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INTERNATIONAL NEWS: GALE

Course "Assessing homophobia in schools", Riga 6-8 October 2014

During the 3 days before the ILGA Europe conference in Riga, GALE will organize a short course on how to do strategic research that can enhance your local or national education strategy. The course has a temporary reduced price.

How can research help you?

The goals of the course are to become aware of how research can help you to enhance your national strategic advocacy and to assist schools to make choices for integration of sexual diversity in their school policy. The course results in a concrete draft questionnaire and a research strategy you can use in your own country. The course is focused on relatively simple research that can also be done by non-academic activists, but the strategic focus may also be interesting for academics.

The program

The course is 3 days (Monday-Wednesday 6-8 October) before the ILGA Europe Conference) in Riga.



The first day we will explore the international human Right to Education and your perspective on how well it is implemented for LGBT in your country.

The second day we will explore the function of research in your strategy and you will formulate research questions.

The third day you will develop a questionnaire and a concrete strategy to collect responses, analyze results, draft a report and follow-up publicity and advocacy.

Reduced costs

Normally, the course fee is € 600. In connection with the ILGA Europe conference and the UNESCO strategy against homophobic bullying, GALE can offer this course this time for € 60 only. This includes the training room, tea and coffee and the trainers fee, but not your travel and subsistence costs.

Interested? Mail Peter Dankmeijer, p.dankmeijer@gale.info

LOCAL NEWS: THAILAND

Go Thai, be free (but not in a Thai school)

Thailand is often perceived by both foreigners and some of its own population as very accepting of sexual and gender diversity. A Thai government agency makes use of this perception in a campaign Go Thai, be free aimed at increasing the number of foreign LGBT tourists in Thailand. However, a recent research in schools show that homophobic and transphobic bullying is a serious problem.



Need for research

For some time, researchers have suggested that Thai society may be tolerant but unaccepting toward same-sex attracted individuals. The perception of Thailand as a gay heaven could be a myth. There has been research on school bullying in Thailand. But there was only anecdotal evidence on bullying targeting LGBT students.

Now, a research has been done by Mahidol University on the request of UNESCO Bangkok and Plan International Thailand. The study collected quantitative and qualitative data from students, administrators and teachers in five provinces in four regions. 2,070 students completed a computerized, self-

administered survey. Qualitative data were collected from over 450 people including students, teachers and school administrators through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. All students were in levels 1-6 of secondary education (grades 7-12); their ages ranged from 13 to 20 years.

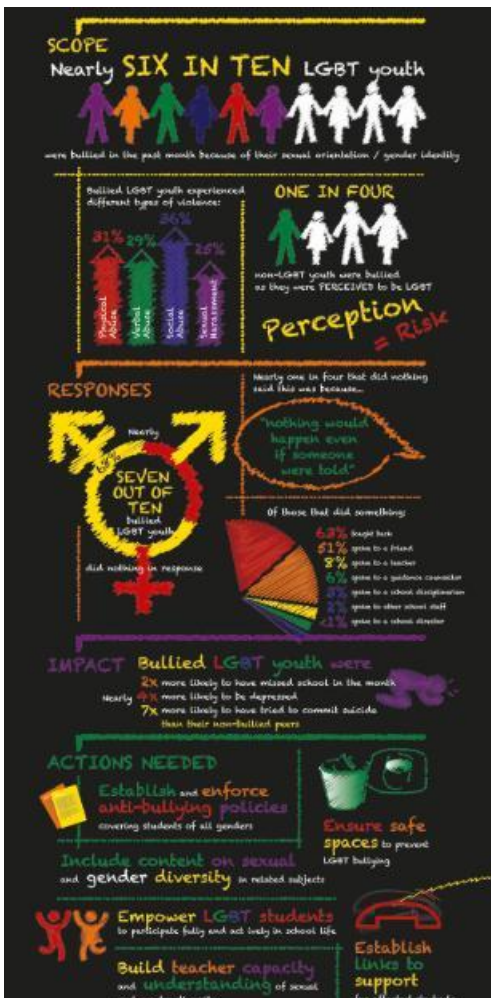
Thai understandings of bullying

Students are clear in their definitions of teasing and bullying.

Sometimes kids are just playing and adults think its bullying. But really, were just having fun, playing.

I think bullying [kan rangkae] is different from teasing [kan klaeng], because the emotion you have when teasing is just wanting to have a laugh, to have fun But bullying is like were angry, we hate, we dont like them, and so we bully them. Its a different emotion.

Teasing is like were playing [yok lo len]; even if its for real, were not pushing, pulling or rubbing them, were not doing violence to them. But bullying [kan rangkae] is hurting them outright both physically and psychologically. Teasing [klan klaeng] is not so violent as bullying, but if you ask me if they are similar. Whether youre teasing [klan klaeng] or bullying [rangkae], neither of these are good things.



Both students and teachers described a continuum of behaviors ranging from kan yok-lo (teasing), considered harmless, through kan klaeng, used for less serious kinds of bullying or rough teasing, to kan rangkae, which is the academic Thai term for bullying, and was used for the most severe cases.

Students differentiation depended often on perceived intent (hostile vs. friendly) and the relationship between those involved (friend, enemy, or neither). These were recognized to include physical, verbal, social, sexual and online behaviors. Teachers often associated bullying primarily with physical fights.

Anti-LGBT bullying

More than half (56%) of self-identified LGBT students in the study reported having been bullied within the past month because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Among students that did not identify as LGBT, 25% reported being bullied because they were perceived to be transgender or same-sex attracted. This confirms

research suggesting that it is the mere perception of same-sex attraction or of transgender identity that puts people at risk.

A range of behaviors were described by those who identified as LGBT, including verbal abuse (face-to-face and online name-calling), physical abuse (slapping, kicking), social abuse (face-to-face and online social exclusion), and sexual harassment (unwanted touching).

Among male gays and bisexuals, and among trans women, students can force victims into sexually humiliating positions and mimic intercourse or rape. Toms (female students with masculine gender identity/presentation) seemed to be the least liked group; some schools mentioned specifically anti-tom hate groups. When compared, lesbian, female bisexual and tom students had a higher prevalence of victimization due to their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity than gay or bisexual males or trans women students.

What bystanders do

Bystanders who witness homophobic or transphobic teasing and bullying react in various ways depending on the situation. Some don't care, some try to stop it if it's their close friend. If they're not close friends, they would not get involved.

Sometimes they even take pictures they post the pictures on Facebook they'll tag the pictures, on and on, within the class.

If they didn't join in the teasing, they would just stand there, watching and laugh.

If it gets unbearable, then they intervene.

The research states different reactions can be seen in a single incident.

Bullying: What it looks like, how it feels



The qualitative research findings suggest that students conformity to gender norms is more important than whether they are attracted to the same sex. For example, 70% of the male students who considered themselves as less masculine than other boys had been teased or bullied due to their perceived LGBT characteristics.

Impact on victims

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of those bullied because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity/expression were depressed, as compared to only 6% of those that had not been bullied at all. Nearly one-third (31%) of those bullied (either due to their perceived sexual orientation/gender identity or for other reasons) reported unauthorized absences in the past month, as compared to only 15% among those who hadn't been bullied. And nearly 7% percent of those bullied because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity/expression reported having attempted suicide in the past year, compared to only 1.2% among those that had not been bullied for any reason, and 3.6% among those that had been bullied for other reasons.

Schools do not take responsibility

Most participating schools did not have general anti-bullying policies, and none had anti-LGBT bullying policies. School directors and teachers likely did not believe this was required. They understood bullying to refer primarily to physical acts of violence. In addition, most bullying incidents targeting students who are, or are perceived to be, LGBT are not reported to teachers or directors. Most teachers do not



see LGBT students as perpetrators or victims of bullying. Overall, they believe the number of LGBT students is small and there is no need for specific bullying prevention programs.

Recommendations

The report recommends to develop and enforce clear anti-bullying policies, integrate attention to bullying into existing school subjects, and promote comprehensive sexuality education that emphasizes acceptance of diversity and mutual respect regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity

or gender expression. The report also recommends to build acceptance of sexual and gender diversity, and to create safe spaces for LGBT students in schools.

Authorities should support this by establishing policies and enforcement mechanisms to address school-related gender-based violence, including bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

There should be greater flexibility on school uniforms and obligatory hairstyles. The implementation of national guidelines should be monitored. Schools that show progress in reducing bullying and discrimination should be rewarded.

Authorities should also give the example by removing biased terminology and explanations related to sexual/gender diversity in existing school curricula. The capacity of teachers should be supported with sexual and gender diversity in teacher training programs. Bullied students should have access to channels of assistance, like hotlines, web boards, or mobile applications.

Read a more elaborate summary here: <http://www.lgbt-education.info/doc/Asia/thailand/TH-2014-Bullying-report-summary.pdf>

LOCAL NEWS: NETHERLANDS

Elementary school teacher wins award for Dutch contest on teaching methods about sexual diversity

Piet Karsten, a Dutch elementary school teacher from the small town Venhuizen, has won the prize for the Dutch MyID contest. The contest was organized by the National Education Alliance for Sexual Diversity, and was focused on developing new teaching methods on sexual diversity (i.e. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual diversity). The prize was awarded today by the aldermen Jannie Visscher and Bianca Kaathoven of the City of Eindhoven during

the official program of the Dutch Gay Pride Pink Saturday.

(Photo: Bas Gijssels, BASE PHOTOGRAPHY)



The awards

The jury decided to reward the main award to Piet Karsten because his method was brilliant in its simplicity, transferability and integration in regular school routines. An added reason to offer the award to Mr. Karsten was that he teacher in an elementary school, and his method show how non-controversial it can be to teach about sexual diversity in primary schools.

Each Friday afternoon, Piet Karsten has an hour question time about friendship, relationships and sexuality with his 8th grade class (12 year olds). He asks the students to write down any questions they have and displays them in class, so it is clear to all, including parents, what questions students have and that all questions are valid, important and learning moments. The space for any questions creates an open atmosphere. All questions are answered in an open way by the teacher and the other students.

The award was also given because the approach is personal, goes well with 12 year old students and comes back every week. The submission of Mr. Karsten included a series of posters with questions asked by students, showing how sexual diversity other than heterosexuality regularly was brought up. The fact that sexual diversity was discussed several times over a school year in a natural ways, makes the impact more consistent and less special than when addressing the subject in a single separate lesson.

The other entries

The other entries for the contest varied greatly in form and potential effect. The jury awarded a valuation to an educational resource on gender differences. The jury stated this approach is important because rigid gender roles often form the background for the gay, lesbian and transgender bullying in schools. Both in Dutch and other languages, "gay" (or the Dutch word homo) is used by students as a derogatory term for "wimp" or "weakling". Someone who is called gay is not as hard as a "real" boy but as soft as a girl. Implicitly, this also refers girls to a lower social status. The fact that rigid gender perceptions are at the root of much homophobia and transphobia is often not yet integrated in anti-homophobia education.

The jury consisted of Brenda Langezaal on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Jeroen Bron on behalf of the National Curriculum Development Foundation, and Andrej Josic on behalf of the National Federation of School Student Councils.



The MyID campaign

The Dutch National Education Alliance on Sexual Diversity organized the contest as part of the nationwide MyID campaign. With this campaign, every month the Alliance mobilizes all schools in a different region. The campaign promotes my ID (my identity), which means that everyone should have the right to be themselves in schools with marginalization of bullying. It also promotes my idea, that is my idea to improve the school environment. The key to this campaign is that organizational change is needed to improve the school climate for all students. Just visibility and awareness of homophobia is not enough. In addition, the campaign promotes mainstreaming, or embedding good quality attention to sexual diversity in regular school routines.

An important part of the MyID campaign is to visit schools, advise them, and recruit and support MyID ambassadors. The campaign now runs for one year and there have been visits to 20 primary schools and 80 secondary schools. Over 175 ambassadors have been recruited. In many schools, teachers get started with work groups. Such groups develop team and students agreements on behavior and bullying

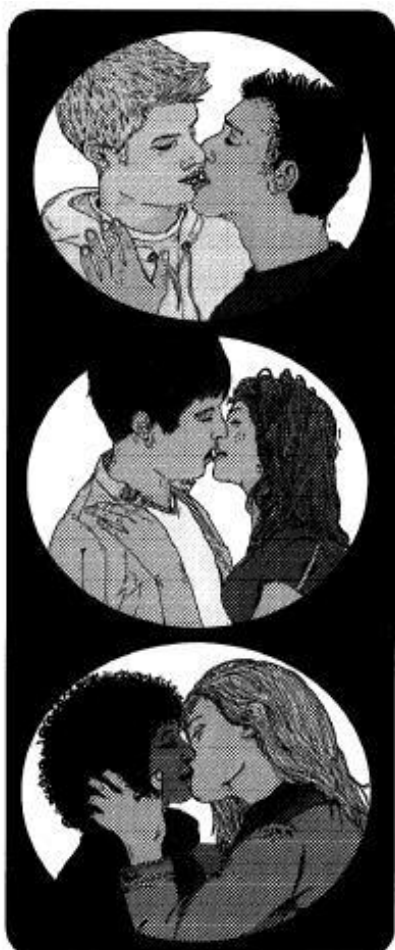
(including homophobic bullying). The teams also often engage in the development of a spiral curriculum and continuous learning about pro-social behavior, sexuality and sexual diversity. In addition, the Alliance is working with large regional school boards and teacher training colleges.

(Image left: Image from a Dutch school book, illustrating the debating exercise: "How do you respond to kissing people?")

Broad discussion of learning resources on sexual diversity

Since December 2012, Dutch primary and secondary schools are legally required to teach about sexuality and sexual diversity. The MyID contest on teaching materials was intended to stimulate reflection of schools and teachers on how they can shape their lessons. The contest is not the initiative in this area. In a project of EduDivers (one of the partners of the Alliance), discussions are being held with educational publishers, teachers, parents, religious school representatives and teacher trainers. In these discussions, good practices are exchanged and solutions to perceived dilemmas are explored. For example, religious school may feel

a dilemma because they want to teach biblical guidelines but at the same time want to prevent bullying and discrimination. Teachers may experience the dilemma how to promote freedom of expression and at

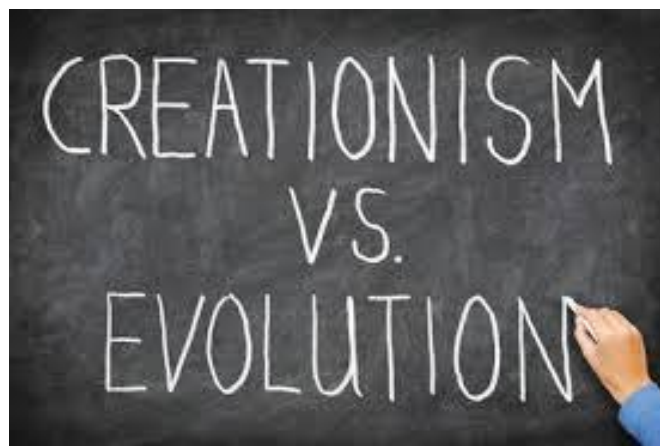


the same time deal properly with homophobic remarks. Educational publishers may be faced with the dilemma to want to develop quality books but that the market may not be ready for quality in the area of diversity. A summary of the discussions and listed good practices will be published in November 2014.

LOCAL NEWS: UNITED KINGDOM

UK government bans teaching creationism as science in all state schools

Mid-June, the UK government banned teaching creationism as science in all publicly funded schools and academies. The creationist theory has commonly been used by orthodox Christians to denaturalize sexual orientations other than heterosexuality, as "running counter to the intentions of creation".



"Homosexuality, murder and stealing"

The new clauses state that the "requirement for every academy and free school to provide a broad and balanced curriculum in any case prevents the teaching of creationism as evidence based theory in any academy or free school."

The decision comes just days after Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt attacked the use of "dangerous" textbooks in British schools that teach homosexuality is a choice (<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2014/06/21/tristram-hunt-textbooks-that-teach-homosexuality-is-a-choice-are-dangerous-and-backward/>). The condemned textbooks also compare homosexuality to murder and stealing. These books are part of the US-based Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum, which has more than 30 participant schools.



Teach evolution, consider creationism unfounded theory

Already in 2012, the UK government banned all future free schools from teaching creationism as science in all future free schools. But this did not

yet apply to existing free schools or academies. Under the new rules, all state-funded educational institutions can now no longer teach the theory as "evidence-based". The clauses require that pupils are taught about the theory of evolution.

Source: <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2014/06/23/uk-government-bans-teaching-creationism-as-science-in-all-state-schools/>

LOCAL NEWS: HONG KONG

Hong Kong teacher reads Tim Ribberink suicide note in class

In Hong Kong, Chow-Yiu-Fai teaches about gay teen suicide by reading the suicide note of the Dutch student Tim Ribberink in class. The "I am me" project of the Pink Alliance of Hong Kong made a touching video of the lesson, which can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXmCIJz57s>.

Does reading a suicide note work?

The reading of such a note creates quite an impact on students, but is a controversial method. Some



scientists fear that focusing on the possibility of suicide may increase the risk that more teens will follow the example. Teens who are at risk may feel desperate and it may seem there is no ways out of their situation than quitting life. So support strategies may be more effective when they focus on alternatives to suicide. This is what the "It gets better" campaign tries to do. In the US version of

the "It gets better" campaign, the standard alternative is the suggestion to find someone who cares for you. In his "It gets better" statement (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzcAR6yQhF8&NR=1&feature=fvwp>), President Obama also calls upon adults to take this caring role for LGBT young people.

Creating empathy through victim images

There are a number of video's and exercises however, that do not focus on direct support for LGBT students but on creating tolerance among homophobic students. Creating an emotional impact is essential to get through to these students. Painting an image of LGBT people as victims of bullying and violence may create a measure of empathy. But it remains a question whether that type of empathy will

move students enough to change their attitudes and behavior. Usually, their homophobia and connected sexism is not only a lack of empathy. It is mainly rooted in the values and norms of their social and cultural peer-group and often supported by institutional condemnation of difference, or by silence.

The case of Tim Ribberink

It is interesting that this teacher and the Pink Alliance have chosen Tim Ribberink as an example of suicide after homophobic bullying. In the Netherlands, where Tom died in 2012, it has always been controversial whether he was gay or not. His parents refuse to talk about it. But students from his school state he was often called "homo". After his death, someone posted a message on the website of the café where Tim worked part-time: "I work here and I am a loser and gay. Greets, Tim". The parent filed a legal complaint.

Right: obituary for Tim Ribberink, which included his suicide note.



The suicide of Tim was one of three teen suicides shortly after each other in the Netherlands. These cases got a lot of publicity. Two of the three were due to gay/lesbian related bullying. After the publicity, the government felt compelled to initiate a new and large scale anti-bullying policy in schools. However, voices from the LGBT movement asking to have explicit attention to homophobic bullying were largely ignored. The Dutch government found it enough to note that "teachers and program developers have to be sensitive of special needs like dyslexia and sexual orientation". At the same time, teachers and program developers fear the often high pitched responses by homophobic students and avoid addressing LGBT issues. LGBT "sensitivity" is still a non-issue in the Dutch anti-bullying policy.

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Colophon

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