

Dr. Jennifer Tupper

[00:00:00] The Intersection Education podcast. schools are the place where different institutions services and societal influences meet. In other words there at the intersection of children's lives in the intersection education podcast. We speak with insiders and Outsiders of the education world to try to gain new insight and improve our schools.

Hello and welcome to the Intersection Education podcast as usual, I'm your host Corey Haley. My guest in this episode is Dr. Jennifer Tupper who is currently the Dean of the faculty of education at the University of Alberta. University of Alberta is a bit of a [00:01:00] return home for Doctor Tupper as she did both her undergraduate and Doctorate Degrees there and in between she was professor at the University of Regina and moved up to the role of Dean in the faculty of Education there as well.

Dr. Tupper has won many awards for her teaching and research including the 2009 Canadian Association of curriculum studies outstanding publication award, and she even has racked up. Award for teaching Excellence at the University of Alberta outside of all these accomplishments one of the reasons. I really wanted to speak with dr.

Tupper is that I'm interested in how new teachers are taught and what goes into the program for teachers who are about to enter the classroom and I was really happy because dr. Tupper provided us with some answers and gave us a glimpse into this complicated world of educating future teachers. I think you're going to like it as well.

If you're interested in listening to other episodes of the intersection education podcast connect with us on our website intersectioneducation.com follow us on Twitter at [00:02:00] intersection Ed or even on Facebook. We really appreciate it when you write us on iTunes and leave a review now, here's my conversation with dr.

Jennifer Tupper.

Well, hello, dD. Tupper welcome to Intersection Education. How are you today? I am well, thanks Corey. How are you? I'm doing very well as well. Do you know I am really excited to speak to you today? Because I and many. In the field think that faculties of Education have have really one of the most difficult jobs there is and that is preparing future teachers for the complexities of their first classroom.

And you only have four years to do it and of that not even quite for your sometimes. So I'm really interested to see and hear when you think about the process of getting a new person who's new to University and then preparing him for [00:03:00] that first. Their classroom what are some of the core values or some of the main ideas that guide you in helping to prepare those Future Leaders and teachers?

Yeah. I appreciate that question and I will share just as a bit of background that as a community of Faculty staff and students. We've recently articulated our core values and we have endorsed those in a more formal way through faculty Council, so I'm going to share some of those with you because I think that values our best our.

The collated when they are collectively created and I don't want to misrepresent the collective creation of these. So in the faculty of Education, these are the things that we have noted, we value students faculty staff and our partners in education psychology and library and information studies within and Beyond the university and that's because we do teacher education here, but we also do the education.

[00:04:00] Registered psychologist clinical psychologist and counseling psychologist and library and information studies professionals as well. We value varied and diverse programs and learning opportunities and undergraduate and graduate education in the service of supporting lifelong learning. We Value Health and well-being through mutual respect.

Empathy and compassion embodied in ethical behavior and positive relationships in a sense of belonging diversity inclusivity Equity transparency and fairness. We value opportunities for establishing and renewing relations between indigenous peoples. Settlers and newcomers and the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation, we value innovation collaboration curiosity and creativity and teaching learning research scholarship service and Leadership.

We value sustainable and responsible stewardship of people finances and environment. And of course as a University faculty of Education, we value academic freedom [00:05:00] multiple perspectives and public engagement locally nationally and internationally, and so those core values are infused in all of our programs.

I think undergraduate and graduate level. Wow, sounds like you've been thinking a lot about that and I love your idea of speaking to your community because I agree with you when values are shared and and held communally that gives you more Direction. Now, I know that teacher education is something that you study and and I'm interested to know what you feel that the research is saying or what are some of the things about the research that you're really seeing that.

That is important for you around teacher education right now. Yeah, thanks for that question. And and it's a huge scholarly body of research and there's lots of different areas of teacher education. So all speak sort of more broadly. So there is a lot of research right now that is helping us think about inclusive practices and teacher [00:06:00] education.

And so that is how do we educate the whole child in all of their diversity? In response to complex learning needs a variety of learning approaches Etc. So it's really about rejecting kind of a standardized way of teaching and learning a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning and this is not new in educational research.

It's been very much part of the research and scholarship over the last 30 years, but I think it's becoming more. Broadly taken out because of the increasing complexities of classrooms in Alberta and indeed throughout the country. So there's a recognition that the ways in which we thought about teaching and learning 40 years ago while there may still be some pieces that are relevant today.

It's a different context and children, you know are quite different and their realities are quite different. In fact than they were 40 years ago or 30 years ago or even 20 years ago when I [00:07:00] 25 years ago and I started teaching. Yeah, we see the complexity and it's one of the things we talked about on this show a lot and also the different aspects of that whole idea the whole child that whole complexity.

So I appreciate that answer. I'm interested and I like this question because it makes you kind of think out of the box now. I'm not saying that you don't pay elements of what I'm going to ask you. So the I don't want you. I don't want it to come across as a me saying that it's wrong but. Let's say we gave you a blank slate and we asked you to create the ideal teacher education program where money was not an object.

There was no political influence. It was just you and as an expert on teacher education in Your Vision, what would it look like? What are some of the key points that you would that you would set up? Yeah, it's fun to dream, isn't it? And I was the LC this as well that right now in the faculty of education at U of A.

We are [00:08:00] engaging in a program review and renewal process. So the timing of your question is excellent because we are actually doing some of that dreaming together about what the ideal program would look like and I think that there would be elements that would look familiar to what we are already doing.

So there would be opportunities for students to engage in curriculum courses and pedagogical courses in feel. Experience opportunities but I would like to see field experience more broadly conceived so that there would be consistent opportunities for students to work in K-12 classrooms, but also to work in other educational settings that are not K12 to see a different.

Communities of Learners in different contexts outside of formal education because I think that that can also help our students to think more holistically about the Children and Youth that they'll be alongside at its core. I think a teacher [00:09:00] education program needs to be anti-oppressive in its orientation.

And so what I mean by that is we would create opportunities for our students to both understand and challenge dominant narratives of teaching and learning. Think that affirmed very narrow in particular ways of thinking about children and youth that rein scribe dominant narratives of teaching and learning and that continued to marginalize youth who aren't part of the dominant social category.

So to me that that must be part of teacher education Any teacher education program and we're working on that now, What else we would have all kinds of additional dollars to provide interesting and Innovative creative opportunities for our students and our faculty members to engage in learning together place-based [00:10:00] learning would absolutely I think be an important part of our Dream as a faculty of education, but that requires resources.

We would love to have. Regular access to indigenous elders and knowledge Keepers as part of our teacher education program opportunities to learn from and alongside lgbtq to plus communities as well. So it would really be about taking. Taking what we

already do and expanding opportunities so that our students are thinking much more deeply and critically about teaching and learning so that they can transform their own classroom.

Damn, I want to talk about two of the things that you just mentioned and and from my view and now I work in the province of Alberta and we hear and we heard perception. We make a story about The Faculty of education at U of A and we see some amazing programs and I think is [00:11:00] specifically to of the ones that you just mentioned and that's that Aboriginal or indigenous education and the lgbtq plus R2 plus I want you.

Maybe tell me a little bit about a work. Or those who are unfamiliar with the work maybe a quick quick survey of kind of what you're doing in those areas. But also why you think those two things are really important for ongoing research and teacher education sure. And so I will come back to I think they're important at the end of my sort of description of them.

I'll talk first about Aboriginal or indigenous education. We have the Aboriginal teacher education program as part of. Our offerings at the U of A. So a tap has been around for over a decade with more than 200 students graduating mostly indigenous students graduating and taking up teaching positions as a result of that program.

It operates from an indigenous [00:12:00] Paradigm. It really takes seriously foundational indigenous knowledge in that program and. At its core is about. Lifting up indigenous Learners in classrooms throughout the province because this is a group who have been historically harmed by education. So this program is a response to that historic harm recognizing that indigenous students need to learn from indigenous teachers and that in fact good in indigenous pedagogies are good pedagogies for all students in the province.

So we're really. Proud of that program it is it has historically been community-based. So we deliver cohort program in community and we've been all over Central and Northern Alberta delivering that program and we also now have an urban secondary cohort [00:13:00] here at the U of A because there is a need in urban centers like Edmonton for indigenous teachers to support students in schools all students in schools in addition to the eighth power.

All of our students in the teacher education. Program Elementary and secondary take a required course edu 211 and it's a foundational knowledge course so that they have an opportunity to learn about the histories experiences and perspectives of indigenous peoples in this treaty territory and indeed throughout the country in ways probably that you and I did not have access to in our own education.

So it's it is about truth telling and inviting students into a different way of thinking about a know. The history of this country. So that's the indigenous. I've heard some really great things about your LG BT Q2 plus maybe tell me a little bit about what's going on there. You bet all kinds of things are going [00:14:00] on there.

So we have we're really proud that we have the institute for sexual minority studies and services in the faculty of Education. Dr. Andre Grace is CRC Canada Research chair in sexual and gender minority studies and is doing a. Using work locally provincially nationally internationally in a research and advocacy way to support.

Lgbtq to Youth and families and so through Isthmus we have the campfire by program, which is a summer camp for lgbtq to plus and questioning young people to come together. It's a leadership focused Camp. So it is helping them develop some important leadership and advocacy skills as well as just to have support and be alongside other.

Who have had similar experiences? So that's count Firefly and then we have the fins program, which is [00:15:00] Firefly in schools. And so it's a group of facilitators that go out into schools and work with classroom teachers and students to understand lgbtq 2 plus issues challenges and the importance of creating I'm going to say not just welcoming but affirming Communities In Schools for.

So that is amazing. We have the two program which is the Comprehensive Health education workers program working with really vulnerable often Street involved young people. We have gosh, I don't even there's so much going on we have where the rivers meet which is an educational program. For indigenous lgbtq to Youth and that is expanding across the province and is reaching into schools and educational communities as well.

And we have also undergraduate classes and graduate classes that help our students really [00:16:00] understand in a in an actual press the kind of weigh the importance of this work and supporting lgbtq, too. Class students in schools to have positive educational experiences. So we I would say that this mess is one of the flagships in this faculty for sure.

Yeah. Now I am interested to know like, you know, I think about and I hear about those two faculties and and personally down. When I see in schools, I see they're important but there's another piece of that and that's that ongoing research piece, which I think that you you have a have a. It's the kind of the reason that education faculties exist.

It's not only to support and create teacher preparation. But to further the research, why do you think it is important to be looking at those two areas and if you want to treat them together or separately, but what are the kind of conversations that you have and in playing out the [00:17:00] importance of those topics?

Yeah, and I think that there are some intersections because in both instances with indigenous education and lgbtq 2 plus educational initiatives. We are wanting to use really good research to inform practice and to make significant shifts in school and also some policy changes as well that can come through rigorous research these areas so indigenous education is.

So critical for all kinds of reasons not the least of which of course are the 94 calls to action that resulted from the Truth and Reconciliation commissions work. And in those calls to action, there are several that are specific to education and it is about ensuring that all curriculum in Canada.

In K-12 has foundational knowledge and so the research and so we [00:18:00] then are able to do research that Ella Straits very clearly the value for indigenous Learners of having that foundational knowledge, but indeed the value to all Learners. It is about Shifting the way we think about ourselves as Canadians and it's drawing on the research to illustrate how those shifts are possible when you include.

Different different ways of knowing and being in teacher education and the same would be true of the lgbtq to plus research. So that research can really illustrate how these programs are making positive impacts on individuals and groups of individuals and indeed can inform a shift in educational practice and curriculum and also policy as well.

So is always that the research informs the. Action and that's really important and that's part of what we can bring as a faculty of education at a research-intensive university. Well, we sure [00:19:00] appreciate it. So this is a so in the field. So thank you. Now one of the things that I find fascinating and that I've always found when I've had student teachers over the years how much they have taught me.

And and I'd like to know what have you seen or what have you seen or what have you heard in regards to that reciprocal nature of professional learning when student teachers come into schools or maybe another way of saying this is how do you think the student teachers contribute to the professional learning of their supervising teachers?

Yeah, and it and it is reciprocal for sure. And I think one of the things that our students bring to their field experiences is recent engagement with with research and I'll use again indigenous education as an example our students because they are having opportunities to engage in learning and becoming more familiar with research in this area.

They're bringing that into their school communities and. They're cooperating teachers and indeed other teachers in [00:20:00] that school Community are really looking to them for help and support and guidance as well as they are trying to take this work up in meaningful ways. So our students in lots of ways are our leaders in field experiences some of these areas that that long time teachers haven't had the same opportunity to engage in so they bring that research they bring that theoretical consideration and the ability to bridge the theory and practice and.

Anyways know I always appreciated whenever you are asked I jump at the chance and try and and our teachers you to so that that's great to see now my last questions when I'm kind of before we move on from kind of the U of A and and University specific questions is that would like to know what you think about because a big difference in your world is that you're dealing with adults and your teaching?

Teaching people that we really trust to [00:21:00] know what they need and what they want and I imagine that that also increases the importance of student voice and student choice in programming and creation of curriculum. I'd like you to tell me what effect does what effect does that have or what impact does that have on your program creation and how you might use student feedback on your programs and and maybe if

you want to get into the back half, how do you think that might inform maybe some of our high schools or maybe some schools about what are some meaningful ways or what are some things that you've seen as impact or positive experience from using that student feedback?

Yeah, great question. So we exist because of our students. So we obviously value their voice and their perspective and in the context of our undergraduate program review and renewal process. We have actively sought out there. Perspectives on their own experiences and their learning and they are always very generous with telling us exactly [00:22:00] what they think good bad and everything in between and that's important for us because that's how we can improve and grow as a faculty of education.

So their voice is always valued and welcomed and will help us as I said to improve our programs now, What was the second part of that question? So I'm interested to know if I mean you work in schools and you work with now with adults and you had that quite vigorous student feedback portion. Is there anything that you learned that might help schools if they're going through a similar process of trying to seek student feedback and input and what that how they might integrate that into some of the changes that students are advocating for it in K-12.

Yeah, so so I think that you have to extend you have to be willing to extend the invitation and it has to be genuine and authentic. So not just tokenistic engagement with young people to say. [00:23:00] Oh, well, we've you know, they've had their opportunity to say what they think and now we're moving on but to to Really in a genuine way invite them to share their perspectives and then too.

Follow up with them. So how were their experiences how were their perspectives then use to inform important shifts or changes in what's happening in the school Community or even what's happening in a classroom? And when I was a classroom teacher, I would often ask my students for feedback on particular things that I was doing and then I would always follow up and say okay.

This is what you told me and now here's what I'm doing with that and here's how I will be better as a result. Yeah, great. Thanks. Now. The next set of questions is perhaps not linked to the university. It's a bit more personal but we realize that you know, your personal life and your professional life or sometimes intertwined.

So I realized if we may go back there. The first one is is there something about learning or education that [00:24:00] you believe is true that most people or at least a large percentage of people disagree with you about. Yeah, that's a great question and I thought a lot about this one and I don't know whether.

I would be confident to say that a large number of people who would disagree with me on it. But I know that some people do and and that is that I really believe in education. We have to move away from this perception that teachers need to be experts content area experts and I think that certainly teachers can have strong content knowledge.

But if we think that we are expert in something then what that does. Potentially shut down the possibilities for continued learning and there is always continued learning. I know for myself even in this role now. I am learning every day and I am growing as a result of that learning. You said something earlier about my expertise and teacher education and I would say [00:25:00] to you I do not.

Frame my work in my experiences and teacher education as expertise because I know that I am always learning and always growing so that's I think something that and I've had a little bit of pushback on that as well. When you think of the term Master teacher who are what comes to mind and why. Yeah, so so I actually prefer to think of teaching excellence and I think it kind of goes back to what I was saying earlier that this idea of a master teacher somehow suggest that that an individual has arrived.

They have all of these incredible skills and. And that's that's it. They've arrived whereas I think that we can be we can demonstrate excellence in teaching but we also [00:26:00] even as experienced teachers are going to have Miss steps as well. And so that's why I would actually reject this idea of Master teacher.

You're not the first person to say that so I wonder if that might be a different change. I had a very similar conversation with dr. Phil McRae a couple weeks ago. So that's that's that's interesting and I appreciate your response bill and I did not even have that conversation together.

Next question is do you have a favorite failure or a favorite success and what I mean by that is you have an experience that was either positive or negative that you felt really helped. You learn an important lesson in that you reflect back on. Yeah, I do. I mean I have many that I could John but I'm going to talk about one in particular and and as a result of this learning it's become my area of scholarship and research for the last 10 years.

So when I. Was a newly minted PhD and had my first academic position at [00:27:00] the University of Regina. And my area of research at the time was citizenship education. I happen to have an office across the hall from the former dean of the faculty who had been a champion for indigenous teacher and he invited me to participate in a research project on best practices and treaty education and I had no idea what treaty education was and that was a huge learning for me because it is exemplified the gaps in my own knowledge.

As a white settler teacher who had really taught social studies to high school students from a dominant the perspective that dominant narrative was what I reproduced in my own teaching and it was in the context of this discussion with the former Dean and my own ignorance around treaty education that has led me on this Learning Journey about.

[00:28:00] Treaties the treaty relationship the importance of treaty education for all students across the country regardless of whether you live in a tree and number 2 D territory or not. So that was a huge learning and it was a result of the limitations of my own knowledge. Great great story. Yeah the great learning I'm gonna ask you a couple maybe quicker type answered questions, but don't don't feel like.

Need to limit yourself if you want to tell us why I'm okay with that too. Do you have a favorite app or a favorite website or even some other media that you really like either personally or professionally. So Facebook would be my favorite app on both personally and professionally because it's a way for me to stay connected with friends family and also colleagues across the world, and I also really appreciate.

The some of the posts that [00:29:00] come across my my app feed my Facebook feed because they are provocative. They linked to interesting articles. There's good debate and dialogue and I do sort of have really restrictive settings on my Facebook page. So it's not public not everybody can. So I get to choose who I'm friends with and who gets to see my profile, but I do really see it as a vehicle to stay connected to stay up to date on some of the conversations and discussions that are happening.

I've gotten a lot of people having trouble picking this. Next one or whittling it down to one or two, especially people who are linked to you know, a lot of reading and Academia. So, let's see how you do. You have a favorite book that you like to quote that you refer to or that you like to refer or gift to others.

I do in fact, and I have to [00:30:00] every graduate student that I've worked with and it's called I'm settling the settlor within and it's by polit Reagan. Excellent. Thank you so much. I was I was hoping you wouldn't go with like a p a six or something like that. Yeah, what's one thing that you do every day or most days?

It keeps you well and healthy. This is a great question. So time with my children and that is intentional time with my children. Where my I'm not on a device. I don't have a computer nearby. There's no iPad open. It's just time talking with them about their days and and being intentional as a mother and also walking the dog.

So that's for me Wellness as well. Do you have an organization or a person that inspires you? So I've two people right now that inspire me and one is the president of the University of [00:31:00] Regina who I was so privileged to work alongside for 10 years. And that's dr. Diane Simmons. She is an amazing advocate for women in leadership.

She has an international. Profile research and scholarship in inclusive education. She's been a classroom teacher. She is just amazing in every respect. I watch her and I learned from her and even though she's not my president now, I continue to learn from her and then the other person who inspires me huge and I'm on the pre-sale list for tickets is Michelle Obama, and I think that she.

It's remarkable and she could be president. I think she is she is smart. She is thoughtful. She pushes people to think differently. She challenges dominant narratives, but she does so in a way that is generous. [00:32:00] Intelligent articulate she's amazing love her. Those are two great ones. Let's talk about what's what's next for you.

What are some of the questions problems or projects that you're looking at tackling? Yeah, great question. So one of our big projects is renewal of our undergraduate teacher education program, and as you might know curriculum change program change

always takes time and at a university, sometimes there are eight or nine levels of governance.

So I'm under No Illusion that this is going to happen quickly, but I'm really looking forward to moving that process forward and also continuing to expand Our Truth and Reconciliation. Share education initiatives within the faculty and our outward facing work as well in that respect. It's great.

Let's see people wanted to connect with you or follow along on that kind of work. What are some of the best [00:33:00] ways that they can do that or at least connect with you. Mmm. So through Twitter for sure and my Twitter is Tepper 3j. That's so you can find me on Twitter that way and people can direct message me on Twitter if they want or they can always find me through email, and that's easily accessible on the faculty of Education website.

Well, I want to thank you so much doctor tougher for taking a little bit of time out of your busy schedule and speaking with us today. So I'm wishing you well with that with that renewal and and again, thank you so much. Well, thank you Korean. Thanks for all you do for education in this province.

Thanks for listening to this episode of the intersection education podcast before you go. I'd like to recognize that the land where this interview took place is a sacred place that has a long history of human existence. This land is helped people like the Kree Salto mr. [00:34:00] Tapie or Blackfoot metis and Dakota Sioux Live Well for thousands of years, let us continue to live well and respect this land.