

## Good practice

### Organizing Student Voices on Sexual Diversity in School

As part of the LeGoP project GALE developed a new methodology to empower students to make their views about school safety and LGBT emancipation known to the school and the local level.

The outline of the intervention is to offer a group of students three or four days an opportunity to prepare, after which the intervention will end with a conference where students present their initial recommendations and then adjust them based on suggestions from teachers, parents and experts.

The method was tested in the Netherlands during the international exchange of the LeGoP project in November 2015 in Amsterdam. In addition to a selected group of 12 students from the Hyperion College in Amsterdam there were 26 students invited from Italy.

#### 1. Making an educational film

The preparation week starts - after the introductions - the study of a portion of the text of a scene from the short educational movie "Caged". This short film is about two friends. One of the, the heterosexual friend discovers halfway the film that his best friend is gay. His other friends are homophobic, so the protagonist must decide whether he remains friends with his best friend or if he will remain loyal to the norms of his peer group.

The students get the text of the scene where the protagonist just found out that his friend is gay because he saw him talking to a gay guy. But the protagonist does not say anything about what he saw. The scene has little text and therefore leaves much to the interpretation how you could film this encounter. After creating a storyboard (overview of some scenes, camera angles and text), students get cameras and film the scene in reality. The various film clips are viewed and discussed.



Students edit their educational film



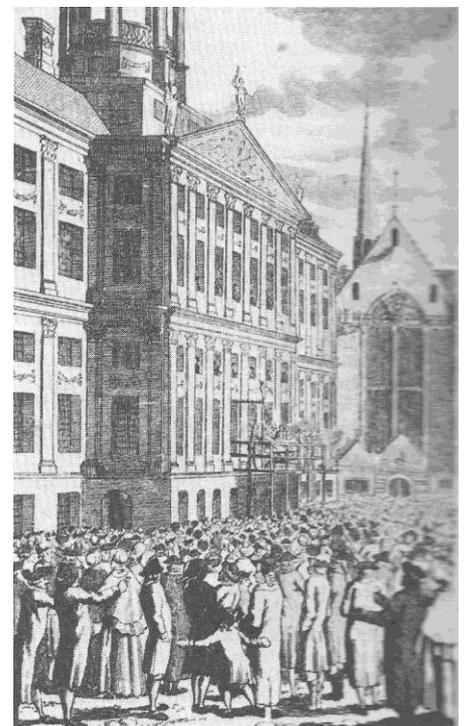
Students edit their educational film

At the end of this mini project, on the second day, the directors of the film are invited in class and the group views the original film. They talk about the choices made by the directors in order to achieve an effect. In "Caged", a main editing choice that the protagonist is a heterosexual boy, while in films about homophobia, the main character is traditionally gay or lesbian. Such films are meant to elicit empathy with gays and

lesbians in the hope this is a first step to tolerance. However, the editors of "Caged" (with the consultancy of GALE) decided that the ultimate goals of the film should be to encourage homophobic youth the rethink their own behavior, rather than just feeling pity with homosexuals. One problem is that homophobic boys are not supposed to show too much empathy, because this would be "effeminate" and "weak". So a focus on empathy works better with girls, while the perpetrators of homophobia often are boys who embrace a rough type of masculinity. The discussion among the young people clarified these processes and also created awareness about how education works.

## 2. Making an educational city walk and interview people

In the next part - on the third day - the students do a walk through the center of Amsterdam, giving them both more information about the city and about its gay history. The tour ended behind the Royal Palace and near Gay/Lesbian Bookshop Vrolijk. The students were given a leaflet explaining that 300 years ago, hundreds of gay men have been put to death with great fanfare in front of the palace (then City Hall), and that nowadays it is possible to have a popular gay bookstore just behind the Palace. The students talked to passers-by on the street, explained the leaflet and the bookshop, and interviewed them about what they thought of the change that happened over 3 centuries. Because 50% of people in the center of Amsterdam are tourists, they heard a variety of international opinions.



Homosexuals executed in front of Amsterdam City Hall (now Palace)

### 3. Meeting Gay/Straight Alliance students

At the end of the third day the group meet three young people who are representatives of different Gay / Straight Alliance (GSA) groups/ GSA's are school-based groups of LGBT and heterosexual students who want to provide a safe place for LGBT students in their high school and who want to do something about the social safety in school. The GSA students proudly tell about how they have created up their GSA and why it feels so important for LGBT students. This discussion made a great impression on the 38 students, of which nobody dared admit that they were LHB or T. After this discussion the participating students and GSA students joined to have a pancake dinner.

### 4. Carrying out a school visitation/assessment

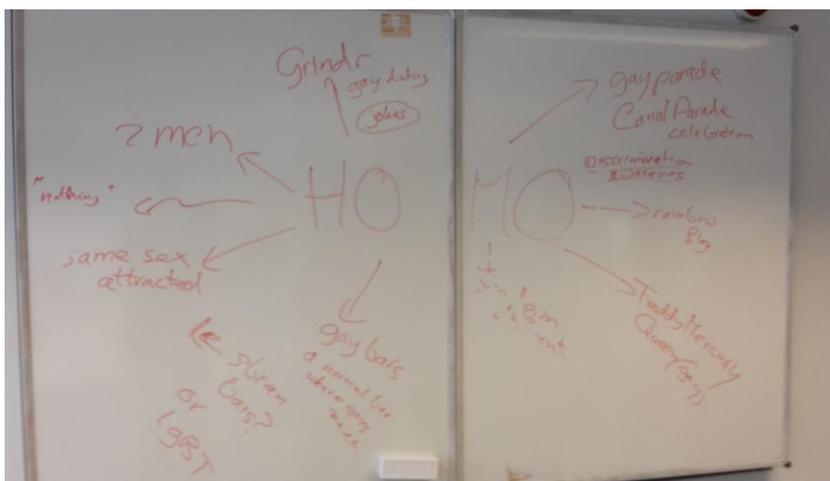
The fourth day consisted of a school visitation. This "visitation" consisted of 5 elements:

- The students interviewed each other about sexual diversity and school policy. This way the learn how it is to interview someone and about how to research school policy.
- They discuss the experience and are given opportunity to change some of the questions of the survey for the next step.
- In the lunch break, they mingle with other students in the school and interview them with the adapted survey.
- After lunch, teachers and external facilitators give lessons about homophobia to 3 classes. The students of the visitation group can choose their role: either they can

observe the discussion process, they can help to facilitate, or they can take part in the discussion.

The lessons consist of a brainstorm about the word "homo" and a statement game.

The visitation students are allowed to change the given statements, except the last one: "the school has to do something to improve the situation of LGBT students". Experience shows



Brainstorm about the word "Homo" in one of the lessons

this statement has 50/50 proponents and o[pponents], so it leads to a good discussion about the need for school policy. During these lessons, the results of the

survey are fed into an Excel sheet, which gives an immediate overview through clear graphs.

- After the lessons, the students reassemble and discuss the impressions from the survey and the lessons. One of the conclusions is that most young people react more tolerant in individual interviews, while in a group process, like in a lesson, prejudiced and negative people have a disproportionate influence on the discussion and atmosphere. This means school policy does not only have to deal with changing individual opinions, but also with group processes and informal norm setting. The review of impressions ends with each student writing 6 comments on post-its: 3 positive observations or school strengths and 3 things that could be improved. These are pasted on a life-size drawing of a tree: the strengths in the roots and the improving issues in the branches.
- The next part of the discussion is a discussion about priorities. The task is to select up to 3 priorities from the improving issues. These are pasted on the trunk.
- Then, the facilitators present the GEEC model: a simplified version of how school policy can be developed. GEEC is an acronym for Goals, Environment, Education and Counseling. These are the 4 key elements of a successful school policy. The 3 priorities are then worked out to a series of interventions which cover the GEEC principles.

	Hobby	Management	Team work	Student involvement
Goals				
Environment				
Education				
Care				

#### GEEC model

- The final part of the visitation is to invite the principal, to present the recommended interventions and to ask whether she agrees and if she has feedback on how to adequately implement them.

The visitation students in Amsterdam's main recommendation was: "Make a kind GSA for

everyone on the theme of human rights" was the main recommendation of the students. In total, the disciples came up with four recommendations:

## 5. Making recommendations for an LGBTI friendly school

The school visitation resulted in a number of ideas to improve the school. The question remained, which of the recommendations should get priority, because you cannot do everything at the same time. Also, the students need to know what plans are feasible. They were checking this by talking to relevant stakeholders in the school, like teachers and the school managers.

At the meeting in Amsterdam , the students came up with 4 recommendations:

1. **INTEGRATION:** Everyone should receive education about sexual diversity, because it is relevant to everyone. This should not be taught in additional or separate classes, because that would emphasize "differences", and we would rather see LGBTI issues normalized. Lessons about sexual diversity should not repeat the same topics, like lingering on basic awareness. Lessons should be different each time. It is good to invite LGBTI people.
2. **TOGETHER:** Students must work with teachers to determine the content of the lessons. Teachers should engage on a personal level with students. Education is not just learning facts, but also about personal development. Therefore, teachers need to be open and talk about sensitive issues.
3. **DISCRIMINATION ALLIANCES:** The students were very impressed by their conversation with lesbian and gay pupils from some Dutch Gay / Straight Alliances. After discussion about this method, they decided that every school should have an alliance. But the preferred such an alliance to focus on the fight against discrimination in general and not only on LGBTI issues.

## 6. Symposium for and by students

The last part of the week is the organization of a public symposium. The location, catering, general program and PR were organized by GALE, but the rest of the symposium is organized for and by the students themselves. They set up the hall, served lunch and drinks, welcomed and registered the participants, prepared their speeches and facilitated round table discussions.

The agenda of the meeting was:

ERASMUS+ KA2 - Strategic Partnerships LeGoP - Learning good practices in European countries 2014-1-IT02-KA200-00406<sup>1</sup>

## Time schedule symposium

Start	Nr	Action	Minutes
16:00	1	Opening by Irene Hemelaar (chair) and introduction by city counselor Bert-Jan Vroege	0:15
16:15	2	Introduction by school director Hans Schoonhoven	0:15
16:30	3	Presentation e-course by Peter Dankmeijer	0:10
16:40	4	Video GEEC model (about what works to make schools safer for LGBTI)	0:05
16:45	5	Student presentation 1	0:15
17:00	6	Break	0:15
17:15	7	Round tables	0:35
17:50	8	Plenary presentations by round tables; students decide in another room about what they take over	0:30
18:20	9	Student presentation 2	0:10
18:30		TOTAL TIME	<b>2:30</b>

The students make use of a script, which may also be useful for readers who want to replicate this event:

Action	When	Where	Who	Done
<p>Form 3-4 groups:</p> <p>Technical: for laptop, beamer, sound, microphone (if school has one)</p> <p>Hosts: receiving guests, signatures, signs, showing/pouring coffee</p> <p>Logistic: arranging auditorium, round tables, signs on tables, sheets for suggestions</p> <p>Presentation: preparing last details of students recommendations, taking lead in collecting and deciding about suggestions</p>	<p>Before</p> <p>15:00</p>		All students	
Setting up screen, beamer, laptop, test image and sound (for GEEC (DOEL) clip); remote controller beamer	15:15-15:30 or before	Main hall	Technical group	
Assist the speakers to install their PowerPoint presentations and the film(s)	15:30-16:00		Technical group	
Making signs to welcome guests and show the way (to hall, round tables, toilets, smoking place) and attaching them	<p>Before</p> <p>15:00</p>	Where needed	Host group	

Setting up reception/signing table(s), signing sheets, making sure all guest sign, give people dots if they do not want to be published, making sure the signed sheets do not get lost	Set up 15:15-15:30	Front hall	Host group; signing 15:30-16:00/30	
Preparing the space for the speakers: microphone(?); water; stand for notes(?); remote controller beamer	Before 15:30	Symposium hall	Logistic group	
Setting up round tables; titles on them, 2 flip-over sheets on each table, 2 felt pens; flip-over stand on stage	?	Symposium hall or classrooms	Logistic group	
Showing guests how to get to the symposium hall, to the coffee and their places, handing out programs	15:30- 16:00/30	Entrance, Symposium hall	Host group	
Maybe: pouring coffee and giving muffins	15:30- 16:00/30	Symposium hall	Host group	
Making photo's, posting nice ones on <a href="https://www.facebook.com/legoproject">https://www.facebook.com/legoproject</a>	15:00-20:00	Left side of the hall	Host group; Irene announces that that who do not wants to be published sit on the right side in the hall, do not photograph/publish people with dots	
Collecting used coffee cups and muffin trash	16:30-18:30	Symposium hall	Logistic group	
Presentation of recommendations	16:45-17:00	Symposium hall	Presentation group	
Break; guiding guest to their round tables	17:00-17:15	Symposium hall	Host group	
Noting down suggestions in each round table on sheets	17:15-17:50	Round tables	Presentation group	
Going to the student room with all suggestion sheets and decide which suggestions will be taken over	17:50-18:20	Students room	All students Facilitation by... (Julia, Antoinette, Peter?)	

Plenary presentation of discussions in round tables	17:50-18:20	Symposium hall	Facilitated by Irene Hemelaar (symposium chair)	
Presentation of which suggestions will be taken over	18:20-18:30		Presentation group	
Guiding guests to the buffet	18:30		Host group	
Diner	18:30-20:00		All, no tasks	
Returning all tables and desks to original position	20:00-20:30		Logistic group	
Taking down all signs	20:00-20:30		Host group	
Handing signature sheets to project leader	20:00-20:30		Host group	
Helping clean up the buffet	20:00-20:30		Logistic group and host group	
Clean up the symposium hall and buffet location	20:00-20:30		Logistic group and host group	
Disconnect the technical equipment	20:00-20:30		Technical group	



Bert Jan Vroege, City Counselor, opened the symposium

The content of the symposium centers on the students. At the beginning of the symposium, and after a short welcome by a city counselor, the students present their 4 recommendations for an LGBTI friendly school.

After this, there are 5 round table discussions of students with parents, teachers, activists, a group of researchers and experts and a group of politicians and civil servants.

After the round table discussions, the students withdraw and debate the suggestions they received from the discussions. The symposium ends with a presentation by the students of

how they had adjusted their final opinion on the basis of the suggestions. At the meeting in Amsterdam. This resulted in 6 additional recommendations.



Students present their final recommendations

#### Additional recommendations after round tables

4. **SCHOOL BEHAVIOR:** The students recommend that every school should have clear basic school rules on social behavior in school. They also think that it is essential that all students should be involved at the start of each year in the drafting of such rules.
5. **DIVERSITY:** Students say that the term "sexual diversity" is better than "LGBTI". Acronyms keep labeling people and may lead to further stereotyping and stigmatizing. Furthermore, this struggle is not only about LGBTI. Heterosexual young people should also be emancipated.
6. **TRAINING:** Training teachers is important. Otherwise, they cannot give good lessons on sexual diversity or support LGBTI students.
7. **HOTLINE:** Schools should set up an anonymous email or telephone hotline. That way, students could ask questions and they can ask help of other students or teachers.
8. **MENTOR:** The students would like ONE mentor that they can address their entire school career. The teachers commented they find this difficult to organize. They also feel that students need to learn to get guidance from different people. But the pupils think these arguments do not outweigh the disadvantages of a mentor that alternates each year.
9. **INTERACTIVE:** Students find that the courses should be more interactive. This way would they become more involved with the knowledge. But more importantly: they would learn skills better that way when working interactive with each other.

10. SPIRAL CURRICULUM: The students recommend that schools should improve the consistency of their program. Instead of modules and courses with individual lessons, the curriculum should have a logical and consistent build-up. This consistency should start in the first lesson of the first grade and last until the final exam lesson. This is especially important when it comes to basic skills and diversity.

## Voice OUT

Another good practice for enabling students to make their voice heard about sexual diversity in school, is the method Voice OUT. This method was developed in 2011-2013 in the NISO project. In the context of an international project, which aimed to involve students in school safety, human rights, and LGBTI emancipation in the context of the regular curriculum. Voice OUT is a curriculum on respect, identities, human rights, and LGBTI issues. The Voice OUT "toolkit" consists of an enormous series of exercises and manual on how to use these exercises as a curriculum. The exact composition of the curriculum is dependent on the level of the students and a number of lessons that the school wants to spend on the curriculum. The toolkit gives options for different levels of exercises and the curriculum and the plans during a minimum of 6ix and a maximum of 15 lessons.

The core of the curriculum is that at the end of the lessons, students have to make a mini campaign about human rights in their school. In the campaign has to includes two criteria:

- (1) Sexual diversity has to be part of it (otherwise this theme will be too quickly avoided)
- (2) The campaign should consist from at least a filled commercial of about 3 minutes.

The lessons usually start with attention for basic social competences and respect. It goes on to elaborate about the role of identity, which is always unique for everyone, and nobody wants to be excluded because of one aspect of their identity. When all students agree on which basic social behaviors are agreed upon and desirable, the curriculum goes on to elaborate the understanding of social behavior in the context of societal solidarity and human rights. In this part, students explore how they can translate their own needs for a safer world, a safer school and a safer class into recommendations that fit in the global human rights context. In the third part of the curriculum, the students develop a campaign message and the slogan, and they develop a campaign plan, and they produce concrete products and actions, like the commercial.

To make the commercial, the students develop a slogan with a connecting story, they make

a *film scenario storyboard*, they divide tasks (director, camera(wo)man, actors, production) and they feel an edit the commercial.

The last part of the curriculum is the implementation of the campaign. When the students only make a commercial, they go around the other classes and present their films. During the presentation, they explain why they make the film and answer questions. After this, each class votes for which of the commercials they judge as making the best impression, and which film has the best message. At the end of the day the election results are presented.

During the experimental phase of this project in the Netherlands, four schools were involved: a lower vocational school within all immigrant population, a media college, a preparatory college for higher professional education and the pre-academic high school. "Voice OUT" appeared to work in all these contexts, so it was shown that the curriculum is flexible and effective.

However, the diverse types of students did come up with quite different campaigns.

The commercials of the media college and the pre-academic high school (schools which had their own TV studios) came up with technically high-quality videos, and on the pre-academic college, the campaign messages were very well thought through. The students on these schools proceeded through the curriculum without problems because they were already quite tolerant before they started the curriculum.

On the lower vocational school the situation was worrying and difficult. There already were visible tensions between cultural groups like Creoles (from Surinam and the Antilles) and Muslims (from Turkey and Morocco) and discussing sexual diversity was initially impossible. According to one group of boys "all people deserve respect, but not gays, because those are not people". Another group with girls was less vehement, but there were clear tensions between several "clans" in class which did not like the cultural expressions of others. So the initial part of the curriculum did not proceed very smoothly. In the boys group, one student tried to intimidate one of the gay facilitators by opening up the zipper of his jeans during some small group work and saying: "You would like to taste this, wouldn't you, master?". This student had to be removed when it turned out he could not be reasoned with.

Still, at the end, both the classes with girls and with boys came up with their own commercials. The girls decided to place homophobia in the larger context of tensions between (sub)cultural groups. This showed a situation of Muslim girls, one who was using makeup and a second one who was of the opinion that makeup in public is not allowed by

Islam, a situation of friendship between a Muslim girl and a Creole girl, and a situation where one girl gave a ring to another girl. The conclusion was: this is all possible, if we tolerate each other. Their slogan was: "Everybody can be themselves and everybody is equal".



Fragment from: "Everybody is equal"

The boys made a film which was much more rough, had a lot of action and contained little text. This film was a variation on a Dutch army commercial series. In this series of army commercials the army shows different types of boys, after which two options appear in the screen: "eligible or ineligible". The aim of the commercial is to make it clear that you have to be a real man to be eligible to be in the army. A positive part of this series of commercials is that masculinity is not only perceived to be strong and macho, but also caring and being able to function in a friendly team.

The commercial of the four vocational school students opens with the statement "Gays are human, yes / no". "Yes" then disappears, so it says: "Gays are human, no". Then a new text appears: "Amsterdam 2012: homosexuality is forbidden". A scene follows where two gay men and lesbian girl are roughly being taken away at school and locked up in one of the classrooms. A new text follows: "We don't take this!". The three are being rescued and the pay-off is "Gays are human, yes / no" with the "no" disappearing so the conclusion is "Gays are human, yes".



Opening scene of

"Gays are human, yes / no"

During the pilot phase of the development project, there were also national elections of the

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best initiatives where a jury of national experts gave away an award for the best Voice OUT campaign. The winner was the preparatory college for higher professional education.



Fragment from: "Gays are human, yes / no"; a lesbian is being arrested at school

Their video was not the highest quality or the most convincing. The video was a documentary about the development and implementation of a campaign at their school rather than a commercial. The campaign of this school was that the group of students talked to all their teachers and convinced them to each give attention in their lessons to sexual diversity. When the teachers did not know how, the group helped out. In addition, the teachers room was filled with decorations and information about sexual diversity. In the final week of the campaign, all the lessons were given. The whole process was documented on video. The national jury decided that this campaign had the biggest impact on both teachers and students, and therefore deserved the national award.

Because the Voice OUT project fits within the regular school roster and contains useful information and skills, any school should be able to integrate it without much problems in their regular activities. Because the exercises in the toolkit are all highly interactive, the curriculum is also very popular with students. The only backdrop is that in schools with students who are initially very homophobic or transphobic, it may be necessary to train the teachers on how to deal with extremely negative behavior by students, or to arrange an external facilitator to teach and facilitate the curriculum.

The contest formula of the Voice OUT project makes this method very applicable to be repeated on national or regional, or municipal levels, and not only in one school.

Reference: Dankmeijer, Peter (2016), *Organizing Student Voices on Sexual Diversity at School. Good practice*. Amsterdam, GALE/EduDivers

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**GALE**  
THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE  
FOR LGBT EDUCATION



eduDivers  
kenniscentrum  
voor onderwijs en  
seksuele diversiteit