you're gonna be forced to think about your own ingrained thinking and complicate your thinking a bit more.

**LC:** So just to finish off, if you were going to go along to your PGCE course, initial teacher training course and talk teachers who are in training who are about to go into schools what advice would you be giving them about how to create an inclusive school that they're a part of?

**P:** It's about being confident in yourself, being open as who you are, and then once you have created a place where you feel like you can be who are open then you can look to move that down into the school, and I think that showing kids that it's ok to be who you are first doesn't matter if you're talking about sexuality or whatever I think it's creating that culture first in school, and then you'll get from that who needs the support and where, and then from that you'll get those kids who don't know how to identify themselves as who they are and their sexuality and from that then you can start creating that, that support unit that they need, because everyone needs a bit of support it doesn't matter who you are. Because I'm a teacher now and I teach in my school, some teachers don't feel they can necessarily be themselves or giveaway too much of themselves

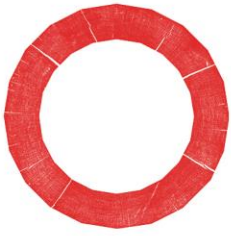


to students because some people like really hold back from being who they are at school, but if you are more open about that with kids then it gets them to understand that there are different people in the world, and I think in our school people were very open about kind of who they were, which meant it was OK for us to be like that. And I think you learn so much from your teachers about people rather than just the lessons they are teaching.

**H:** I would say to continue trying to provide some of those like safe spaces, naturally students will gravitate towards the teachers who they think will get them, as long there's a pocket of teachers that are willing to create those spaces, at least there's several different outlets for a student to go to if needed, and it makes you dedicate a bit more time to the history because I only learnt that from yourself, so there needs to be more, more inclusion. Feminist movements, gay movements, Black history, there needs to be a broader spectrum taught in schools so that nobody is left out and yeah it just helps to create the safe spaces for the people that need it.

**E:** I think it's understanding that gay, homosexuality, LGBTQ people, transgender people especially, and non-binary people have always been around, it's not this new thing that's come into, that's come into the world, these people have always been there, there's just been no like shot to recognise that. I think what I would've liked was just teachers saying it as just the norm.

**E:** Don't step around the subject I think talking about it, in just the most frank way you can, don't make it so serious where it becomes unapproachable but not to skirt around the subject. Like everyone's going to mess up they are young and they're finding out about these subjects for the first time often in school, when they're gonna say maybe clumsy things but a lot of it will just be coming from curiosity. I think just give kids straight answers and respect their intelligence even though they are young, don't hide things and cloak things behind some mysterious, like this is a hush hush subject because then kids are just gonna be more and more interested, they're gonna find out from bad sources and find out bad information and wrong information. But if you give them a solid,



straight to it full of facts and reality education about LGBT issues and people they're just gonna be like ok.

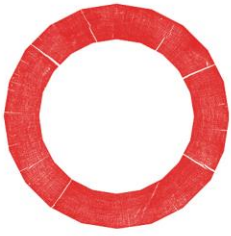
**T:** If I was to be parachuted into a erm, teacher training course and give my advice about how to support LGBT students and non LGBT students for that matter I think I would use the government's Coronavirus advice and say act like you've got it, act like everyone might be LGBT. And I think it's so much about role models, and it's about just normalising because I think that everything else in our culture is saying you know, not necessarily you know there's lots of things in the culture that are very very pro LGBT, pro LGBT rights, but I think still all of the narratives, all of the kind of, all of the things that we grow up on are so based around heteronormative shit. If you're a teacher and you've got an opportunity to speak to like 100 kids a week or more, then be one of the people that's helping to unpack that because if that's by just referencing history, referencing, and it goes also for other marginalized groups, referencing the stories that are relevant to more than just straight folk, if it's science, talking about scientists and all of that stuff. You know I just think it has to be, it just has to be in the groundwork of everything because otherwise we just keep walking through life thinking there's one way of being, which is so not the case.

**LC:** I think we should finish there, that was beautiful.

[Music plays]

**IG:** Next up Lucy sat down with Dr Elly Barnes to discuss her experience in schools, first as teacher and now as the Chief Executive and Founder of Educate & Celebrate. Elly set up the charity after spending years working in schools and seeing first hand how much dedicated work is needed to give schools practical help and frameworks to make schools as safe and inclusive as possible for all students, so here's Lucy and Elly.

**LC:** Hi Elly.

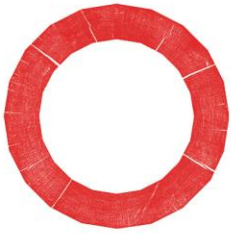


**Elly Barnes:** Hi.

**LC:** So you and I first met but not actually in person when we were both in a documentary film back in 2008 that was done for a Channel 4 Teachers TV and we were asked to be in a documentary called Gay Teachers and it featured according to the blurb, five inspirational teachers who are out in their schools. So I was going to ask you what your experience was of teaching, and when, if you came out in school what that experience was like?

**EB:** Yeah I mean it's like what you say, there wasn't many of us out at that point was there. I mean quite incredible to believe that now because of the jobs we're both doing now, we're surrounded by teachers of all different identities and isn't that a wonderful thing. Then I think you know I was very lucky in terms of coming out, I don't think I ever had an official coming out in school, because I think I was never in from the get go. But I think that is me and my personality because I just believe in just being myself as much as possible in whichever environment I'm in, and particularly I think when you're working with young people because you want them to be themselves too because if I can have open and honest relationships with them, then they're going to be open and honest with me, and it really does help. There was several young students in the school who were really struggling, they had no language around their identities, they had no one to talk to about how they were feeling, difficulty forming friendships and achievement and you know just being themselves, and I thought wow we're in the 2000s we really really should have moved on, you know Section 28 was repealed in 2003 we should be on a much faster road than the one that we are already. So I really took it upon myself, I just wanted to put my head above the parapet you know and just make sure that I was there as the voice of those young people, because if I didn't do it those kids, you know would suffer within the school, and they wouldn't find themselves at school, and they couldn't be themselves and just stopping all the harsh treatments and the bullying and the adversity that was happening around the school, so that was my trigger really. And of course there was staff who wasn't out as well, you know it wasn't the sort of environment where they

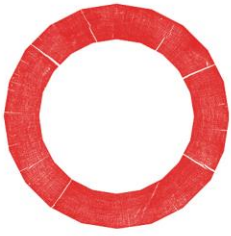




felt like they could be. Gosh at that point there was still teachers losing their jobs of course which you'll probably remember because of their gender identity or their sexual orientation.

**LC:** Yeah and it was quite a scary prospect for teachers wasn't it, and I think the culture in schools 15 years ago I think it was, it seemed pretty toxic regarding homophobia, I remember that was the kind of your gay kind of cuss was just endemic I felt when I started teaching but the progress as you say has been pretty rapid hasn't it. More and more there are schools and teachers understanding that you cannot have this kind of atmosphere and some of the work you're doing has been very instrumental with that.

**EB:** Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia are real, and they are ugly and horrible and devastating things you know. And I really wanted to create training, a programme that was full of useful resources that everyone could use to make positive change and I wanted to go into this with a positive message because I've always found that way the best way, and the most successful and effective way, and we're building this future of inclusion and social justice, and I don't think we're gonna get there if we just keep telling negative stories about ourselves. Yes I believe our voices should be telling our stories, all voices from all the different protective characteristics all those voices should always be at the centre of every single conversation going forward but, it needs to be partnered with here are effective tools that you can use going forward, and these are not for particular members of your organisation who can only do it, this is for absolutely everyone and I like to empower people to know they can make change, and if I can change the opinion of one person per day then I am doing my job and I'd like to throw my baton to the next person. So we have a programme where we will start off with interviews, with of course the young people themselves, with teachers of all different levels and subject areas all over the school, and surveys for everyone to build a picture of what is happening within the school first and identify the areas for immediate change and then identify all of the areas for long term stable change. Now as you



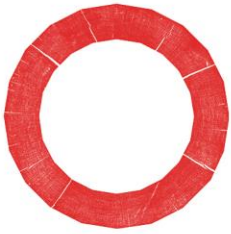
know and you suggested, there's a lot of fear still around this, that is part of the problem, the fear that we are saying the wrong thing, and we don't want to upset anybody so getting the language right is pretty key at the beginning of the process, we have to bring people on board step by step, and that includes, all of the teachers, all of the parents, the governors, the trustees, whoever is a stakeholder within your environments. And of course then interrogating the curriculum right the way through, all key stages and all subjects across the board and increasing visibility in the environment. A lot of the time which is quite interesting, the schools will have their first student that is transitioning, so that has given them the impotence to make sure that they're getting things right. So they're coming from a place of, we want to do the best for our students what do we do and that's when I get a lot of calls from schools who want to start the work, they haven't done it before but someone's given them a reason to start doing it, and I find that that's good but can also be quite a negative thing as well because why weren't you doing it anyway, because it's in law that we do this, so from the Equality Act 2010 we should be you know creating inclusive schools and we should no longer be in a place where we are trouble shooting.

**LC:** What was your own school experience like?

**EB:** Oh gosh, what in terms of inclusion?

**LC:** Mm-mm.

**EB:** I don't think it was ever mentioned I cannot think of one single conversation I had growing up, it never ever ever came up in conversation. I think the first chat I had was when I went to uni when I was 18, and someone said to me, ooh you're one of those people aren't you, I was like what? [laughs] What do you mean one of those people? Oh, oh well you're like bisexual aren't you, or you're queer, or you're lesbian, or you're this or you're that, I was like wow! I had never labelled myself before, because I was from the countryside I guess no one really had ever noticed that I was



having relationships with different genders, and I never questioned it and no one else questioned it either [laughs]. I guess I come from this the other way round, you know, when I was told like oh you're not heterosexual, I didn't find that out till I was 18 that I may be different to everyone else and that's what silenced us.

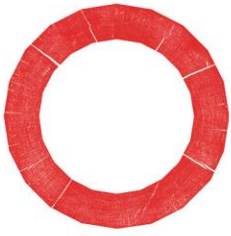
**LC:** Looking back was there a single teacher who could've been a role model in your school?

**EB:** No absolutely not, I can't think of a single person that was around me at anytime growing up. No absolutely nobody. I mean no one was telling me that it was right or wrong. I guess the only person on the TV I remember seeing was Martina Navratilova and she lost her sponsorship because she came out, and then the only other people were all these absolute absurd stereotypes.

**LC:** And it is really interesting to think back to school to think about anyone who could've potentially been a role model, but obviously we went to school at a time when they would not have been able to be out, without as you say their jobs being at risk. I think nowadays I do find it frustrating when we have teachers who aren't out, there's all sorts of reasons why they can't be and it's everyone's individual choice, but if you do nothing else just being out does a huge amount doesn't it.

**EB:** Yeah I completely agree, I mean I was always advocating. I mean did you feel safe when you came out in your school?

**LC:** Not particularly but I did know that I had the support of the senior leadership, I think it just happened quite naturally, I had students regularly from the first couple months that I was teaching asking you know, Miss are you married? Miss do you have a boyfriend? Do you have a boyfriend Miss? Are you married? Do you have a husband? And the questioning went on and on to a point where I thought hmm interesting, possibly they know. And I knew at one point I would just come out and in one lesson a girl said, Miss do you have a boyfriend? And I just said no but I have a girlfriend and she just went oh, and then we just got on with the lesson and

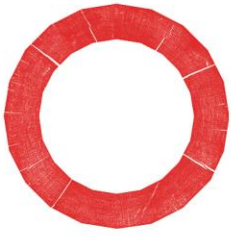


that was that. And then slowly it just kind of spread through the school, the news, but rarely did I get any kind of direct homophobia for that, occasionally, but I think once you are out in quite a strong way, you know young people don't really have anywhere to go with that do they? Somebody occasionally would say lesbian, and I would be like, say yes I told you, it's it's, you've taken the power away haven't you.

**EB:** I find that with young people, I found that through my entire career, they just want an answer and then they go oh right OK what's next? And that's the beauty about working with young people isn't it.

**LC:** You know I agree they're are incredibly open and accepting once you're honest, I think they sniff out dishonesty from five miles away. Your in a sense, as an LGBT teacher you're almost kind of more comfortable in the school because if you're out. We almost used to have these coming out assemblies which we did as a particular tool so, so we'd save them up for once a year and then any staff who either wanted to talk about themselves or we had staff who would get up and maybe you know talk about a very close relative, and it was so powerful because the students would then, at the end of this assembly when everyone was talking about their experiences of being LGBT, all of these people in their lives, the students would look and realise how many people in the room were involved, how many staff, and if you are homophobic around the school you are directly offending somebody possibly on the same corridor or in your classroom. And it became real I think it stopped this idea of homophobia being bad as sort of almost an abstract thing, as you say there was those people that people knew on television but actually you brought it back to the community, and real people that were hurt by you behaving like that.

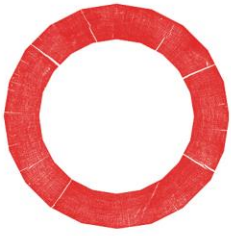
**EB:** I, it's good to see because mostly what you can see that those ones that are homophobic, biphobic, transphobic are in a minority, and they can see it in front of them because they can see that most people are on side with this, and I think that's a really good lesson to learn because there's always somebody who will not be on side,



where do those adverse views come from I'm always trying to analyse that. Kids as you know are not born with prejudice, it's not there is it so, a lot of my research is done with early years and you don't see it. So that prejudice is learned, where are we learning that? Because a lot of the time when you're getting to the teenage years in secondary, and me and you were both secondary weren't we you know they've already formed their personalities and their opinions, you know if only we could start this earlier on, much earlier, in early years and primary, then we wouldn't have to do the trouble shooting within secondary, that's what I've found.

**LC:** There's been some particularly unpleasant reactions to that work in primary schools recently hasn't there, but it's almost seen as that's more inappropriate.

**EB:** I mean sometimes parents they get the wrong information and that's really sad, so if we were able to be united in schools with the information we were sending out we'd be in a much better place. If we've all got our policies in line saying this is what we do, we do include gender identity and sexual orientation within our RSE and this is what it looks like, here's an example of a book that we might be reading, here's a song we might be singing and this is a lesson that we might do and if we had that in a more transparent way on the school websites or centralised even then we'd be in a much better place, because parents are very very much part of this process, and if course they're going to panic and of course they're going to be fearful, they're our generation if not much younger and a lot of them didn't have this education when they were at school so we developed a survey specifically for parents around all of the protected characteristics, not to find out if they agreed that we were including gender identity and sexual orientation within the curriculum but what help do you need to continue the conversation at home, and we received the most amazing feedback from parents and it wasn't necessarily around gender identity and sexual orientation, so many were about I need to know more about race, particularly about Black Lives Matter movements, I need to know more about faith, so that's when we started providing more

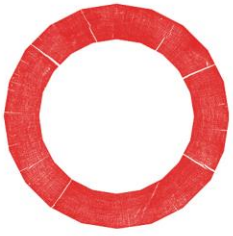


resources specifically for parents around all of the protected characteristics because it's what was needed.

**LC:** There's quite a preoccupation in primary school on gender, and I was interested in how you, how the gender and sexual orientation kind of issues combine and how you can tackle gender issues I guess.

**EB:** Yeah you know what there has been a change on emphasis because when I started it was all about sexual orientation and there's almost a feeling now when I go into a school, oh that's been done and it's all about looking at the roots of all of this. And I think the roots and everything we do now are all around gender. I mean we're looking at the bigger issues of sexism, homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, all of these, and if we really think about it the roots of all of those are in gender and our thoughts and our perceptions and our stereotypes of gender. So I'm all about at this moment eradicating all the heteronormative and cisnormative practices that happen around, schools do we need to specify gender anymore in everything that we do, do we need to fill in forms and say our gender, why are we doing that? What information are we trying to collect? And why are we collecting it? And we always start off with male and female and then move on to another box maybe that says other, ah, how awful is that! It's that whole othering. You know if we brought everybody up in this gender free world imagine, imagine if we went into our early years or nurseries, or as soon as we were born we weren't subjected to these awful stereotypes around gender, so there were no expectations so we were just brought up as people.

**LC:** I did quite a lot of work in the past few years in primary schools and I find that the focus on gender is huge, it's everywhere within a school so once you start to look at it you realise it's everything from behaviour management, it's about how we line up boys and girls, it's about uniform, and the schools are rare where they have gender neutral uniform. It's so pervasive and this labelling of being boy or girl becomes more important actually than anything else you



might have in common it's very restrictive.

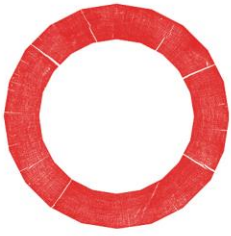
**EB:** Yeah I completely agree. We want our students to be who they are, we want them to achieve, we don't want to put limitations upon them around their gender. The stories that we read you know, a lot of them are white characters, white families, Mum Dad, you know and it's really bringing in that level of diversity and inclusion in books, literature is such a fantastic way to start right from early years.

**LC:** In the history of teaching LGBT positive messages in school, literature and books has been an inflammatory area hasn't it?

**EB:** [Laughs] Oh it has over the years, yes I mean, I think it was part of the reason why Section 28 first came about back in 1988, there was a book called Jenny lives with Eric and Martin, about of course, about a young person who had two dads and at the time that was seen as wow! The most outrageous and radical piece of literature you could possibly have yeah, and of course off the back of that Section 28 was brought in were teachers were not allowed to talk about sexual orientation or gender identity.

**LC:** I was in middle school I guess in the sort of, the late 80s, the mid 80s, and I had a teacher there who was quite a role model for me. Obviously I didn't know anything about her private life but there was something about this particular teacher who it felt like she didn't fall into the usual kind of femme stereotypes. I looked up Miss Porter and I got back in touch with her, and she's been married to her girlfriend for 30 years and she said that Clause 28 at the time, how toxic it was that she had to sit on meetings about Clause 28 where other staff members being dismissed was discussed, and it was that kind of, that kind of atmosphere.

**EB:** When I first started my first job I was told not to come out and I was really quite horrified by that as someone who's never been in, it was quite difficult to be and behave like someone else for my own



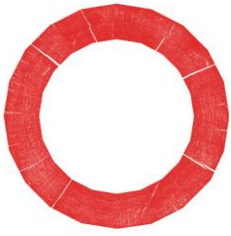
safety within the school, my heart goes out to all those poor teachers at that time who had to go through that.

**LC:** That's the difficulty isn't it, I started teaching a bit later not straight after University and I'd spent my 20s doing sort of very queer activities including I was in a choir called Queer Choir, I was a volunteer counsellor on it was then called Lesbian Gay Switch Board, I'd been pretty immersed in the queer community and politics to then going to school and I had the exactly conversation you had, somebody said to me you know you don't need to tell anybody else, you don't need to come out, you don't need to do that. I think there was a suggestion that that's private, that's your personal life and it doesn't have a place in the school, and yet students knew loads about other teachers, you know, you brought your husband to the winter fair, everybody met him, you know you've got a picture of your wife and kids on the desk. Children knew about teachers private lives, it wasn't that we were being inappropriate. And I think there were other fears from parents and other teachers that if you talk about something too much you are leading students, that you are opening up a world that they wouldn't otherwise know about, that you can make a child gay, I've heard that phrase before. And obviously this is just a load of other nonsense.

**EB:** Yeah. Now I've had that all the time and I'm just opening up the conversation around gender and sexual orientation, which is a conversation we all need to have, it's just begun you know we're now in a place where we are relatively safe in our schools right now. Let's hope, I know it's not everyone but I'd like to think that they are much safer places than they were 15, 20 years ago.

**LC:** They are without a doubt and I think it, you know the kind of work that you do, the kind of work that Stonewall have been doing as they're all champions in school, that's all been so so helpful to schools that have struggled to know how to start this work themselves but then if they can bring in an organisation like





yourself or perhaps Stonewall, or use something like the LGBT History Month as a hook, as an anchor, it's helped with that work. So we should just talk a little bit about language, I mean to anyone who is new to this kind of work or is wanting to kind of embark on it, one of the barriers sometimes is feeling like you don't know the vocabulary feeling like you don't; know the right words to use, have you found that?

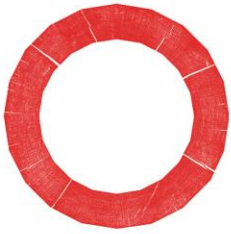
**EB:** Oh I find that every single day in this job, and people fall over their words all the time, oh I don't know if I've said the right thing. We've really moved forward now, I mean I'm using language now that I definitely wasn't using 15 years ago. So to be inclusive I guess we're all using the LGBT+, so the plus and the star, so that means we're including all gender identities and all sexual orientations, and the Q of course for queer and questioning, A is being used for asexual and ally, and I intersex, so all are now included with all the different initialisms and acronyms.

**LC:** Yes it's a much broader vocabulary now, it's much more nuanced and it's much more inclusive really isn't it.

**EB:** This is going to continue to change don't you think? Because we are at a point where we are inventing language aren't we, because we are covering all genders as we go along so we know that we've got non-binary identities, gender-fluid and of course there are many many more and we have to move with language.

**LC:** That movement can cause people anxiety because if it changes so quickly you think you've just got the hang of it and it's kind of changed again. But that shouldn't be a barrier to starting this work, that anxiety around language or using the right words, it's just something you can pick up you can learn can't you.

**EB:** Absolutely, oh wow, you can google anything these days of course, and you can always get in touch with organisations like ours. We want to eradicate all of the cisnormative, all of the heteronormative practices and make room for everyone to make



sure everyone to make sure that everyone feels represented I mean it's just as simple as that. You know I don't want to get bogged down in language I just don't think that's very helpful as long we're all accepted, appreciated, acknowledged within our environment then we're doing really well.

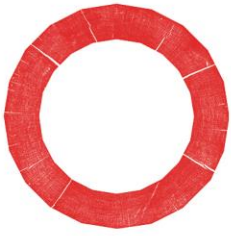
**LC:** Just to finish off if you, if there were school leaders, if there were students who are within a school and they know that homophobia is still an issue within that school, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, what would be your advice to them right now?

**EB:** Oh wow, well the first thing that we must start with is why are people not safe within your environment, what is happening right now, and let's look at the things for immediate change. Now I would definitely recommend getting in an outside organisation or I would recommend getting somebody from your staff body trained, then of course having a structured programme. So what training are you laying out each year? Are your policies embedded? Does everyone know about them? Who is doing the work in the curriculum? What can we change in the curriculum? Where can we change it and where is it needed the most? What's on the walls? Where can young people go for further support? You know where can staff go? Where can parents go? You know who and how is making the changes? Is it staff? Is it the young people themselves? You know we need the young people's voices on this, which is why we have a massive pride youth network, so groups of young people making positive because they are the benefactors aren't they of this, they're the ones receiving this education, they're the ones that need to be heard.

**LC:** Thank you Elly.

**EB:** My pleasure, lovely talking to you.

**LC:** Yeah you too, amazing work you do.



**EB:** [Laughs] And you too, fantastic, let's keep it going.

[Music plays]

**IG:** That's it from us but you can catch up now on the rest of our LGBTQ+ History Month content on our website and on social media.

If you're part of a school or an educational environment and you're interested in improving your approach to creating a positive culture for LGBTQ+ students and staff, and you've been interested in any of the work discussed in the podcast there are lots of organisations that you can contact. Of course Educate & Celebrate would love to hear from you and you can find out more details about the work that Elly and her team do at [educateandcelebrate.org](https://educateandcelebrate.org).

As Lucy mentioned Stonewall also do extensive work in schools and you can find out more at [stonewall.org.uk](https://stonewall.org.uk).

Finally if any of the issues raised in the podcast have left you wanting to talk to somebody there are lots of helplines you can contact. Switchboard LGBT is a confidential listening service, you can call on 0300 330 630 between 10 AM and 10PM daily, or go online to [switchboard.lgbt](https://switchboard.lgbt) to instant message the team. You can contact Stonewalls free information service on 0800 050 2020 and lines are open from 9.30 AM to 4.30 PM Monday to Friday.

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