
LGBT EDUCATION

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REGIONAL NEWS: EUROPE

EAN brings together EU initiatives against school bullying

December 10, 2015 - On 8 and 9 December, the European Anti-bullying Network ([EAN] <http://www.antibullying.eu/>) held its second meeting and an international conference at the headquarters of the European Parliament in Brussels. EAN brings together European organizations who are combating school bullying. It was noted that bullying is increasing and that the European Union needs to realize that school bullying cannot be fought adequately under the general policy heading of "anti-violence" policies.

Challenging the European Union

EAN was founded in 2014 when it became clear that Europe needs a more concerted effort to combat school bullying. The meeting and conference of 2015 were held at the European parliament to stress that the European Union needs to increase her efforts. In her first year, EAN has requested the European Union to adopt a community wide "anti-school bullying day", but this was refused because "Europe already has an anti-violence day, which cover all violence". This shows the lack of awareness. The conference, entitled "Dare to bullying priority on the European agenda", was promoted by the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Dimitrios Papadimoulis and brought together academics and organizations working on the ground to address and prevent bullying. The aim of the conference was to present to MEPs the alarming rise of the phenomenon and the need for coordination at European level. Peter Smith, professor emeritus of psychology at the University of London, presented the results of a meta-research on bullying, demonstrating an increase in cyber-bullying. According to this research, 10.3% of the victims suffered cyber bullying 2 or 3 times in a period of two months, while 11.3% have experienced any form of bullying in the same period.

GALE is the first LGBT-oriented organization to join EAN. It joined EAN a few months ago. Peter Dankmeijer, GALE director read an [introductory paper on the specific aspects of LGBT bullying in schools |doc/gale_products/151209-Homophobic-bullying-introduction.pptx], which was well received.

New members are welcome

The EAN network currently consists of 20 members from 15 EU countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom). The secretariat is taken care of by the Greek organization Smile of the Child, who does this pro deo.

Network members EAN pledged to mobilize national and European actors involved in the fight against bullying. New members are welcomed by ([EAN| <http://www.antibullying.eu/>]. The next General Assembly of EAN and a 3rd international conference will be held on 23 and 24 June 2016 in Malta.

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REGIONAL NEWS: EUROPE

European Parliament wants to promote fundamental values through education

January 31, 2016 - Yesterday, the members of the European Parliament adopted a report on promoting EU fundamental values through intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education. A great majority (554 for, 147 against) in the European Parliament voted in favor of a report on the role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values.

Fundamental values includes fighting bullying

The report by Julie Ward (S&D, United Kingdom) reminds that education should aim at ensuring that learners become active and open-minded members of society. Including that all forms of discrimination, hereunder also bullying, should be addressed. In particular, it highlights the importance of taking into account the *"needs of people suffering multiple forms of discrimination, including people identifying as LGBTI"*.

GALE joins ILGA-Europe in being delighted about the European Parliament's strong stance on how the role of education can play to promote human rights and non-discrimination. Now we hope that the Council will act on it.

Sources: ILGA Europe Digest <http://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/news/latest-news/european-parliament-promote-eu-fundamental-values-through-education>

The report can be found here: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fTEXT%2bREPORT%2bA8-2015-0373%2b0%2bDOC%2bXML%2bV0%2f%2fEN&language=EN>

LOCAL NEWS: NETHERLANDS / ITALY

Dutch and Italian students develop recommendations for lgbti safer schools

November 20, 2015 - "Create a on every school an alliance on the theme of human rights." That was a main recommendation of 40 straight and unidentified students from the Netherlands and Italy after for a week of research and consultation on how a school could become LGBTI - friendly.

Recommendations

The students came up with 10 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.
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.

Symposium for and by students

The recommendations were made by 12 Dutch students of the Amsterdam Hyperion College and 26 Italian students of Liceo Gaetano Salvemini (Bari, Italy) as part of an exchange program. The program is funded by the European Union (Erasmus + program).

The symposium was organized for and by the students themselves. In the week prior to the symposium they were engaged in an interactive program. The students did a school research on school safety and diversity, made an educational film about homophobia, prepared the recommendations and prepared the symposium. During the symposium, students organized everything themselves.

The content of the symposium centered on the students. At the beginning of the symposium, the students presented their recommendations for an LGBTI friendly school (recommendations 1-4). Then there were round table discussions of students with parents, teachers, Dutch activists and educators, foreign activists and a group of researchers and experts. After the round table discussions, the students withdrew and deliberated on the suggestions they received from the discussions. The symposium ended with a presentation by the students of how they had adjusted their final opinion on the basis of the suggestions (recommendations 5-10).

Omar Didi includes sexual diversity in UNESCO youth policy

Icelandic school becomes gender neutral

January 26, 2016 - An Icelandic elementary school has removed gender signs from its bathrooms in an effort to become "gender neutral". The school also stopped dividing girls and boys into separated groups in gymnastics. If they need groups, they use the alphabet or other factors. But not the children's assigned gender. The principal thinks that other schools should do the same, so pupils can be themselves without being forced in to a role.

Don't force gender roles

Sigurbjörg Róbertsdóttir, principal of Akurskóli, says that schools should not force their students into gender roles. "You just have to be conscious about the fact that we are not all the same and everybody has the right to be as they are. Everybody should be able to be themselves. And since there are currently children attending the school who are gender-fluid or trans, it is not up to the school to force them or anybody else into a pre-designed form".

Appropriate swim-attire

Sigurbjörg says that the decision to remove the gender signs of the restrooms was fairly simple. "We don't have a large battery of restroom booths. The restrooms are like the ones you find at home. So there is no need to have them limited to specific genders. Now everybody can just choose either one."

The school has also changed some of the swimming lessons instructions. They sent a memo about it to the parents. The instruction does not say: "girls should wear swimsuits and boys should wear swimming trunks". Instead, it simply says that children should wear appropriate swim-attire.

The principal says the school does not see anything wrong with girls wearing trunks at the swimming pool. Or boys wearing a swimsuit. The kids can choose which one to use.

Mostly positive feedback

According to Sigurbjörg the reactions have been wonderful. "We have only received positive responses from the parents. I have mostly just felt gratitude and praise from the staff, who are also parents. Parents who have children who vary, so they appreciate these measures."

The kids themselves hardly notice the changes. "The ones who do, think it is no big deal", says Sigurbjörg. "Children are way more tolerant than we give them credit for. When they grow up with different kinds of people they learn to recognize and accept things. I think the kids use whatever bathroom they find convenient and don't give it much thought at all".

Source: ILGA Europe Rainbow Digest, Gay Iceland: <http://gayiceland.is/2016/school-removes-restroom-signs/>

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Colophon

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