

## Diverse Gender Identities



### The importance of integrating all gender identities into the education system

**Target groups:** VET students/ learners; teachers/ trainers; parents

**Focus:** School staff is familiar with the topic of different gender identities; the school environment is inclusive of all gender identities.

**Objectives:** The source of this best practice has been employed for 40 years at a grammar school in a quite conservative small town. She said that there have been many incidences of students expressing different gender identities over the years and through these experiences, the teachers' council has become more sensitive and learned together about this topic. Things started to change around 20 years ago. Her own personal experiences also helped her to become more aware of these issues and luckily, she was supported by her co-workers. They encountered students who were struggling to deal with gender-related issues during adolescence and consequently, some did not finish their education. This was often due to insufficient support from family as well as the school itself.

**Methodology:** The school counsellor was very active, talked a lot about gender issues and worked together with the students in these areas. The staff did not have any official training on the subject; this needs to be very subtly organised. The school began working with Dr. Roman Kuhar, a researcher and expert who presents different findings of gender identity research in a very subtle way. All fourth-year students, as well as all the teachers, attended his presentation. Dealing with these topics on a regular basis created an atmosphere of awareness and acceptance at the school. Whatever happens at school touches everybody's lives in some way.

**Impact:** They now have same-gender couples who can walk along the corridors together without encountering any problems. Last year, two boys danced together at the graduation ball which would have been impossible 20 years ago. The school counsellor has met and collaborated with various relevant organisations such as LGBTQ, Humanitas and others. Last year, some students decided to hire a coach and take part in the Pride Parade in the capital. However, the school decided that it was not



appropriate to organise this as a school activity as they didn't want to jeopardise the fragile positive atmosphere of acceptance felt within the school.

In philosophy classes, the teacher is very open-minded and unbiased, and gender issues are discussed and supported. Of course, they have experienced vocal disapproval from some students, as if to say 'we need to cast out these types...' However, the rest of the class was appalled by this viewpoint and the student in question had to be protected. The situation was resolved by the school counsellor using social games to explore this difference of opinion.

**Conclusion:**

These days, students with different gender identities can turn to the school counsellor for advice without any problems. The message learnt was: it's not important whether you are accepted; others just need to be respectful.

Unfortunately, there is no distinct support for implementing this good practice at a state level; the members of Parliament do not currently wish to be seen to be in favour of such issues.

