

HOMO'POLY

Somewhere over the rainbow: discussions on homosexuality in schools across Europe

SUMMARY

This publication is the product of a partnership between fifteen European secondary and higher education institutions. It was launched towards the end of 2016 under the auspices of a strategic partnership (KA2) within the European Commission's ERASMUS+ programme and will run until August 2019. By selecting and financially supporting this partnership, the European Commission underlines the need to urgently counter homophobic and transphobic behaviour. The project supported by this partnership, Homo'poly, seeks to promote greater understanding of acceptance of homosexuality, with the explicit aim of improving the school life of LGB pupils.

The eight countries involved have strongly diverging track records where homosexuality is concerned. Where the Netherlands are widely considered a pioneer on gay rights, Hungary faces a rapidly shrinking civic space for gays and bisexuals. Religious convictions render homosexuality a difficult topic in Turkey, Poland and – to a lesser extent – Spain, whereas the UK is keen to portray itself as progressive but lags behind in practice. Belgium appears reasonably comfortable embracing homosexuality, but here too, equal rights, protections and opportunities still too often elude the LGBT community.

The studies collected here explore these trends in greater detail and shed some light as to how and why homosexuality is (or is no longer) such a divisive issue across Europe. To frame the context, this publication explores the attitudes towards homosexuality of teachers, pupils and parents in Homo'poly's eight participating countries. Reviewing a unique range of survey results – pupils, teachers and parents - it sets out to capture how young people see homosexuality, and what role schools (can) play in shaping these views. The study outlines the data collection methodology and presents the results and key findings. As this is the first qualitative analysis on homosexuality in these eight countries, we are confident that these results provide new insights that can help guide policy recommendations in this area.

Following this, the first country study focuses on Belgium. The authors analyse different legal aspects regarding homosexuality in Belgium as well as relevant aspects of the Flemish educational system. Finally, the article explores daily classroom practice through the eyes of a teacher, illustrating how these issues can be addressed in day to day teaching.

The second study deals with Germany. Following an overview of homosexuality in German's history, the study compares the curricula and guidelines on the subject of sex education in two German federal states. It also explores how the issue of homosexuality is dealt with in both initial and continued training of junior and senior teachers. Finally, a number of illustrative external projects and organizations will be portrayed, which provide seminars and workshops in cooperation with schools to promote the inclusion of homosexuality in all types of secondary education and at universities.

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Inspired by Al Gore's book and film *An Inconvenient Truth*, the third country study tackles Hungary. It provides a comprehensive overview of Hungary's history of 'diversity', as well as past approaches to and the current situation of the LGBT community. It explores how homosexuality features in Hungary's legislation in 2017 before moving on to how and through what instruments the Hungarian Constitution ensures equal treatment for the LGB community. The final section touches on homosexuality in education, including the different tools teachers have at their disposal to promote awareness and understanding.

The fourth article reviews how the LGBT community fared throughout Polish history. It recalls the origin of the terminology and outlines how homosexuality has been treated different throughout the centuries – with, to this day, a different treatment of men and women who are attracted to same sex partners. Young people face stark challenges as schools are not (yet) safe spaces for homosexual pupils: bullying is common and the topic goes unaddressed in the curriculum and in the classroom. Overall, Poland is a long way from understanding and acceptance of homosexuality, and the treatment of (young) LGBTs remains a cause for concern.

Next, the article on Spain reviews current social attitudes towards homosexuality, both in education and society more broadly. A retrospective look at Spain's recent history explores the social consideration of gender and homosexuality, as rooted in the models for education in general and gender education in particular. Special mention will be made of the position of homosexuality in secondary education, the initiatives taking place outside of schools and the representation of the homosexual community in Spanish literature, as an example of how homosexuality might be on its way to gain value by means of new models for its representation.

The sixth country study turns to The Netherlands, exploring how Dutch society views the LGBT community and what factors shape the different attitudes we find. It zooms in on young people and schools, documenting that life quite simply remains harder for LGBT students and that much of the Dutch education policy and curricula on LGBT, as ambitious and well-intended as it may be, falls short where implementation is concerned. Lastly, the article touches on some key priorities going forward, including cultural diversity, cyberbullying and the rise of social conservatism.

The seventh study focuses on Turkey. Turkish people, shaped by thousands of years of history, religion, geography and so on, share common interpretations of homosexuality. This country study is an attempt to present the historical background of homosexuality in Turkey and to focus on its place in education and in the educational system (curricula, educational programs and so on) today.

The eighth and final country study focuses on the United Kingdom. Research demonstrates that young people feel more comfortable talking about their sexuality but that teachers can compound the learning environment by their tendency to heteronormativity. This article introduces Kumashiro's work on teaching 'queerly', which means to understand curriculum as a gender text and, by being 'queer', have educators question normative ideals about genders and sexualities. By doing so, they normalise other ways of being (Sedgwick, 1991, 2003, 2013), challenging binary logic.

Lastly, a note on the approach. The comparative study is listed first, to capture the key findings and provide a baseline for the country studies, which follow in alphabetical order. All country

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studies were written by Homo'poly's partner institutions and therefore vary in style and approach. They all, however, reflect the country-specific criteria and extensive experience of the authors. While we are keen to acknowledge that several other European countries are doing exciting work in this field, this publication has limited itself to the eight participating countries of Homo'poly.

We leave you with an invitation to visit our website: www.homopoly.eu. This publication is the first of a range of resources Homo'poly will develop to promote the understanding and acceptance of homosexuality in schools. We look forward to seeing you online for further updates and exchanges.