

LGBT EDUCATION

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LOCAL NEWS: ITALY

Summer school on prosociality discusses risks of being social

21 July 2019 - Last week, participants in the international summer school on prosociality in Città di Castello, Italy, discussed the limits of being “prosocial” in world that quickly seems to become more selfish and ruthless. It became clear the concept of “prosociality” is not just an unproblematic ambition of teaching students to be nice to each other. True prosociality includes being free to be yourself, free to make choices even when the majority does not like it and being free from discrimination. This makes prosociality a politically sensitive topic, especially in countries where dictators and right-wing populists are actively using the argument of religious freedom to establish fundamentalist and totalitarian control of society.



The concept of prosociality

The summer school was part of an international European project (ALICE) that aims to introduce improvements in high schools to reach a better level of prosociality. *Prosociality* is defined by the project

as people doing something for someone else, without expecting a direct return of the favor. This distinguishes *prosocial behavior* from *general social behavior*, that can also be based on selfish intentions. The ALICE-project further bases itself on the prosociality theory of the Canadian researcher Kristen Dunfield. She states that prosociality is not just being nice to each other, but that it can be distinguished in 3 distinct types of behavior: helping, sharing and comforting. For a variety of reasons, people don't help, share or comfort each other. It may be that they don't understand that others need it, or that they are unable to see the possibilities to do it, or that they are not motivated to be prosocial. Dunfield says students need to learn to understand the situations of need, to be helped to see the need so they are more willing to do something (motivation) and to be able to assess what they can realistically do.

Threats to prosociality

In practice this is not so easy as it sounds. Research of the ALICE-project shows that being prosocial is easy in situations where the situation is unambiguous and when they are motivated. But in situations that

are ambiguous, it becomes much more difficult to be prosocial. What do you do when your fellow students disapprove of comforting a friend whose father is in prison because of a crime? Or who is lesbian or transgender? How to teach about helping each other selflessly when the government makes it a crime to help drowning refugees? What does a teacher do when a teacher educates on non-discrimination prosociality and is reported for so-called leftist indoctrination on a right-wing populist website (Italy) or when the government adopts a law allowing students to film and report teachers who teach non-evangelical views (Brazil)? In societies where democracy, equality before the law and non-discrimination erodes, prosocial behavior becomes a provocation of the dominant totalitarian order and a dangerous thing to do. Many people will tend to avoid conflict and become silent bystanders of the social and political bullying.



alice-erasmus.eu

ADAPTING LEARNING IN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT



ALICE project intends to experiment educative and social pedagogic practices related to the application of pro-social measures aiming at involving local communities in the promotion of social inclusion of students of secondary schools, which have been selected among different EU Countries.



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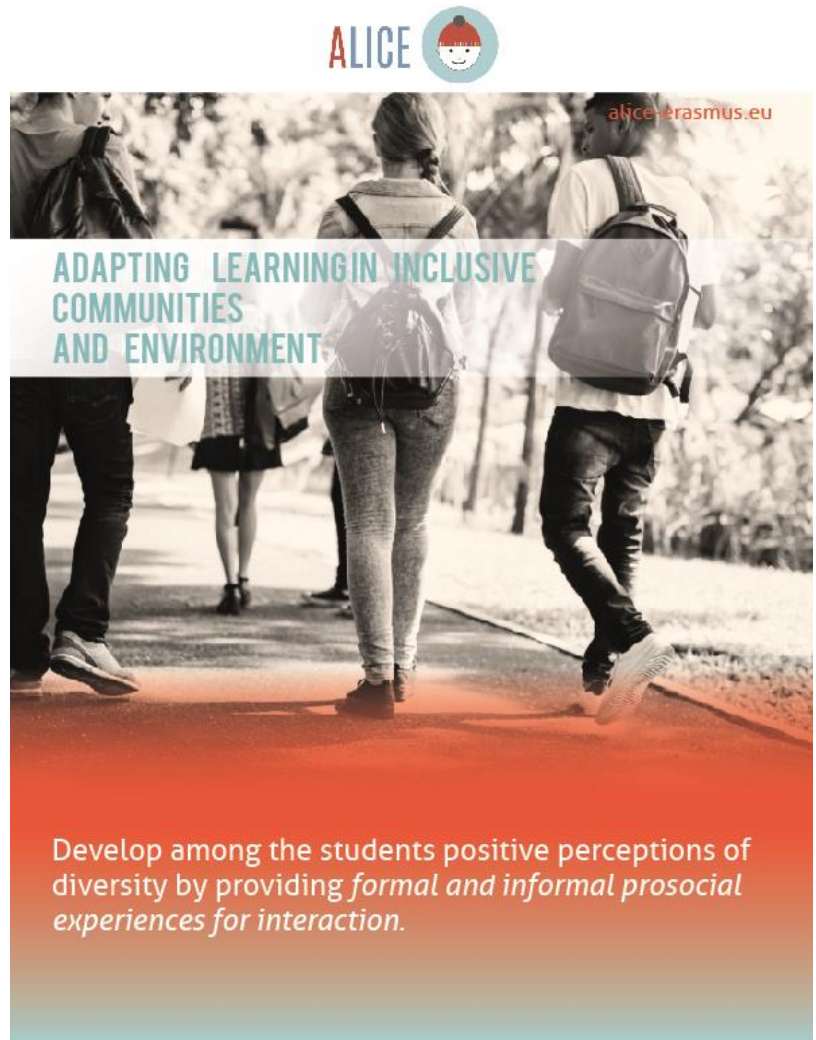
The way the ALICE partnership deals with sensitive topics

The ALICE-partnership recognizes how sensitive prosociality can be. In the draft Prosociality Manual, there are numerous references to Maria Montessori and the more radical Danilo Dolci. Maria Montessori promoted education which links closely in the natural development of students and does not force them to learn in unnatural ways, like traditional school systems do. She also stressed the importance of social learning, including learning to know your own emotions and make own choices. Danilo Dolci went a step further by encouraging students and communities to take political action. He saw the school as a part of an inherent political society where communities, schools and students have to act, and saw the school as a place to learn such activism. At the same time, his activism was non-violent. He was sometimes called the Italian Gandhi.

But the ALICE-project also has partners in Italy and Greece, where the populist forces are strong. In Italy there is even a government adopting numerous laws that are contrary to the principle of prosociality. In Greece, objections were made to the diversity chapter in the Prosociality Manual because Greek students were deemed to not be ready to be informed about LGBTI issues. Of course, these tensions make it difficult to agree on to what extent we can implement prosociality together and in the same way.

GALE is a partner in the ALICE-project and attempted to facilitate discussion on these tensions. However, although the participants touched upon these questions, for the moment they could not be solved. The participants appeared to be hesitant to discuss sensitivities in a too public way. It maybe they perceive the risks a too great. GALE concluded more work needs to be done to make sure the project does not become a bystander in bullying, discrimination and populist political blackmail.

Sources: the [ALICE-project website](#), the [ALICE Facebook page](#) (photos of events), Kristen Dunfield, [A construct divided: prosocial behavior as helping, sharing, and comforting subtypes](#) (2014)



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Nepalese teachers trained again by colleagues

10 August 2019- Nepalese teachers were trained again on how to deal with LGBTI issues in their schools. With assistance of the Blue Diamond Society, the Chetana teacher training group and GALE, training were offered in previous years as well. The partners have sought funding to expand these trainings beyond the province of Pokhara, but the unique trainings remain on limited to a few schools because donors do not consider it a priority on the same level as (heterosexual) gender violence.



Teachers training each other

One of the unique aspects of these training is that they are given by heterosexual cisgender teachers. They are sometimes motivated because their own child is “third gender”. In Nepal, “third gender” is a common term to label different kinds of transgender people, which sometimes is also taken to include same-sex preference. In Nepal, men who choose to transition are called metis. For other teachers, their motivation is

because they encounter harsh discrimination of and gender violence towards boys who behave effeminate, leading to them being bullied in schools and in their village and eventually often ejected by their parents. Such boys and also gender non-conforming girls then have to feel to a larger city where they can often only survive by begging or prostitution.

The Chetana teacher group cooperates with the national LGBTI organization Blue Diamond Society to get more information and on the trainings. Several attempts have been made to secure funding for the successful trainings in Pokhara, or even upscaling them to other regions. Although international donor are eager to fund projects against gender violence, LGBTI-gender violence still seem to be a no-go area. Good proposals have been rejected without comments.

The ambiguous role of Hinduism

One challenging area in the trainings is how to deal with Hinduism. In Nepal, most of the population is Hindu and conservative. The trainers are also Hindu, and they are aware that some Hindu conservative traditions promote inequality in general and gender inequality and violence. This does not mean that Hindu religion is rejected but that there is a need to change destructive views and consequences.

In the training, there is ample attention for how Hindu religion views changing sex, same-sex love and different types of family constellations. There are numerous gods that have changed sex or are a combined male/female sex, that display same-sex love and gods that produce children without having a partner, or gods that are born of another god without partner.

Religious Hindu texts are ambiguous about all of this. “Third gender” people or metis were always there, and are sometimes taken for granted and sometimes with some disdain.

This could be because they are seen as part of the lower castes, but gender stereotypes also play a role: effeminate men are seen as weak and cowardly (like women).

Brahmans are the highest priest caste and they are supposed to be extraordinary pure in a religious sense. This can also mean not having sex or purifying yourself after sex.

Punishments for impurity differ. In an old text it has the heavy fine of losing caste status. But in the same text another more moderate penance is mentioned: taking a bath with your

clothes on, eating from a cow and fasting. Punishments were mainly for higher castes, while among lower castes being third gender or having same-sex was considered more common and not needing punishment. Punishments for lesbian sex were more harsh than gay sex, but seem to be more concerned with virginity than with the same-sex aspect.



Training

In the trainings, basic information about all of this is given to create awareness about the unfair treatment that results from history. Possibilities to improve the situation of metis in schools are discussed, like not punishing gender non-conforming behavior, gender-neutral bathrooms, anti-gender violence curricula and cooperation with the local community.

Source: Chetana, personal communication and training resources.

Hungarian volunteer education group raises funds with Lego

28 July 2019 - The Hungarian volunteer education group “Getting to know LGBT people” has initiated a fundraising program by selling self-made Pride Hearts of Lego. They ask supporters to help spread the word and share pics with the heart using the #myprideheart hashtag.



Get to know LGBT people

The volunteer group Melegség és Megismerés (“Getting to know LGBT people”) is one of the many volunteer groups across Europe and Canada that offer panel sessions of LGBT peer educators for high schools. Commonly, the peer educators introduce themselves with a testimonial, and then answers questions. This method is based on research on intergroup contact, which show that people become more tolerant when they know people from minorities, even when they are not becoming friends.

In some countries, the testimonials and questions activities are followed up by a critical dialogue on heteronormativity. The idea of such discussions is to deconstruct rigid norms about sexuality and conformity. This could give young people more insight in how society tends to systematically exclude some groups, like women and LGBTIQ people. It is also hoped that young people can then feel supported in making non-normative lifestyle choices and to actively resist discrimination.

Pride Heart

Doing such peer education sessions in Hungary is quite a challenge. The government is actively promoting homophobia and abolishing gender studies. Promoters of equality are called foreign agents of non-Hungarian values and therefore enemies of the State. The peer educators of Melegség és Megismerés are brave people facing difficult discussions. Moreover, their group cannot count on subsidies and asking schools for a contribution is also difficult. The Pride Heart fundraising campaign is a hard-needed tool for their survival.

With one Pride heart (19,95 USD), they cover the travel cost of one volunteer to Hungary's capital, Budapest. Selling 3 hearts funds a volunteer's trip to a countryside training. Ten hearts sold will train 30 people in a company to know more about LGBTQ society. And 200 hearts would cover more than 60 countryside trainings reaching more than 600 people.

Source: [The Pride Heart campaign](#)

LOCAL NEWS: POLAND

Polish court stops distribution “LGBT-free” stickers

1 August 2019 - The Warsaw District Court ordered the newspaper Gazeta Polska to stop including *LGBT-Free Zone* stickers in its publications pending the outcome of a rights activist's case. The newspaper now avoids the ban by distributing a revised version *LGBT Ideology-Free Zone*.



Hate stickers

The Gazeta Polska is a government-aligned newspaper, which assist the government is spreading anti-LGBT hate. One of their campaigns is to distribute *LGBT Free Zone* stickers which homophobic towns can use to support the hate campaign. The stickers remind us of WWII when shops posted sign “Jews not wanted”. Much of the recent hate speech has been driven by Poland's ruling Law and Justice Party. Rather than defending equality for everyone in the country, the government has used state resources to promote an agenda that undermines it. For example, to advise it on recent sex education curriculum changes, the government appointed a Catholic theology professor who has claimed that contraception can cause “hedonism, sex addiction and a tendency to be unfaithful.” New curriculum guidelines reinforce discriminatory attitudes against LGBT people and gender stereotypes.

Activist responses

Activists have taken to Twitter with the trending hashtag #jestemLGBT (#IamLGBT). This Twitter campaign works well to mobilize broad opposition against the government turn to open discrimination. They also went to court. Despite the government appointing conservative judges, courts have been supportive toward equality in recent years. And the European Union has made critical comments about the developments in Poland. However, the current measures do not seem to be sufficient to stop the sliding back of Poland to a situation of pseudo-fascism.

Source: [Human Rights Watch](#)

LOCAL NEWS: USA

US school comes back from inadequate response to homophobic leaflets

2 July 2019 - A junior high school in the USA tries to address racist and homophobic flyers that students were passing out earlier this year. The homophobic and racist flyers had crossed-out rainbow flags and showed confederate flags. The school's initial reaction to the flyers was a disaster. It forbade both confederate flags and rainbow flags, and clothing with messages supporting LGBTQ equality were banned. The teacher who supported the Gay-Straight Alliance was no longer welcome to come to work.



Homophobia and racism combined

This past March, students at McCormick Junior High School in Cheyenne, Wyoming, handed out flyers and taped them to hallways. Some of the flyers had anti-LGBTQ messages like a rainbow flag crossed out and "It's great to be straight. It's not OK to be gay." Others were racist, displaying the Confederate flag and messages like "Black lives matter only because if it weren't for them who would pick our cotton" and "Join the KKK."

The school did not know how to handle the situation. While investigating the flyers, school administrators pulled GSA members out of class and questioned them in front of police officers. One parent said that the kids felt really intimidated and were crying.

Superintendent Boyd Brown said they felt like two opposing sides were escalating the situation. By saying this he blamed the students who were victims protesting discrimination as perpetrators.

Solution: hiring a consultant

Of course, the response to the schools complete denial of the issues at hand was strong. Forbidding both discrimination AND non-discrimination does not make sense and pretend non-discrimination is as reprehensible as racism and homophobia.

The school district now finished a report on diversity and harassment at the school. The plan includes hiring a diversity and cultural awareness counselor and more employee training. The superintendent said that they have *a pretty good plan to try to work on all of that*. His vague and insecure description and apparent lack of vision does not raise hopes that the plan will provide effective solutions. In addition, the school refused to release the full report because part of it contained names of students involved. Several news organizations have filed a suit to get it released.

Sources: [LGBTQ Nation](#), [Wyoming News](#), [MySA](#), [NWA Online](#), [Metro Weekly](#)

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Colophon

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