

Friday 2nd of May. Panel – Transnational EU Project Rainbow Has. First part: Research

After a first round of presentation, Marta Distaso introduced again the concept of the project, moving fast to the results of the field research carried out in 2013.

1. Contextualization

Differences can be found mainly between England and Spain on one side and Italy, Poland and Bulgaria on the other side; this, mainly, because of the legislation, which in UK and in ES allows for legal unions and adoptions by non-heterosexual people and protects them from discriminations. In IT, PL, BG, instead legal obstacles lead to not very tolerant public opinion and lead to a growing need for counseling in order to develop a positive self-image and self-awareness. In Italy, Bulgaria and Poland there are also few data about homosexual families, while the other two countries offer more reliable data and information on this topic.

2. Family discourses regarding affective-sexual diversity

Interviewed parents don't usually talk about sexuality and affectivity with their children, unless they asked a direct question. They usually think that this is an uncomfortable and thorny topic, which deserves to be faced only when a specific situation occurs: for example, when children come in contact with something related and ask a specific question to the parents. In general, parents seem to adapt to what they think is their children's own will, often specifying that they consider him reluctant to face such issues or that he isn't old enough etc. Sexuality and relationships are often still seen as a taboo, something people should not talk about and talking about homosexuality is a taboo not only because it involves diversity, but also because it involves sexuality.

3. Educative community facing sexual and affective diversity.

There is no agreement on the need to give affective-sexual diversity education in schools, even if parents often delegate most of their children's sexual education to schools. On the other hand, the relationships model between families and schools is individualised and personalised, mainly they just regard the sharing of information on the children's academic results and conflictive behaviours.

4. Homophobic bullying

Schools and teachers are not adequately prepared to face such issue: they lack information and tools. Sexuality and homosexuality in particular is not part of the school curriculum. Teachers do not seem to deal with such topic, even when bullying episodes occur within their class. Proactive actions only come from the initiative of a single teacher or of a single principal, but in many cases there aren't any protocols or ministerial directives to follow. In this sense, teachers need to become more aware and sensitive about the topic: before dealing with kids' prejudice, teachers' prejudice has to be dealt with. Many situations can be very dangerous for LGBT youngsters, including suicidal attempts. But our research showed also that just having policies in place within a school is not enough; four important elements have to be considered in this sense:

- the culture of the school in terms of their response to all bullying
- people's own values and prejudices can also affect the way in which they respond
- a multi-agency response is sometimes necessary
- being child focussed rather than procedurally oriented.

5. proposals to deal with sexual and affective diversity and homophobic bullying

- to raise awareness on the language to be used at school

- a triangulation among LGBT parents, heterosexual parents and schools could be beneficial, but it is important to find a way to involve heterosexual people
- many traditional storybooks for young people excluded gay people and different families, focusing exclusively on heterosexual relationship. However there are now a Number of High quality children's books which feature same-sex parents and challenge stereotypes. In some European countries, many schools already stock a range of resources and teaching materials that reflect different people and cultures. Expanding their use and ensuring that teachers know them and also train teachers themselves in how to use them could be very important.

Then, Peter Ryan introduced the training proposal of the Rainbow Has project.

This is a series of three thematically linked 90 minute workshops, bringing together children entering their first year of secondary school, their parents, and teachers from their secondary school who have a leadership role in developing a culture of acceptance in the school, and who have a particular commitment of addressing bullying in its various forms, and homophobic bullying in particular.

Aim of training workshops: To develop a collaborative partnership between parents, their children entering secondary school, and the school itself, focusing on first year of secondary education, with the intention of:

1. Establishing and maintaining a culture of acceptance and the celebration of diversity with respect differences in gender, race, sexual orientation and disability
2. To develop a partnership in the addressing and combatting bullying in all its forms and in particular, homophobic bullying

Audience for the workshop: Interested volunteer parents, of children aged around 11-12, who are entering their first year of secondary school education; children themselves from this age band; Representatives of school and School executive team; representatives of local community where appropriate

Time: This is at the discretion of the parents, children and the school concerned. Ideally, this would be immediately after school. The school may need to consider crèche arrangements if parents arrive at the school with younger children

Frequency: Three 90 minute sessions

Venue:

The existence of a suitable public space is crucial, so teachers and families can meet up in a friendly, helpful and casual environment, which lends itself to developing a sense of collaboration. It would most typically be a classroom, but could be any other easily accessible space which could allow for a 90 minute meeting

The workshop programme: three linked 90 minute sessions

Discussion with the 11 participants was about the method of the field research and about some practical information on how to implement the training proposal. The session ended at 1.00 pm.

Sincerely

Marta Distaso



Prof. Peter Ryan

