

## (A 3) How to make a school safe for your child

Peter Dankmeijer

### About GALE

The Global Alliance for LGBT Education is a global network of 750+ educators. It is a formal partner of UNESCO. Its mission is to "identify, enhance and share educational expertise". GALE currently focuses on mapping the right to education (and advocacy), school projects, storytelling/peer education and teacher training.



THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR LGBT EDUCATION

### What is a safe school?

Peter shows a series of pictures drawn by primary school kids and illustrates their thoughts about sexual diversity.

Some male students have the association it is about naked men...



Some other students feel aggression, want to bomb the gays, and do not want to talk about it....

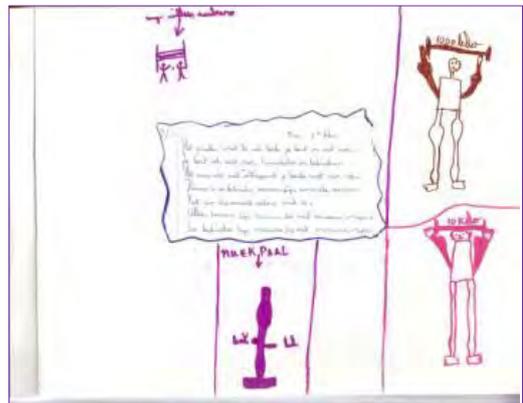


Some girls think about flowers, bees and married couples, and think about romance....

Most boys think about sex and masculinity.

Here they draw a gay that pushes 10 kilo and a straight who pushes 1000 kilo.

There is a 'fucking pole' and the gay demonstrate: 'we want sex'....



And one boy says he is gay. He writes: "Gay is not nice. When you are in bed and you uncle comes in, he will get angry"

Peter explains that *homophobia* is not just homophobia. It is *heteronormativity*: a complex of values and norms that say: (1) you should be straight, (2) you should be a proper man OR women, (3) you should have a monogamous romantic relationship and procreate, and (4) you should conform to you peer group and keep non-conforming needs secret.

Peter also explains the social exclusion spiral. When you don't conform to these norms,



people will feel a negative emotion or threat. When negative emotions are supported, they will turn into negative attitudes. Attitudes are like a Magnum ice cream: they consist of a frozen emotional core and a layer or black arguments. Educators should not start with challenging arguments as long as the frozen emotions are not unfrozen. Negative attitudes often turn into negative behavior, especially taking a social distance to you (exclusion, ignoring, saying sexual diversity is not an issue). Such distance creates stereotyping and prejudice, which in turn leads to negative emotions. The task of activists and of teachers should be to stop or slow this spiral in a strategic way.

## How to create a safe school?

This can be done by offering other values through ***diverse images***: information, training, a good vision and mission. ***Emotions*** can be influenced by correction in daily interaction, pedagogic behavior and a pedagogic vision. ***Attitudes*** can be changed through interactive education students and staff and by peer consultation. ***Behavior*** can be influenced by having rules and guidance for respect and empowerment, through supportive social interaction, and systematic implementation of the school mission.

## What can LGBT parents do?

LGBT Parents can check out the school by asking questions like: "How has your school thought about LGBT families and how to deal with them?" (mission), "How do you make your school safe for my child?" (school environment), "How do you teach about diversity and sexual diversity?" (curriculum) and "How do you counsel your LGBT and homophobic students?" (student counselling). They can also refer school to experts, or take part in panel sessions to tell about your life as a rainbow family. Peter advises LGBT parents organizations not to develop their own education material or training, but to think about their specific expertise and role, discuss their aims with education experts and cooperate on a joint strategy.