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Artistic Education System
for Social Inclusion of young
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
and Transgender adults

Update

ARES finishes its two year project period

With a two day meeting in Brighton, UK, the ARES project team closed its two year project. The project was meant to demonstrate that artistic education using ACM (Artistic and Cultural Media) facilitates learning of young (LGBT and heterosexual) adults about homophobia and to promote a dialogue between adult education providers, cultural associations, experts of LGBT associations and local government authorities on the use of ACM to tackle homophobia and transphobia using ACM.



The ARES team and learners in Brighton (June 2015)

Although the project is essentially only an exchange project, providing only travel and accommodation costs for 4 international exchange meetings, the project yielded a large number of products. Each of the 5 partners organized at least 5 and sometimes up to 33 meetings where films and theatre were shown and discussed with young adults or with experts. Each partner also made 20 analytic descriptions of films, 10 description of other cultural media like theatre plays and books that can be used in discussion sessions, and a video clip giving an impression of the type of discussions during the project. Apart from these, additional films and events were published on the [ARES Facebook page](#). All partners have summarized their experiences and conclusions in an “educational guideline”, and our partner **Szczecińskie Centrum Edukacyjne** has collected all of the guidelines and put them in one huge international version.

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ARES international workshop produces criteria for good educational films

On 22 May 2015, the Dutch and Italian partners wanted to make a further step towards an international synthesis of the findings and the development of criteria for good educational films. The two teams discussed this with their Long Life Learning/Erasmus+ authorities and decided to organize an extra international bilateral meeting on this. Ten Dutch participants and 6 Italian participants watched 3 Dutch films, 2 Italian films and 1 USA film that can be used for education. The participants from the Netherlands were teachers, school consultants and film makers, the Italian participants trainers and gay and lesbian activists. We discussed the differences between the film, the choices film makers had made in presenting LGBT people and the social choices that have to be made and the choices teachers need to make. We also discussed how the different contexts in Italy and the Netherlands create a tendency to choose different types of films with an eye to the effects.



Discussion in Florence during the exchange meeting on criteria for educational films

The main conclusions were:

- In countries where homophobia and resistance against diversity in general is strong, trainers tend to focus on similarities and downplay differences. In the area of sexual diversity this results in presentation of 'normal' gays and lesbian in films and discussion focussed at accepting sexual differences as a normal variation.
- In the Netherlands, and especially in the provinces Noord-, Zuid Holland and Utrecht, student are more used to all kinds of diversity. Teachers and trainers from these areas perceive presenting 'normal' images of LGBT people as risking to promote 'heteronormativity', while their aim is to promote a greater tolerance for diversity in general and for sexual diversity specifically. These trainers, teachers and film makers experiment with film, discussions and other interactive curricula which engage students towards that goal, while also taking into account that urban areas have groups of students that are very different in their opinion about (sexual) diversity and gender.

At the end of the workshop, the team formulated 14 criteria for good education films.

Technical criteria

1. The film should be short and leave time for debriefing
2. The film must be a qualitative, technical (sound and vision) good movie

Criteria for the content or message

3. The message should be clear but not presented as a mission
4. The messages should lead to a good dialogue
5. A film with a straight main character makes the film more relevant to straight viewers
6. Show different perspectives and how to deal with it
7. Be aware of the side effects of breaking or avoiding stereotypes

- Choose a clear focus for the film story so the debriefing does not get blurred

Criteria for the way of filming

- Humor helps to touch on sensitive topics
- Find a balance between being explicit or implicit depending on your target group
- An overly strong focus on esthetics is often nonfunctional for an educational film
- The film should encourage young people to open up and not shock them (too much)
- The storyline, actors and setting of the film must be current (not outdated)
- Be aware that nudity or sex scenes can create insecurity among some young people



Pilvede all

Sexual diversity in the most popular Estonian soap

Hanna Kannelmäe presented their bachelor thesis where they had analyzed how heteronormativity is reinforced and/or challenged in Estonian television series, on the example of the most popular Estonian drama series “Pilvede all” by exploring how LGBTQ characters and queerness are depicted. They had critically analyzed how LGBTQ characters and queerness are depicted, and how different elements of the drama series’ content reinforce, reject or question the rules of heteronormativity - gender binarity and sexual binarity. Hanna had observed how these depictions have changed since the series began in 2010.

During their presentation Hanna concluded that the first season of the series portrayed several non-heterosexual characters, some of them in an extremely stereotypical, some in a non-stereotypical way. Non-heterosexual characters were shown as diverse regarding their gender, sexual orientation and social status, and the



Humor in film: Come non detto

portrayal of characters was also different in relation to heteronormativity. Several tendencies in the depiction of LGBTQ characters in television series, that have been observed by academics in the U.S., were also present in “Pilvede all”. A gay male character was depicted in a ridiculing manner. Also, non-heterosexual characters were portrayed as harmless to the heteronormative order by being depicted as straight in every other way than their sexual orientation. The seventh season did not portray any non-heterosexual characters although considering that the visibility of LGBT topics is increasing in the society, their presence in the series would have been well grounded.

Norms of gender and sexuality are produced and reproduced by television and significantly impact the reality that we live in. Heteronormative elements and elements that question or undermine heteronormativity in “Pilvede all” impact its viewers and hence the society at large. “Pilvede all” most certainly often reproduces elements of dominating cultural ideology but also offers some alternatives to the norms.

Hanna is determined that as different interest groups’ and individuals’ support for the equal treatment of LGBT people increases, television series could provide space for yet unseen but relevant, diverse narratives of LGBT people’s lives. It would be an opportunity for the viewers to get an insight of the issues that are discussed in the media in a rather polarized and generalized manner. In order to offer its viewers a richer and more diverse representation of reality and thereby recognize the possibility to break free from the confines of conventional gender roles and sexual identities, “Pilvede all” should depict more diversity regarding sexual and gender identities of its characters and more diverse narratives that include same-sex relationships and the possibility of same sex desire.

Read more on [Academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu).

Partners discuss learning results from ARES

During the last partner meeting in Brighton, in June, the partners of the ARES project attempted to summarize their learning experiences from this two year project. It was clear that some learning experiences were similar, but also that local circumstances could lead to different learning effects.



Discussing learning results in Brighton

Present role models that are encouraging in local contexts

The lead partner of the ARES project, ENFAP Toscana, has been trying to combat homophobia presenting homosexuality (male, female and transsexuality) aspects in the society (family; sports, friendship; work; love etc.) without stereotypes, in a real and natural way. ENFAP has been focusing on changing the controversial and discriminatory sentence "don't ask don't tell", which is the strategy that people can be LGB or T as long as they don't talk about it, or show it. This has been done by screening short LGBT movies and reading literature about how same-sex relationships or gay characters can be common behavior. This means the films and plays chosen presented positive, real and natural LGBT

characters and models in the heteronormative context.



Brokeback Mountain: straight-looking role models

Peer education as a way to help open up the discussion

In the film screenings and reading sessions, some participants were embarrassed about the topic, but not so much about the topic as about their lack of knowledge. The meetings were facilitated by Massimo Zanoccoli, a retired high school-literature gay teacher with a great passion and expertise for film and arts. In the discussions after the ACM, he could give a lot of information about LGBT (sub)cultures and basic information the participants were missing.



Massimo Zanoccoli (Enfap Toscana, Italy)

This helped opening up the discussion, trying to shift the homosexuality themes from being the “object” to

“subject” of the discussion and analysis. But also using ACM like short movies helped to start a discussion.

Writing gay issues into literature (again)

However, prejudice towards sexual diversity is still deeply entrenched in Italian society. Some young-adult participants were even surprised ACM about sexual diversity did exist. For example, during the reading of some poems about same-sex romantic liaisons, participants expressed their surprise than a man could write such a love poem about another man.



On Shakespeare...

They were also surprised to hear that famous writers like Shakespeare were writing such poems. Another example of how literature teachers “don’t ask and don’t tell” during the ordinary activities with their students.

Sandwiching the touchy subject

RINOVA has worked with a network of 20 field partners, who in turn work with young people. During the project, RINOVA was confronted with the unexpected resistance of the management of their field partners who did not want to work on the topic of sexual diversity with their youth. Some of the partners had an Christian or Muslim mission or learners and did not think it appropriate or feasible to touch on this topic.



A film which 'sandwiches' same-sex attraction of one of the characters within the issue of trying to leave a gang

One solution RINOVA developed was to 'sandwich' aspects of sexual diversity in other topics that these organizations were interested in, in other words: to integrate it in broader concerns of the target groups. An example is unemployment: VET organizations are interested in how to coach young people towards jobs. In practice, some young adults have a limited worldview and networks. They may be intolerant and feel threatened to engage with other who are not of their peer groups and values. This limits their capacity to function in other than their own peer group, to find a place in a hierarchy, or to deal with clients. Helping the young adults to open up and feel more secure about dealing with diversity helps them to become a better citizen and to find a job. By integrating tolerance towards sexual diversity in trainings on empowerment

and dealing with diversity, the topic could be discussed. In addition, young people did not feel nearly as uncomfortable discussing sexual diversity as the management of VET some organizations.

Involve an LGBT ally

Recently and towards the end of the project period, RINOVA met James West who set up an alternative London Film Festival. This turned out to be a golden opportunity, both because James is gay and film maker himself and he was experimenting with organizing film screenings specifically on LGBT issues. His new formula (organizing the film screenings in a small almost home-like setting in a trendy neighborhood) attracted lots of (paying) visitors. This way, James filled a gap in the experience of RINOVA. It is worthwhile exploring such cooperation further in future projects.



James West (West Creative, UK)

Sneaking sexual diversity in the communication curriculum

In Poland, this project posed quite few challenges. From the beginning Educational Center from Szczecin (SCE) knew it would be difficult to find trainers and audiences. In Szczecin there are already many workshops and sessions delivered by European union projects, so learners are quite oversaturated with input. Young adults, mostly, work during the week and then study in the weekend, so may are not keen to undertake additional workshops. SCE also had to find different trainers than their own because the topic sexual diversity was new for the organization.

SCE worked initially with higher education pedagogy students. Professors at the university were open to integrate LGBT theme in their courses, especially that these students must be particularly sensitive to the topic as in Poland pedagogy alumni might work as teachers or social workers. SCE, like RINOVA, tried to 'sneak' the topic into the general pedagogy curriculum. For example, they worked with students as part of their interpersonal communication training.

Take differences in learners into account

The students were of all ages and usually working next to their study. They were private higher education learners, but not all of a higher academic standard. This created some challenges in dealing with the diversity of levels in the groups of learners. Some students were smart, open minded and reflective - others were not.



Not all learners are open and reflective...

Students who were over 30 years old tended to be reflective and open minded, but not very knowledgeable. They often said they knew people who were LGBT, but usually only from a distance. They did not have knowledge of terminology, like what "LGBT" means or "coming-out". But they were interested in talking and discussing - they were very engaged. This was not always the case with the younger audience, which could be intolerant and even rude.



Some learners can be intolerant and rude...

Analyzing songs on singer and listener

The 6th and last workshop SCE organized was with young people and they were not so interested in the topic. To tackle this, the trainer did not announce that the workshop was about sexual diversity. Instead he presented it as something that would be of interest to young people, namely analyzing Polish song lyrics. As part of the communication course, it focused on considering who is the sender who is the recipient of each song. Halfway the workshop the SCE trainer told them about the real purpose of workshops and used this momentum to explain heteronormativity. This was a good way to get them involved. But still, some engaged more, while others lost interest.

Recruiting young LGBT people

In Estonia, sexual diversity is also a touchy subject. Seky decided to focus on young LGBT adults of 20-30 years old. Teaching young people below 18 would require parental consent, which would have been very difficult. But this choice posed another challenge: were to recruit the 'older' LGBT people? It seemed that older young adults do not go out much and are nearly invisible in Estonian society.

Bye the way, in the Netherland, this was exactly the other way around. Gay and lesbian Film Festivals are mainly visited by gay and lesbian people over 30, with very little or no younger people than 25. Also the bar and disco scene is nowadays in Amsterdam are hardly visited by young people who apparently prefer

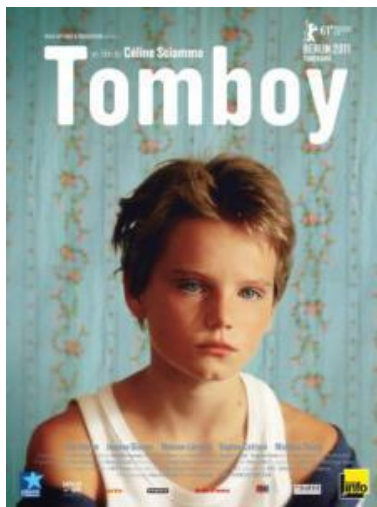
homo/hetero mixed bar and parties and dating apps to meet.

Being specific in choosing topics for L, G, B, T or I audiences

In one workshop Seky organized with a film screening of “Brokeback Mountain”, some transgender people attended. They liked the workshop, but wanted to see more films about trans issues. A learning experiences is

that in workshops for LGBTI people, L, G, B. T and I people have different interests and are mainly interested in their seeing films and discussing topics that are specific to their own experiences.

Specific audiences like trans people may prefer film about their own identity



Tearjerkers or fun?

Another challenge Seky experienced was that many older movies present homosexuality or transsexuality in a negative way: they are often about the problems LGBT people face and in many cases the film even ends in a depressing way. Although this may be meant to elicit empathy, understanding and tolerance of the (heterosexual) viewer, it may not be very helpful to empower LGBT people. So there is a need for funny, humorous and empowering films for LGBT screenings.



What is the impact of 'tearjerkers'?

Restrictions on filming

The invisibility of LGBT people in Estonian society is partly due to the fear of people to come out. The norm in Estonia is “Don’t ask, don’t tell”. This also had the consequence that learners and partners did not want to be photographed or filmed, which is one of the planned outputs of the ARES project. A learning experience is that literal visibility of learners, or the requirement to give up their privacy for project requirements can be harmful for the project impact.

One hour to start open up heterosexuals

With (partly) heterosexual audiences, it turned out most Estonian heterosexual learners were very unaware of sexual diversity. They lacked even the most basic information and before offering them more information they need to be convinced that this is worthwhile learning about. In the experience of Seky, just this ‘convincing phase’ or ‘opening up phase’ takes at least an hour. A good film helps to start this discussion, and in these cases, the awareness can be created just by visibility. It does not really matter whether the film is a tearjerker or funny. As long as the film answers some very basic questions.

Blaming and shaming politicians

This is also important for some politicians, who may make very uninformed and damaging decisions by relying only on unsubstantiated prejudices about LGBT people. In Estonia, Seky used a mix of ‘pulling’ and

'pushing' strategies to involve politicians. Politicians were first approached in a friendly way with information and questions, but when they did not respond or responded in a prejudiced and negative way, Seky published their responses as a 'blaming and shaming' strategy. Although this might be counterproductive in normal learners, it works well with politicians whose prime interest is positive visibility and re-election.



SEKY used 'blaming and shaming' strategies to call politicians to responsibility

What teachers and film makers want

From the beginning of the project, GALE focused in the Netherlands on the question: "what is a good educational film (or other ACM)?" GALE gets questions about this regularly by teachers and trainers on the one hand (wanting names of adequate films to start discussions with a range of audiences) and by film and theatre makers on the other hand (wanting help to get their film into schools). To answer this question, a discussion was needed between teachers, learners, film makers and theatre makers.

A main challenge turned out to be that the question GALE itself asked was not the same question teachers and film makers ask. Most teachers just want a list, and most film makers just want access to schools. But they do not want to invest time in discussing criteria for a good film. This was why the initial event GALE organized during a LGBT Film Festival failed: very few people turned up.

Choose a straight film character reflecting on his intolerance

This first event consisted of two evenings, one about

short educational films with a gay theme and one with a lesbian theme; and both with a discussion about criteria afterwards. The discussion during the 'lesbian' evening was attended by a teacher with a few Muslim students, who were mainly angry about a film about the transition of a 12 year old boy into a girl, because "He is a boy and should behave like a boy". Seeing seven short films and reflecting on them was a much to high level for them; they needed very basic awareness and information. However, during the 'gay' evening an interesting discussion started between some film makers and teachers about the perspective of the film: should the main character be straight or gay? Maybe a straight character reflecting on his own intolerance works better for mainstream audiences than a tearjerker about an LGBT coming-out story.



Scene from "Caged": a straight boy is forced to redefine his friendship with his friend who turns out to be gay

Training vocational students and their teachers

Another approach worked better. In a cooperation with an theatre group, AanZ, GALE and its local Dutch branch EduDivers organized 60 performances of "No Face" ("Geen Gezicht") for almost 3000 vocational students and about 160 teachers.



Scene from "No face": a Muslim mother singing to her gay son

After the performance, AanZ had debriefing discussions and after that, EduDivers had 32 focus group discussions, each with about 8 students and 2 teachers. While the debriefing focused on primary reactions and opinions on the topics raised in the play, the focus group discussions reflected on the impact of the play on the school climate and what was needed to improve the school climate and professional quality of the students (their future behavior towards LGBT clients) further.

We already knew that "No Face" is an extremely high quality ACM. The performance is based on the personal comments of vocational students themselves and links their Christian and Muslim concerns to the dilemma how to choose between family loyalty and their own personal preferences and choices. Being gay or lesbian and choosing to have a same-sex relationship despite family, cultural and religious objections is such a choice, which is comparable to many other choices such bicultural or religious students have to make. The learning effects of this series of discussions were that (1) students are very willing to discuss this as long as the topic is made relevant to their primary concerns, (2) that a performance and debriefing of 2 hours is a nice starter to get attention and interest, but that more attention is needed to reach further necessary goals, and (3) that teachers feel very uncomfortable discussing

this topic, especially because they do not know how to deal with extreme differences of opinions and high emotions among students. The main final recommendation was to start a project focusing on implementing a spiral curriculum in vocational schools which combines 21st century skills in general with dealing with sexual diversity, and which has adequate attention to introduce, train and coach teachers before and during the implementation of the spiral curriculum. Such a project started in the end of 2014 and will end in 2016.



Scene from a Dutch teacher training using interactive theater (AanZ)

Fourteen criteria for good educational films

At the same time, GALE did not want to let go of its original learning question. With the help of Ad van Dam, director of "Pink Images" ("Roze in beeld"), GALE organized an international workshop with the students of the Hyperion College in Amsterdam and a bilateral international workshop between Dutch and Italian experts in Florence. In these workshops, young people, teachers, film makers and VET trainers reflected on the original question of what constitutes a good educational film. In a follow-up dissemination meeting, the Dutch experts refined the discussion results to a shortlist of 14 criteria.

Last session of ARES closes with participation in London Gay Pride

The fifth and final partnership meeting took place in Brighton over 2 days, in which we reviewed the work plan and deliverables before the end of the activities. The main challenges faced were shared and we discussed the best learning solutions adopted by the partners during the two years of activities.



James West presenting at the partnership meeting in Brighton

James West (West Creative) joined us to present his 'Queer Short Film Night' event that took place in May 2015, in London, where 9 short LGBT films were presented to an audience of 100 people, with short break-out discussion sessions. James West spoke to us about how he promoted this event, how it was organised and the feedback that was received. (See also his blog at WestCreative.co)

We then went on to watch the short film 'CHANCE', by film maker Jake Graf, who had also recorded a short video clip for us to reflect on the film, his motivation for the piece and what he hopes will be achieved by using ACM in the LGBT context, as he couldn't be there with us himself.

October 2015 – James West is to organise another 'Queer Short Film Night' in London.

westcreative.co/

London Pride is one of the world's biggest annual LGBT celebrations, showcasing London's varied LGBT cultural scene. Last year 750,000 people attended the event, and this year saw over one million people, making this year the biggest turnout ever.



Some of our partnership members attended The Pride in London Parade, which took place the day after our final partnership meeting, on Saturday 27 June, and ran from Baker Street to Whitehall, via Oxford Street, Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square.

prideinlondon.org/

