

# Report of the SENSE European Expert Meeting on LGBTI Sensitivity in VET on 18 May 2021

SENSE E7 Multiplier

## Online

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, it was decided to have the multiplier meeting online. The program and the logistical and technical part of this Zoom meeting was organized by EfVET. The meeting took place on 18 May from 1 till 4 o'clock.

## Public relations

The public relations to invite attendance for the online European expert meeting included reaching out to 14,891 online contacts and EfVET personally inviting 145 European stakeholders.

## Attendance

The multiplier meeting was attended by 37 participants, of whom 20 were not from project partners. From these, 6 were representatives of international organizations living in Brussels.

## Welcome & introduction

Peter Dankmeijer, director of GALE and moderator of the meeting, welcomed the participants at this presentation and discussion of LGBTI sensitivity in vocational education. He was proud to be able to chair this expert meeting, which is - as far as we know - the first international discussion on sexual and gender diversity in vocational education.

He clarified the program would take 3 hours and would be followed by a Dutch meeting.

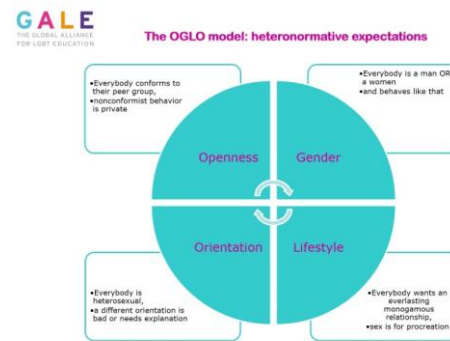
## Presentation of the My-ID method in VET

Peter Dankmeijer explained the principles behind the "My-ID" technology, that was developed by the SENSE project. "My-ID" has a focus on LGBTI (sexual and gender diversity), but in its treatment of the topic LGBTI it goes beyond "knowledge" about LGBTI and "visibility". The technology identifies *basic aversive emotions towards difference* as the key challenge, especially when such differences challenge existing values and norms. The My-ID technology is a "deep diversity" approach: how to deal with *fight or flight* emotions. It makes a link between generic exclusion mechanisms and specific LGBTI exclusion.

He then explained the theoretical models behind the teacher training and envisioned curriculum: heteronormativity and how exclusion works in practice.

To explain heteronormativity, My-ID uses the OGLO model. OGLO stands for openness, gender, lifestyle and orientation. These labels stand for expectations and norms: everybody is expected to conform to their own peer group culture and to hide aspects that are different from that (sub)culture (openness), everybody is expected to be male or female and to fulfill their role as such (gender), everybody is expected to have a romantic, everlasting and monogamous relationship with someone of the opposite sex (lifestyle), and everybody is expected to be heterosexual until it is proven otherwise, and in that case non-heterosexuals are often asked to explain or defend their sexual orientation (orientation).

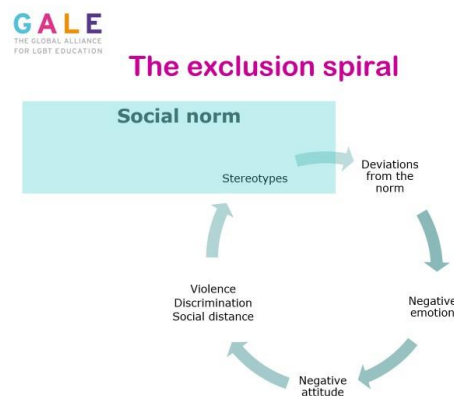
## HETERONORMATIVITY: OGLO MODEL



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To explain how the social exclusion process works in practice, My-ID uses the model of the exclusion spiral. The spiral describes how social norms and expectations can lead to negative emotional responses to expressions that do not conform to the norm or to expectations. These negative emotions, or *fight or flight* responses, are hardwired and a natural instinct. It is not healthy to ignore them or suppress them, but at the same time they need to be handled in an adult way to prevent

## EXCLUSION SPIRAL



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undesirable and discriminatory consequences. This handling of your own and others' emotions is the key to the My-ID technology, which in school, is mainly done through immediate pedagogic action in response to aversive emotions.

When negative emotions are allowed or even rewarded, they are "covered up" with cognitive arguments and this mix of emotions and arguments is called an attitude. Attitudes are more stable than volatile emotions. Contrary to what some teachers think, negative attitudes *can* be influenced in school, but this cannot be done in a single topic lesson. It requires a spiral curriculum in which the students are coached to explore their own values and norms and to gradually redevelop them in a more open and positive way.

Negative attitudes commonly lead to negative behavior. In terms of homophobia or transphobia, we often think of rather crude forms of violence or exclusion, but the most common form of negative

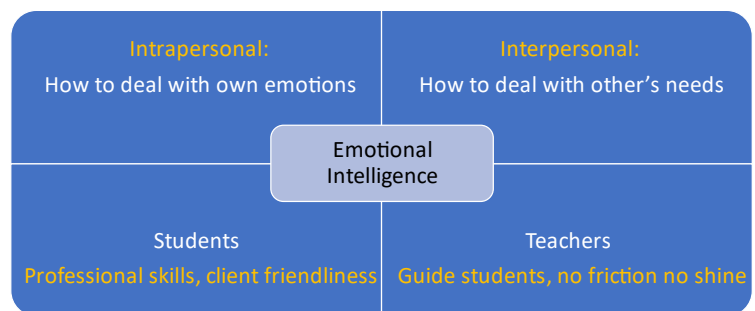
behavior is “taking distance”. We prefer not to associate with people who are different from ourselves, and in cases where we are pretty irritated about other races, cultures or lifestyles, we tend to ignore or block information about them. Negative behavior can also be influenced by school by creating rules about prosocial behavior and agreeing on them with the students - not only prescribing them. In the curriculum, cooperation between students also helps to create relations with a social nearness rather than a social distance, it helps to develop skills of relating to other people in well-mannered and even welcoming and curious way. These are basic diversity skills.

Social distance creates a situation in which we don't know the other very well, and because we only perceive the others from a distance, we form stereotypes. Stereotypes in turn, lead to the impression that marginalized people fall outside the norm. This starts the negative emotion again. Schools can combat stereotypes by explicitly giving attention to a wide variety of people, races, cultures and lifestyles. In their pedagogy and curriculum, they can note stereotypes and discuss with students to what extent stereotypes are based on realities and to what extent they are exaggerated and unproductive.

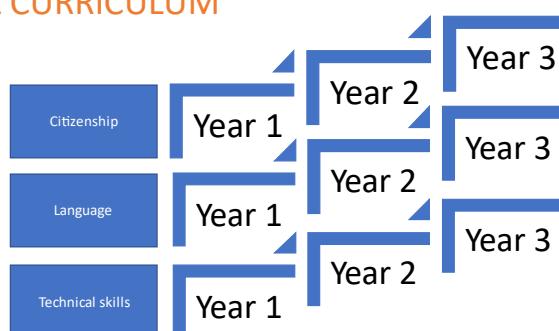
Peter Dankmeijer then went into how the project developed a series of competences for students and teachers which are supposed to lead to a higher level of emotional intelligence, and in the practice in vocational education to an increased client-friendliness and awareness of diversity among clients.

It is clear that such competences require a spiral curriculum to develop improperly during the lifetime of vocational education course. In the SENSE project this was done by developing a spiral curriculum which extends over the two or three years vocational courses

## DESIRED COMPETENCES



## SPIRAL CURRICULUM



take, and describe what needs to happen in the level of goals and on the level of concrete classroom activities in the different subjects of the curriculum, like citizenship, language and technical skills.

To support the implementation of the My-ID technology, the SENSE project developed for products:

1. A Trigger Technology manual on how school can coach students to develop discussion triggers (coordinated by CESIE)
2. A Teacher Training manual and reader for a one-day training (coordinated by EUROTraining)
3. A Curriculum Consultancy guide on how to develop a spiral curriculum (coordinated by Fondazione Hallgarten-Franchetti)

4. A Competence Framework: a description of students and teacher competences and how they can be developed (coordinated by DEFOIN)

All products can be downloaded in English, Greek, Italian, Spanish and Dutch from <https://www.gale.info/en/projects/sense-project>.

## Screening good practice “discussion trigger videos by students”

After the introduction of the project, the four trigger videos made by the students were screened. The videoclips can be watched on YouTube:

- EUROTraining: [https://youtu.be/U9Fj\\_pNXZGw](https://youtu.be/U9Fj_pNXZGw)
- ROC van Amsterdam: <https://youtu.be/hN1NLU4Uo>
- Fra Luca Pacioli: <https://youtu.be/vGSS4Jc8aso>
- Euroform: <https://youtu.be/SwksOsJKLk0>

## “The power of storytelling”

Pete Chatzimichail is a board member of the European Youth Forum. He studied political science at the University of Cyprus and now lives in Brussels. He spoke about how testimonials and storytelling are powerful tools for education.

In his introduction, Pete said he liked the clips. Each clip tells us a story. Sharing stories about LGBTI issues works in two ways: for the storyteller it works cleansing when you can tell your story in a safe space. For the listeners, it creates an understanding which goes deeper than just reading information. When somebody tells a story, you empathize with it and you put yourself in the position of the storyteller. It's like following the character in the book, you feel stressed when something happens to the main character. When you listen to an LGBTI storyteller, you can understand and feel what happened to them and empathize with their position. Therefore, testimonies and subsequent questions and answers and discussions in the classroom work to dispel prejudice, but also to get a deeper understanding of diversity.

LGBTI stories are often about coming-out. For heterosexual students, coming-out for your sexual orientation is not an issue; their heterosexuality is assumed. By hearing the story of an LGBTI person, others can better understand the significance of coming-out and why in our society coming-out is still necessary.

Authenticity is an important aspect of this type of storytelling. You can shape your story to some extent and link to the audience, but you need to stay true to yourself and be authentic. Another aspect that is important is that also other students can share their stories - if the storyteller has created a situation in which they feel comfortable to do so. It is important to remember that there are no perfect stories. Stories that work are authentic but not necessarily perfect.

In good storytelling about LGBTI issues, the audience also has responsibility. They have to prepare for the session and to be properly introduced to the subject. Otherwise, there is a risk that they will be shocked by the newness of what they hear, and that they close down. In school, it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure such preparation is done.

LGBTI students may also tell spontaneous stories about themselves in lessons. Teachers have to be aware that these kinds of stories can be a cry for help. For example, students may tell about unpleasant things that happen at home. Teachers need to be aware of this and to adequately respond to these implicit or explicit cries for help.

Peter Dankmeijer thanked Pete Chatzimichail for his contribution and agrees with the importance of storytelling about LGBTI issues in class. GALE has been doing research on LGBTI peer education group in the last six months and is preparing the European project to support LGBTI peer educators.

## “Promotion of the My-ID method in Italy”

Marco Alessandro Giusta is deputy major of the city of Turin in Italy and is – among other things – responsible for the human rights portfolio of the city. Some time ago, he called the SENSE project partnership because he was inspired by the My-ID method and he wanted talk here about why and how he will work to promote LGBTI sensitivity in Turin and Italy. However, he was called away during the meeting and was not able to do his presentation at this time.

14:15 **Break**

## Roundtable discussions in break-out rooms on 3 statements

After the break, the participants were divided in three breakout rooms. In each of the breakout rooms three statements were discussed. The statements are about the potential need to change the national frameworks for vocational competences.

### **1. The current generic competence frameworks are **adequate enough** to cover LGBTI sensitivity (reporter: Eileen Quin, CESIE)**

The first statement says that we don't need any changes, because the current frameworks are adequate enough to cover sensitivity for LGBTI issues.

### **2. The current generic competence frameworks **should be updated** to clarify **how specific LGBTI sensitivity is part of generic qualifications** (reporter: Juan Escalona Corral, DEFOIN)**

The second statement thinks they are okay but could be accompanied with a clarification on how to make them sensitive for LGBTI issues. This is the level of change we chose in this project.

### **3. The current generic competence frameworks **should be updated to better include LGBTI sensitivity and attention to other areas where client-friendliness towards marginalized groups may not be self-evident** (reporter: Nefeli Bantela, EUROTraining)**

The last statement goes one step further and claims that we should explicitly include LGBTI friendliness of vocational competences in the formal frameworks.

After half an hour, the group reporters summarized the discussion.

In breakout room 1, participants said it is difficult to assess the competence frameworks. VET qualifications are not the same in different countries. Even within countries, different institutions can have different competence expectations of their students.

One aspect that was noted is that sex education is not adequately integrated in the VET curriculum, and even when it is, it is often too technical and does not focus on social and emotional aspects. In such cases you treat the terms and definitions, but it is often forgotten that we are talking here about human beings and how you will deal with them in your professional practice.

In breakout room 2, it was also noted that in many vocational courses there is now a focus on knowledge, and that we need a shift to emotional intelligence. However, this is a challenge in many countries and many VET institutions: teachers and VET managers often consider emotional and social competences as irrelevant or of lower status than technical skills. However, in some countries, new legislation or guidance on vocational education is being adopted, which gives more space for attention to such “soft” skills.

In breakout room 3 the importance of teacher training was stressed, especially in the current widening gap between older teachers and younger students. It was argued that especially older teachers need to update their knowledge and awareness of diversity. This should not be up to individual teachers, like what happens now in most countries, but it should be a mandatory upgrade of VET teaching competences.

## Policy debate “LGBTIQ Equality opportunities across all EU levels”

After the breakout discussions sessions with participants, the meeting turned to a panel of experts. The discussion was moderated by Fabrizio Boldrini, the director of the SENSE partner Fondazione Hallgarten-Franchetti.

Marc Angel is a Member of the European Parliament since 2019. Beside acting as Head of the Luxembourgish Delegation in the Social & Democrats has served on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Petitions. He is a substitute member of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection and the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs. In addition to his committee assignments, Angel is part of the parliament's delegation to the EU-Chile Joint Parliamentary Committee, to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly and for relations with China. And he is here because he co-chairs the European Parliament Intergroup on LGBT Rights. Marc Angel went into his work in the European Parliament Intergroup on LGBT rights. He noted that the domain of education is not a key competence of the European Union, but of the Member States. Still, the safety, well-being and health of LGBTI students features in current important policy documents like the LGBTI policy 2020-2025 and the children's rights strategy. These documents speak, among other topics, about combating stereotypes and promoting inclusion. For the future, Marc Angel looks forward to work on European directives to include LGBTI in legislation on hate speech. There are also initiatives to improve the quality of life in European countries and to strengthen the position of rainbow families, also from a child's perspective.

Rubén Ávila Rodríguez coordinates the policy and research work of the International LGBTQI Youth & Student Organisation (IGLYO), a youth-led network with over 100 member organisations in more than 40 Council of Europe countries. Rubén has always combined his academic and activist career to promote the rights of LGBTQI people, with a strong focus on LGBTQI youth.

Rubén Ávila mentioned some statistics from the large study of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). These statistics make clear that LGBT youth faces higher rates of discrimination than older generations. Also, it is very clear that trans and intersex people are worse off than LGB. In the practice of IGLYO, he notices that LGBTI youth complain about the general lack of representation of LGBTI people in curricula, or even that curricula display negative messages. Schools are often characterized as an unsafe environment and LGBTI students reported that teachers are too insecure to support them. The covid-19 epidemic has only worsened the situation for LGBTI youth.

Yesterday, at the European IDAHOT meetings, ILGA Europe also stated that the emancipation of LGBTI people in Europe is stalling. This is partly due to the rise of right-wing populist movements and to countries where an “anti-gender ideology” movement is coming up, even creating so-called LGBT free zones.

Rubén Ávila makes clear that LGBTI citizens need to know that the EU cares about them. He calls for benchmarking tools, which can be used to monitor how countries are implementing LGBTI policy. We should not only look at teacher training, but also at screening curricula. IGLYO and other NGOs already engage with this, but that remains on the level of advocacy. We need governments creating such monitoring mechanisms themselves.

Rubén Ávila also notes that mainstreaming LGBTI in general policies is important. And in some way, this is already done in different countries and on the European level. But for IGLYO it is not quite clear to what extent (youth) policies and practices are really including LGBTI. Too often, LGBTI are symbolically mentioned in policy papers, but infrastructure to really support LGBTI youth in countries is often missing.

Paolo Antonelli is an Italian expert on LGBTI rights. He is a clinical sexologist and Professor at the School of Psychology in the Department of Health Sciences of the University of Florence, Italy. One of his main

research and intervention interests is LGBT+ issues and bullying at school, especially gender and homophobic and transphobic bullying.

Paolo Antonelli starts to inform the audience about a new law in Italy which should improve the situation of LGBTI citizens. However, this law is still debated and controversial.

Paolo Antonelli himself did research on homophobic attitudes and is developing interventions to change them. In the interventions he develops, gender roles and stereotypes are being discussed. Students are mostly positive about such interventions, but teachers are insecure and hesitant. Fabrizio Boldrini confirms that the problem of LGBTI education is more often with adults and with young people.

Aron le Fèvre is Director of Human Rights at Copenhagen 2021 WorldPride & EuroGames. He is a passionate and multilingual champion of human rights, with experience in international politics and the global LGBTI+ and Pride community. He works together with a multitude of governments, civil society and non-governmental organizations both in Denmark and abroad.

Aron le Fèvre stresses that action and cooperation on the international level is important. The events in Copenhagen later this year are a key form to develop such cooperation. The UK is developing an equal rights coalition which could be a leader in international developments.

Aron le Fèvre also thinks that youth should be given a more structural space to speak in international fora. Until now, they are often enabled to say a few words, but their presence is often symbolic, and they are often not really part of the political conversation. LGBTI organizations should share information among themselves and with their governments and put pressure on other governments. The Erasmus + program has created opportunities and experiences for LGBTI young people. It enables them to see how it is in other countries and how life could be when you're free to be yourself.

In the plenary discussion, Marc Angel notes that it is a shame that some European member states block the adoption of a horizontal directive (forbidding discrimination in the area of sexual orientation and gender identity across sectors, not only in employment as currently is the case). Another point he wants to make is that it should be made easy for trans and intersex people to get a new diploma with the appropriate gender when they want.

Eileen Quin asks the speakers suggestions about future directions of Erasmus + and other European projects.

- Marc Angel advises to write the project proposals and products in easier language to get a wider audience among people who are not used to advocacy, political or academic jargon. Such a larger audience can also create more commitment for European projects.
- Aron le Fèvre suggests thinking not only about the short-term products, but also have enough attention for what will happen after the project, the sustainability. Many projects, programs, products are made, but what happens with them afterwards? These tools really need to be used in an ongoing strategy to integrate sensitivity for LGBTI issues.
- Rubén Ávila notes that activists and professionals should feel free to contact international organizations. From the perspective of IGLYO, he also comes back on his earlier comment about LGBTI youth participation. He mentioned the example of a meeting about high schools in which young people were only invited to speak for only 15 minutes. He warned not to invite young people only as tokens, and stresses that real youth participation is key to successful policies and projects. Finally, he thinks that the fact that many projects develop teacher trainings, but the fact that these are not compulsory is a big problem in the sustainability of such products. He advises projects should look at the sustainability of teacher trainings they develop.
- Paolo Antonelli agrees with Rubén about participation. He added that it would be good to also include teachers and parents as coproducers in projects. Aron le Fèvre also agrees with this, and adds the needs to also include LGBTI advocates, both youth and adult in projects and policies.



## Wrap-up of the meeting

Peter Dankmeijer closed the meeting with a short summary. He also noted that the SENSE project was already getting follow-up in a series of other projects.

- UNIQUE: earlier this year another project focusing on LGBTI in vocational education has started. This project is called UNIQUE and will be implemented in Cyprus, Greece, Croatia, Bulgaria and Poland (KA3). It will train VET teachers as ambassadors to promote LGBTI sensitivity.
- My-ID in high schools: the SENSE partnership, in a slightly altered form, is submitting a proposal to redevelop and experiment with the My-ID technology in high schools (KA2).
- Connecting Letters: GALE has initiated a new partnership around the theme of storytelling. In this project, LGBTI students will be encouraged and supported to write a letter about their experiences and to give a recommendation to their current or former school.

Peter also noted that it would be interesting to consider how we can promote the participation of LGBTI young people in KA1 exchanges. KA1 exchanges are usually organized by schools and it is more or less accidental when LGBTI students are selected to come along. LGBTI organizations are less active in organizing KA1 mobilities. It could be an interesting idea to explore how LGBTI (youth) organizations can be supported to develop an international policy and related mobilities.

Peter Dankmeijer thanked once again all the speakers and the participants for their active participation and engagement during the online event.

For more information, please check the project website:

<https://www.gale.info/en/projects/sense-project>

This report can be cited as:

Dankmeijer, P. (2021). *Report of the SENSE European Expert Meeting on LGBTI Sensitivity in VET on 18 May 2021*. Brussels: EfVET/GALE

<https://www.gale.info/doc/project-sense/SENSE-E7-Multiplier-Report-18-May-2021.pdf>