

LGBT EDUCATION

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ILGA EUROPE: DEADLINE 20 OCTOBER

GALE offers extra research course to benefactors of the ILGA research call

The deadline to submit a proposal for the ILGA Europe call on research in education (http://www.ilga-europe.org/home/news/latest/13th_call_education) is closing on Monday 20 October. The ILGA call includes activities to improve the expertise of activists to do research. It is still possible to include a small budget (275) to participate in an extra GALE course "Assessing homophobia and transphobia in schools".



Extra course in January

After the successful first international course for activists on educational research on sexual diversity in schools this October in Riga, GALE decided to offer an extra course in January. The extra course will be tailor made for European activists who already made a proposal to ILGA and will focus on developing concrete questionnaires, reaching out methods and high impact

presentations and follow-up strategies. The course will take place in Amsterdam from 21 till 23 January. The costs will be 275 including lunches, excluding travel, accommodation and diner. Inquiries and reservations can be made to info@lgbt-education.info.

Other GALE courses

In June, GALE will offer two other education courses on sexual diversity. The first one (1-5 June) will be on peer education (LGBT volunteers going to secondary schools) and how to deal with strong opinions. The second one (5-7 June) will focus on how to make a school safer. This course will focus on how to plan and carry our education sessions and develop a curriculum. It will also discuss how to influence a school climate and how to offer schools consultancy on this. Both courses will take place in Barcelona or Sitges and will leave some time to enjoy the city or the beach. Inquiries about these course can also be made to info@lgbt-education.info.

GLOBAL ALLIANCE: RESEARCH COURSE

GALE facilitates international course on research on sexual diversity in schools

On 6-8 October, GALE facilitated a course for 11 international participants from Europe on how to do research on sexual diversity in schools. The course mostly focused on strategically and practically asking the right questions because too much research does not have social impact because the research objectives and follow-up strategy are not clear enough.

Social exclusion and the norm of heterosexuality

The start of the training was devoted to an exploration of how marginalized LGBT students are excluded through social processes which are initiated by the norm of heterosexuality. Many researchers fall into the trap of just asking about violence and overt discrimination, and only about homophobia. By such a narrow focus, they miss wider but related aspects of gender discrimination and general uneasiness about sexuality.



Image: the course took place in Riga

They also miss attention to related social processes like bullying and the general social safety in schools. This way their conclusions and recommendations become unrelated to the priorities of education authorities and will even attract criticism from within the LGBT communities for missing out on trans, intersex and bisexual issues.

Exploration, proof or advocacy

A second day of the training was devoted to research strategy. This part evolved around two questions: Why do you REALLY want to do research? and How are you going to make sure the results of your research will have a social impact?

"We found that most research had little impact because the objectives of the research were not clear"

Professor Theo Sandfort on 20 years of Dutch research on LGBT issues

In an overview of 20 years Dutch research on LGBT issues, professor Theo Sandfort stated: "We found that most research had little impact because the objectives of the research were not clear". On a superficial level, many activist researchers want to prove that LGBT students are discriminated. This wish comes from anecdotal impressions of social exclusion. These researchers want to collect statistical data that prove in a harder way that their impressions and expectations are true on a wide scale. However, they often ask explorative questions in their survey. These questions do not always yield the expected data. When activists cooperate with academic researchers, they may get in a difficult discussion because academic researchers are often not focused on proving that a social situation exists, but on objectively finding original knowledge. The participants discussed how to deal with these questions.

Involving stakeholders

The course ended with developing a questionnaire and a strategy to present the research conclusions. The participants discussed which questions are appropriate and yield most useful data in different school types. They also develop a format to publish the research report in an inspiring and clear way. Finally, they developed tailor made strategies to have a maximum impact on the stakeholders they most want to engage in a follow-up of the research.

Happy story research recommends to include LGB teenagers in regular events

Researchers asking LGB teenagers to describe an event when they were happy, conclude teenagers are hardly different from straight teenagers in the events they describe. The researchers conclude that having a good time with friends is most important. They recommend that schools secure that LGB teenagers can be themselves not only at special time or in GSAs, but also in general school events.

Happy memories

The study was done by Bradley James Bond and Joshua Noah Loewenstern from the University of San

Diego, USA. They were curious for the positive experiences of LGB youth. Much research focuses on negative aspects like discrimination and coping with challenges.

Bond and Loewenstern developed an online survey. The survey had questions about perceived peer support, school comfort, and internalized homonegativity. But the survey ended with a question to write a short narrative: Think about the time you had a lot of fun (..) Now tell us about it! Write out what happened, where you were,, and who you were with. What made this such an happy memory?



Ordinary events

The researchers spread the news about the survey through a series of LGB and general websites that are used by teenagers and sent direct invitation mails to GSA networks. Within two weeks, 560 people visited the survey and 390 completed the survey.

The researchers code the stories as every leisure, special events, school event, LGBT event, or risky behavior. Apart from this primary coding, they coded the stories for the presence of family, friends, significant others, media, LGBT culture, sexual behavior and connectedness with a specific social group.

It turned out that most stories (51%) were on very ordinary every leisure, like shopping together, watching movies with friends, having sleepovers, and playing games. Special occasions also scored high (26%). These were also quite ordinary events like spending Christmas together, a happy vacation or a family outing. Only a few stories were related to being gay, lesbian or bisexual. Only 4% of the teenagers told about a specific LGBT event, usually going to a gay bar or LGBT party and meeting friends like-minded people.

Image: gay teens watching a movie together.

Such simple daily events were mentioned as most happy.

(Image from a 2006 campaign by the Polish NGO Campaign Against Homophobia)



More connected, more comfortable

The analysis showed that the teenagers mentioning having fun with friends perceived to have more peer support, were feeling more connected and felt more comfortable at school. However, it was puzzling that teenagers who felt more socially connected, also felt more internalized homophobia. Bond and Loewenstern theorize that these teenagers may have written happy stories about occasions where they did feel connected because such events contrast with the homophobia they feel.

A small group of 4% could not think of any happy story. These people also felt they had less peer support.

Schools should create space for LGB having fun with everyone

Bond and Loewenstern state that open homophobia in society and in school is diminishing (in the USA). They recommend that the well-being of LGB students may be supported by integrating them further in the social school system. Rather than just socializing in separate groups, it would be beneficial if LGB teenagers could have fun with friends in all school events. Bond and Loewenstern recommend schools take measures to secure space for this.

Bond, B.J; Loewenstern, N. (2014). Employing Memory Narratives to Dissect the Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Adolescents, in: // Journal of LGBT Youth //, 11:189-211, 2014

GLSEN promotes to frame sexual diversity in wider social inclusion school policies

During the ILGA Europe conference, GLSEN director Eliza Byard, advocated to frame sexual diversity in wider social inclusion school policies. It makes our movement and cooperation with mainstream organizations stronger when we focus on school policies and programs that include not only LGBT issues, but also take into account the need for general authenticity, honesty, respect, empathy and equal treatment for all minority groups.

GLSEN not an activist organization

Eliza Byard was invited as one of the panel members during the opening session of the ILGA Europe conference in Riga.

Image: Eliza Byard speaking at the ILGA Europe conference



The ILGA Europe conference focuses this year on sustainable change. How do we sustain attained innovations in Europe? How do we combat new threats by a heavily financed lobby of right wing organizations? Ms. Byard was asked to comment on this from the US perspective. She is director of the national Gay/Lesbian & Straight Education Network. GLSEN has been called one of the non-profit NGOs with the highest impact on equality by the US government.

Ms. Byard started by pointing out that GLSEN does not see itself as an LGBT activist organization. GLSEN does work a lot on advocacy. But GLSEN sees itself as an educational organization which cooperates with other education organizations on social inclusion for all, including LGBT youth.

Youth activism requires adult advocates

In the USA, in many schools Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) of young people are formed. The GSA clubs are allowed and sustained because they are part of a school club system. The support for school clubs is secured through law. Some GSAs do not just offer a safe space but also become activist to mobilize the school to become more friendly towards LGBT. Ms. Byard was asked if GSAs could also be a bottom-up solution for action in Europe.

She said GSAs are very good initiatives to create safe space and to give a voice to LGBT youth. Moreover, such voices could help feed and illustrate broader advocacy to improve the school system and the situation of LGBR young people in general. She also said youth activism and adult activism could benefit by a partnership in which both partners make full use of their own experience and roles.

LOCAL NEWS: GREECE

Greece adopts penalties against incitation to racist and homophobic violence

On September 9, the Greek Parliament, passed an anti-racism law allowing for stricter penalties for individuals and legal entities that engage in racism or incite racist violence. The law includes penalties against incitation of attacks against LGBT persons.

SOGI mentioned despite EU directive

Article 1 of law 4285/2014 punishes specified intentional conduct, including publicly inciting to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such group. In this law sexual orientation or gender identity are specifically mentioned, even though Article 1 of the European Council Framework requires EU Member States to mention only race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin.

Image: Constantina Kosmidou, president of the Athenian organization OLKE, here newly elected to ILGA Europe board on October 11, 2014



Heavier punishments

The Greek parliament also adopted a new article (81A) to the Criminal Code. This article states: if a crime is committed due to hatred bias on the grounds of race, colour, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability of the victim, the minimum custodial sentence is increased. The law foresees terms of imprisonment of up to three years and large fines for those who incite attacks against persons of several discrimination grounds.

Still opposition to partnership rights

The law passed after months of intense political debate. Unfortunately, two other legislative resolutions about legal recognition of civil partnerships for same-sex couples were taken off the agenda. After pressure of conservative parties, Greek Minister of Justice failed to support the law proposals.

Progress in Greece

Despite economic challenges and a deeply conservative society, Greece does get more inclusive. The hate incitation law is one example. But also, later this year is invited to facilitate a national strategic workshop on LGBT rights in education, which may be attended by the minister himself. Next year, the ILGA Europe conference will be hosted in Athens. This may give another boost to the local movement.

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Colophon

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