"Diversity is Our Daily Bread": An Exploratory Study of the Dutch ‘Sexual Diversity in Education’ Policy

Alex Sirotzki
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“Diversity is Our Daily Bread”: An Exploratory Study of the Dutch ‘Sexual Diversity in Education’ Policy

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for SIT: The Netherlands: International Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender, Spring, 2012
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Abstract

This independent study project focuses on the discourse surrounding the recently-approved ‘sexual diversity within education’ policy, which requires all schools in The Netherlands to incorporate discussion of sexual diversity into their curricula. My findings are based on six interviews of individuals who, either directly or indirectly, are connected to or affected by this policy, either in their professional work or simply in their interests. My findings include themes found surrounding the policy: what is being said, how sexual diversity should be implemented in schools, autonomy of schools, normalcy, potential racism within policy implementation, and what should be done. Ideas for future research include this same question and focus but utilizing different interviewees and checking back in years from now to see what may have changed of the discourse surrounding the policy.
Acknowledgements

While this project is my own, its development would have been greatly hindered without the constant guidance and support of so many. To my advisor, Peter van Maaren: you are brilliant. I so appreciate your constant support and suggestions, helping me to focus my fascination with everything into one single area. Beyond connecting me to many of my interviewees, helping me shape and reshape my ideas, and allowing me to interview you, you helped me to tap into my inner fascination with life.

Kevin, thanks for the leadership, the excellent feedback on work, and the exercise with speed walking. Hannie, thank you for housing me for a week prior to the arrival of my host, offering great hospitality and conversation, and for reminding me that I can say ‘thank you’ too many times. Paul, thanks for your presence and for the supply of lunch money. Michél, thank you for putting up with me and my messes for three months and for being a truly gracious host.

To my family, Mom, Dad, Megan, Grandma, Grandpa, Alex, Emily, Maiah, Jordan and Aurora: thank you all for putting up with my rants and venting sessions. You all mean more to me than you will ever know, and this project could not have been completed without all of you listening, advising, and sending your love.

And lastly, I’d like to thank YOU, anonymous reader, for taking the time to read through what you hopefully take to be a positive contribution to the academic community. Whatever your reasons for reading, I truly hope that you find the pages of this paper to be useful, or at the very least, interesting. Enjoy!
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Introduction

My focus/Primary Research Question

The focal point of this paper is a recently-passed Dutch policy, which requires that all schools in The Netherlands include discussion of sexual diversity into their curricula. Note that the policy reads ‘sexual diversity’ as opposed to simply ‘homosexuality’. One of my interviewees, Philip Tijsma¹ of the COC², said in his interview, “So they [Dutch schools] have to teach about sexual diversity, and we lobbied for the term sexual diversity so it includes not only homosexuality but also gender and gender expression, so transgenders, LGBT.” I was (and still am) fascinated by this policy, and I feel that it can tell us much about Dutch culture, especially pertaining to sexual diversity and its meaning in Dutch society. Therefore, my primary research question is What is the current discourse surrounding the “sexual diversity in education”³ policy requiring all Dutch schools to include discussion of sexual diversity into their current sexual education curriculum?

Why I care

I feel that understanding an author’s motivations allows the reader to better understand the author’s potential biases. I argue that awareness of bias increases the objectivity of the paper, for no author can be truly objective, so understanding their subjectivities allows their perspective to be better understood. It grants the reader a lens through which to analyze an author’s work. Sexual education has been an interest of mine throughout my college experience, because I

¹ For purposes of clarification, the first and last name of the interviewee will be used upon introduction, and thereafter, only the first name will be used.
² “Cultuur en Ontspannings-Centrum, or Centre for Culture and Leisure... COC is the oldest Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender organisation in the world.” (COC Netherlands,” 2012).
³ This is the English translation of the policy, as given to me by Philip Tijsma
believe that a comprehensive sexual education program is one of many factors that can help lead to a safer, more erotophilic society. Beyond the existing correlations between comprehensive sexual education and lower STI rates, unwanted pregnancies, and abortion rates, it is of my personal opinion that comprehensive sexual education can help students open their minds and critically think about the world around them. So when I came to study in The Netherlands, which “is often recognized for its approach to adolescent sexual health, noted by the country’s low rates of teen pregnancy and high contraceptive use among young people” (Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck & Knijn, 1), I was quite excited to explore what made their system so effective.

My studies here in The Netherlands have introduced me to some surprising realities regarding the Dutch education system such as the lack of uniformity in curriculum requirements, specifically within sexual education. There is a level of autonomy granted to schools by the Dutch government that I had not expected to find. Schools are often told what to teach, but very little criteria are given on how they should teach. This applies not just with sexual education, but with all topics. I had incorrectly assumed that all schools were held to the same standards with sexual education, that they all had the same program and materials. So with this in mind, when I heard that the ‘sexual diversity in education’ policy was approved, I was very intrigued. Here was a policy in which schools were legally required to discuss sexual diversity. From an American perspective, where a policy like this would be highly controversial and held by most as a very powerful statement, the lack of general reaction to this policy was intriguing to me. I began forming many questions: How will the policy be integrated into schools? What criteria are outlined by the policy? Does ethnicity play a role within this policy at all? How do different people define sexual diversity? What do people think of this policy, is it seen as a good thing? Why is this not seen as a ‘big deal’? Since I was required to focus my paper around one central
question, I decided that asking about the discourse surrounding this policy would encompass all of what I was searching for.

**Terminology**

A few terms must be defined prior to their use in the rest of the paper so that the reader understands my exact meaning with those terms. The most prominent term is ‘discourse’. Originally, I had rather lofty plans with ‘discourse’, wanting to use it as a catalyst to jump into higher levels of theory than this paper utilizes. However, I quickly realized that I was (and still am) ill-prepared to tackle theory to the degree I had originally intended. Had I held onto this goal, I would have spent far too much time attempting to comprehend and create abstract theories surrounding the ‘sexual diversity in education’ policy, leaving me far too little time to gather and process the data collected. In abandoning the higher-theory approach, I decided to keep the word ‘discourse’ and define it very simply as ‘opinion, communication, and meaning’.

With this in mind, my primary research question focuses on the opinion, communication, and meaning surrounding the ‘sexual diversity in education policy’ is. What do people think about the policy? What is being said about it, and by whom? What does the policy itself mean for schools, for Dutch society? More specifically, I wanted to fuse these three concepts in order to understand opinion regarding communication and meaning surrounding the policy. So, what do my interviewees think of the policy, what do they think is being said about it, and what do they think it means for Dutch society?

Another point of terminology that warrants explanation to non-Dutch readers (or to those unfamiliar with Dutch culture), the terms ‘black’, ‘mixed’, and ‘white’ schools are respectively used to define schools of mainly immigrant population, a mixture between immigrants and native
‘white’ Dutch children, and predominately native ‘white’ Dutch children. This paper will only utilize aforementioned terms as they are presented by the interviewees. Primary school generally teaches children from ages six to twelve, while secondary schools generally teach ages twelve to eighteen.

Assumptions

During my studies in Amsterdam, I was exposed to a connection between some ideologies supporting rights for homosexuality and some ideologies against immigration and Islam. I then began to expect to see this ‘pro-gay/anti-Islam’ sentiment, perhaps where it never really existed. That is why during the formation of my project proposal I expected to find ethnic issues underlying the motivations behind the policy’s goals (Sirotzki, 1). I am happy to report that in my findings, I found no such racist motivations.

I am also in support of action taken to increase the tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity. I attempted to hide these biases throughout the interviews, but they may have played a factor in how I asked certain questions, perhaps without my full realization.

Theoretical Framework

Modernity

The concept of ‘modernity’ is the idea that all cultures and civilizations can be held to a given standard of a linear progression, with certain ideals being held as ‘modern’, while others are held as ‘backward’ or ‘primitive’. Judith Butler uses this idea in her Sexual politics, torture, and secular time to analyze the Dutch policy (as of 2007) requiring immigrants to look at
photos/videos of two men kissing and rate how (un)comfortable they were in reaction to it.

Butler states:

“Those who are in favour of the new policy claim that acceptance of homosexuality is the same as embracing modernity. We can see in such an instance how modernity is being defined as sexual freedom, and the particular sexual freedom of gay people is understood to exemplify a culturally advanced position as opposed to one that would be deemed pre-modern.” (3).

This applies to my research topic, I argue, because the same politics surrounding the policy Butler refers to also surround the Sexual Diversity in Education policy. Both have the notion that acceptance of homosexuality is an essential aspect of a ‘modern’ society.

However, there are problematic issues underlying these politics. The dichotomy between pro- and anti-homosexuality seems to have developed into something largely limited to pro-homosexuality vs. Islamic ideals. While I do not believe the motivations behind this policy to be in any way racist as I originally thought might be the case, I believe that the implementation of this policy may highlight underline racist notions regarding Muslim opinion and perspectives on homosexuality. Other religions that are openly against homosexuality do not seem to be targeted in the same ways that Muslim groups are. This idea will be explored further in the Analysis section of this paper, based heavily on my interview with Peter van Maaren and an example he uses of a ‘black’ school being held to different standards than a ‘white’ school.
Literature Review

Much literature covering my topic of exploration exists. As mentioned in both the Introduction and the Theoretical Framework of this paper, I had preconceived notions of pro-homosexual/anti-Muslim sentiment having something to do with the formation of the national policy. Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens explored this idea in their work *Sexual politics, orientalism, and multicultural citizenship in the Netherlands*. Their main argument: “representations of gay emancipation are mobilized to shape narratives in which Muslims are framed as non-modern subjects.” This connects back to my ideas regarding Bulter’s use of modernity. While I do recognize the possibility for racism—specifically anti-Muslim sentiment—in the implantation of the national policy, I no longer believe that the motivations behind the policy itself were racist. This work still applies, however, because it can help us understand how this policy may be used as a way to enact racism on different schools, specifically on those that are labeled as ‘black’ or ‘mixed’.

I was significantly influenced throughout my project by past students’ ISPs, so my literature review consists mainly of these ISPs. *Teaching Sexual Diversity within Educational Spaces in Amsterdam: A Journey of Misguided Theory and Empirical Research*, by Chloe Kanas greatly helped me to shape how I wanted to approach my project. She claims to have failed to answer her primary research question for a number of reasons, many of which were tied to flaws within he attempted theoretical framework. This showed me to be cautious when using terms such as *discourse*. “I still do not have clear enough an understanding of all of these theoretical terms. I need to articulate a clearer theoretical understanding for how ideologies, norms, and discourse relate to knowledge about sexuality in educational spaces” (Kanas, 2008). Because of
this, I strived to define my use of discourse very clearly, as well as keeping myself from straying into higher level theory which I don’t understand.

_The Integration of Homosexuality into Dutch Sex Education_ by Melissa Boone helped to introduce me to the differing views of how homosexuality should be integrated into education. This is highly related to the theme I found in my own research of how sexual diversity should be integrated into education. Her analysis of the organizations within The Netherlands which are key at raising awareness of issues of homosexuality and sexual diversity confirmed that my use of members of the COC as interviewees was a beneficial decision. Reference of what eventually manifested as the national policy was mentioned within Boone’s work. “…the government also works along with COC to garner information about the best way to go about making core objectives for the inclusion of homosexuality in all aspects of education, but particularly sexuality education in the Netherlands” (Boone, 2007).

_Defining the Right to Sexual Literacy: An Examination of Teachers’ Perspectives on State Involvement in Education_, by Ciara Segura, greatly added to my understanding of autonomy in Dutch schools and introduced me to the discussion over school autonomy. “The Dutch education system values school autonomy because it maintains teachers’ agency and encourages consensus in curriculum decision-making” (Segura, 2009). She also explores variables that may indicate a teacher’s response to autonomy within Dutch schools. Segura attempts to answer if the state had the right to impose itself into educational system and finds that doing so would be unlikely. This connects to the theme of autonomy of Dutch schools found within my research, especially given that my interviewees, while alluding to the autonomy of schools, did not offer much speculation on it. They mentioned autonomy almost in passing, accepting the system for what it was and attempting to explore ways in which to work within it.
rather than voicing opinions that it should be changed. Also, her three main findings fall in line with my interviewees’ responses.

“All students should have access to the same level of knowledge and skills through explicit content requirements, but teachers should have discretion over when to introduce certain topics and what topics to focus on more… Second, in addition to content requirements, teachers must be deemed competent and willing to teach SE [sexual education]. Thus, more emphasis should be put on teacher training. And third, schools should provide outside resources to teachers, to address needs specific to their students and educational track.” (Segura, 2009).

*It’s always the prince who marries the princess: Exploration of relational and sexual diversity education in Dutch primary school classroom* by Lauren Reibstein is also highly connected to my focus.

The four themes found by Reibstein were also seen within my interviewees’ responses: “discussions of relational and sexual diversity within classrooms, education about general diversity, teacher training in the field of diversity, and teacher reflections on the future of relational and sexual diversity education in primary schools.” (Reibstein, 2009).
Methodology

For this study, my methodological process was entirely qualitative, focusing on in-person interviews. Originally, my goal was to combine interviews with surveys and questionnaires to be filled out by as many teachers and students as possible, which would have allowed me to access to my own qualitative and quantitative data. This would have added a level of breadth to my findings. However, due to time constraints, I thought it best to focus all of my energies on conducting and transcribing six interviews. The face-to-face quality of interviews also allows for a richness of data which cannot be replicated with a survey or questionnaire. Many of my questions were purposefully broad and open-ended to allow for interviewee interpretation. This allowed for answers that were lengthy and complex, and could not have been ascertained utilizing survey methodology. The qualitative data gathered, while certainly not representative of the entire Dutch population, has offered me great insight into these six individuals, each one having a unique position in relation to the sexual diversity in education policy. I utilize quotations throughout my Analysis section in order to keep my discussion directly connected to the interviews. In terms of interview location, the interviews were conducted entirely at the interviewee’s convenience, such as in their homes, work offices, and the SIT office.

I had intended to interview more than six individuals, not fully realizing the difficulties in establishing contact with interviewees, having them willing and able to assist me, and most importantly, the sheer amount of time involved in interviewing and transcribing. A single month of time dedicated to research is not enough time to accomplish what I had intended to at the beginning of this project. I had also intended to interview national-level politicians, especially the Minister of Education, J.M. Marja van Bijsterveldt-Vliegenthartm, who passed the policy after being against it throughout much of the debate process. However, the Minister is a difficult
person to contact, and while my host Michél Tromp is a politician himself and offered to try and establish contact, he was unable to do so. Because they are different parties (Michél is of the VVD and Bijsterveldt is of the CDA), contact is difficult even under normal circumstances. Adding to the existing difficulty was the Dutch government declaring collapse. This means something very different than what it might in the context of the United States. Essentially, the loose coalition that had formed to barely hold a majority in Parliament could not agree, after seven weeks of debate on the budget proposal to be submitted to the European Union. It announced that the coalition had failed and that until the next elections are held, the government will only conduct essential operations, keeping the country afloat until the next government is instated. “The prime minister is expected to tender his resignation to the queen on Monday [April 23rd].” (Geitner, 2012). The chaotic circumstances of the political system prevented me from interviewing national-level politicians, which would have greatly added to one of my original goals of analyzing political discourse surrounding this policy.

Along with the political angle, my intention was to gather as many different perspectives pertaining to the policy as possible. I wanted to have a range including perspectives such as those of national politicians, local politicians, educators actually implementing the policy, and students involved in receiving the implementation of the policy. Through the interviews that I conducted, I was able to fill most of that desired range, plus other perspectives that I discovered along the way. Philip is a spokesperson for the COC, which was highly involved in the lobbying process which eventually allowed this policy to be approved. Dennis, whose last name will remain anonymous per his request, is a teacher and coordinator/member of the management team of the Elout School in Amsterdam, a ‘mixed’ primary school of around 300 students. Joke coordinates Socratic dialogues with primary schools on topics of diversity (including sexual
diversity) through the diaconie, a church-based organization that leads dialogues on diversity.

Krzysztof Dobrowolski-Onclin is a volunteer with the COC who coordinates and leads dialogues for secondary school students on sexual diversity. Peter van Maaren, my advisor for this project, is currently involved in working with both Joke and Krzysztof with student dialogues and teacher training sessions. He also has much experience teaching in secondary schools and has written a book about how he worked at integrated themes of sexual diversity into all lessons and aspects of the classroom. My final interviewee is my host, Michél Tromp, who is a local politician and has five children within the Dutch school system. All of my interviewees are pro-LGBT and are for actions that promote tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity.

My interviewees were all recruited through different means. My advisor, Peter, recommend Philip, Joke, and the Elout School, where I interviewed Dennis. Philip recommended Krzysztof, and thought it wise to interview my advisor and my host, Michél.

All interviews were semi-structured, with the use of a prepared interview guide. With all of the interviews, I asked questions not included in the interview guide as they seemed appropriate, and was sure to ask (or have answered) every prepared question. Because I had a diverse group of interviewees, I did not have a standardized interview guide and thus personalized each guide to each interviewee (see Appendix A). For this same reason, I must stress that this study and the data found throughout are not representative of Dutch population, of all educators within the Dutch school system, or even of COC representatives and volunteers (three of my six interviewees work or volunteer with the COC). This data is representative of only the six individuals that it was gathered from, and while it does allow me to analyze discourse surrounding the policy, this data is only some of the surrounding discourse, not by any
means *all*. It should be noted that all of my interviewees all live in Amsterdam, and readers must not take Amsterdam to be representative of all of The Netherlands.

**Analysis**

My analysis first summarizes each interviewee and the main points that came up in their respective interviews. Information on the interviewees is given in order to give the reader an understanding of the interviewees’ positions in relation to the ‘sexual diversity in education’ policy. A brief section discusses the lack of direct discourse on the policy; most of the interviews followed themes that surrounded the policy rather than opinion on the policy itself. The responses in the interviews are then organized and analyzed by the following themes: what is being said, how sexual diversity should be implemented in schools, autonomy of schools, normalcy, potential racism within policy implementation, and what should be done.

**Interviewees:**

*Philip*

I was connected to Philip through my advisor, Peter van Maaren, who both work together through the COC. The COC was a very powerful player in seeing that this policy was passed, involved in the initial proposal as well as in heavy lobbying throughout the entire process. “I think we can [claim] without bragging, we started the campaign and we finished it.” Because of the COC’s high level of involvement, Peter and I felt that Philip would be the best first interviewee, for he was able to specifically outline what the policy is. Being the COC spokesperson, he is able to represent and voice the organization’s goals and motivations for pushing this policy. He emphasized multiple times that the one of the goals behind the policy
was to help decrease the number of incidents of anti-LGBT bullying and violence. The COC believed that this could be achieved by increasing the level of tolerance and acceptance by requiring that all students be exposed to sexual diversity by their schools. Philip did acknowledge that because of the level of openness of the policy, schools “theoretically could start teaching about homosexuality in a negative way”, and it would satisfy the demands of the policy. However, he held great value in the fact that because of this policy, sexual diversity is now among other core goals or objectives that must be met by each school. Basically, this means that sexual diversity is held at the same level as any other subject that is required to be taught or discussed in schools.

Joke

Joke works with the diaconie, which is an organization through the Protestant Church in Amsterdam. Her position is setting up dialogue workshops with primary schools. These dialogues cover a great range in topics within the greater theme of diversity. Joke creates the content of the dialogues and is involved in the training of the volunteers who actively moderate the dialogues. She holds a degree in philosophy and thus uses a philosophical perspective in managing the dialogues, holding the idea that when exposed to content oriented around diversity, children can take more away from a discussion than a lecture. She had been conducting general dialogues prior to her work with primary school children “in mosques, in synagogues, in churches, community centers… with adults… we find out that it’s very hard for people to really listen to what another person is saying and we thought ‘well, why not beginning on a primary school?’”. The policy makers responsible for the schools in the southern part of Amsterdam contacted Joke and asked her to give her dialogues in primary schools, incorporating sexual diversity into the discussion. Three years ago they started with just one school as a test, and
currently, there are only three schools that invite the diaconie to give the dialogues. This is because it is not mandatory for the primary schools of this region to hold the dialogues. “The policy maker at that level cannot say ‘you have to do that’, that can only [be] the national government.” According to Joke, this project is still in its testing phase, and perhaps more schools will invite the diaconie to give the dialogues as time goes on. The schools that currently use the diaconie “are very happy” with the dialogues.

The dialogues are broken down into six lessons, held once a week over a six week period with a given school. Throughout the lessons, children are taught “the dialogue form, because it’s different than normal”, ‘normal’ referring to a more traditional teacher-to-student lecture. “It’s a different approach than information being pushed into the heads of the children… [It is] not education of information, but it’s talking with them. ‘What do you think about it? What do you feel about it?’” The lessons also cover discrimination, difference/diversity within culture, religion, and handicaps, and typically end with homosexuality. “There’s one or two homosexual persons coming into the class and talking with the children.”

Unlike Philip, who was pushing to pass a policy regarding sexual diversity, Joke is on the other end of the system, actively working within the education system to implement sexual diversity awareness. It should be noted that the dialogues through the diaconie exist independently of the ‘sexual diversity in education policy’, which has yet to be implemented. The diaconie has been working with the dialogues in primary schools for three years at the request of local policy makers, so Joke’s dialogues and the national policy are not directly related to each other. However, Joke’s experience and position are both highly relevant to this paper because of her work with sexual diversity education; her dialogues are one of many forms of
sexual diversity discussion that a school can utilize to satisfy the requirement of the national policy.

*Dennis*

Dennis is currently teaching for two days a week at the Elout School in Amsterdam, a mixed school of roughly 300 students. He also works with the management team at the school and once the current director of the school retires in a year, he will be trained to be the school’s next director. Working with the school on both a teaching and administrative level grants Dennis unique perspective. When he becomes the principle, he will play an active role in determining how the rest of the school integrates the new national policy. And as a teacher, he currently plays an active role in actually teaching about sexual diversity. The Elout School actually uses the diaconie dialogue that Joke is responsible for organizing, and Dennis was able to offer his perspective on the program, as well as another one the Elout uses called Discussiëren Kun Je Leren (which literally translates to ‘to discuss you can learn’)\(^4\). His evaluation of both programs gave me insight into what he thought to be important to teaching and discussing sexual diversity to and with primary school children.

*Krzysztof*

Krzysztof is a volunteer worker with COC Amsterdam and coordinates dialogues for secondary schools throughout Amsterdam. In addition to the coordination process, he also leads several dialogues himself. Krzysztof’s position is similar to Joke’s in that he is actively integrating discussion of sexual diversity into a school setting, so he can offer a similar perspective in relation to the national policy. The COC dialogues are similar in style to the

\(^4\) This translation was given to me by Peter via email.
diaconie’s, except only in one session and with secondary schools, as opposed to the diaconie’s six sessions with primary schools. Also, the COC was not asked to give the dialogues by policy makers, so Krzysztof and his team work to establish contact with schools, sending letters and emails as well as calling the schools to see if they would be willing to allow the dialogue to happen. They always strive to have two volunteers lead the group. To stimulate discussion, they “make sure that the chairs are in a circle and that we sit between the youth”. Also similar to the diaconie, Krzysztof tells that the COC dialogues “are quite personal, which means that we do not stand at the blackboard and teach… we ask them to reflect, we ask them to give their associations, what they think about homosexuality”. An important point he stressed was that the volunteers offer personal information, such as how they discovered they were homosexual or bisexual. While dialogues do differ from one another based on the volunteers and the students, the basic structure is the same for all of them. “So we start by, we open by saying who we are, what the COC is exactly, what we do in the COC, we tell the rules of the lesson, and we ask the children to say their name and what they think when I say ‘homosexuality’.”

Peter

Peter held the dual role of both an interviewee and my advisor. He has much experience with teaching children a great variety of subjects, having taught secondary school for many years. He currently works with both Joke and Krzysztof in their respective dialogues as a discussion leader, as well as with Philip at the COC. He also runs teacher training sessions, helping teachers learn how to incorporate sexual diversity into their topics. Because of his experience, Peter’s perspective is similar to those of Philip, Joke, and Krzysztof combined; his covers a large range of the policy’s breadth. The backbone of Peter’s personal style in leading
the dialogues, as well as how he trains teacher’s to incorporate sexual diversity into their classes, is that sexual diversity should be interwoven into all subjects. Peter told me—

“So the way it should be taught is in all books, like now we have books that we have the cultural and religious diversity, and color diversity, so if you have pictures also, you see the diversity in cultures and religions and colors, but not in sexual diversity, so not in a relationship. So what I think is the best way is to have the diversity in the text, in the examination, in the books, in the pictures—in everything because now it’s all straight.”

Michél

Michél is a local member of the VVD, a Dutch liberal political party. He is also a father of five children, four of whom are currently in primary school. His position as a local politician grants him perspective on local policies that are or can be enacted to support sexual diversity within education. His position as a father with children on the receiving end of the national policy grants him the perspective of one whose children are directly affected by the implementation of this policy.

Political Background

When the policy was voted on by Dutch Parliament, a total of 122 of the 150 seats voted for it⁵. According to Philip, grounds for debate had two points.

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⁵ This information was provided by Philip after our interview and thus via email.
“Should they [schools of religious denomination] be forced to teach about something that they might have difficulties with? And the other thing was there has been a long-term discussion in The Netherlands on how much social issues you should teach children in schools, so that the curriculum doesn’t become overly heavy. You don’t want to teach about everything. And whereas the latter argument was used most, especially by the minister of education, I think the first, so the fact that especially religious schools don’t want to be teaching about sexuality and sexual diversity, that was the real argument, in my opinion.”

According to Philip, the existing “controversy was along the lines of faith-and non-faith based parties.” As of now, “the policy has been put into a formal regulation that is now being reviewed by the Raad van State (Council of State), which is standard procedure. The formal regulation is only published after the advise. The minister [of education Bijsterveldt-Vliegenthart] promised that the policy will start working on August 1, 2012.” As I understand it, the fall of the Dutch government during the formation of this policy should not affect the policy’s implementation.

*What is being said about the policy?*

The general opinions of my interviewees towards this policy are positive. They tended to view it as a step in the right direction, though to different levels. Philip was by far the most excited, seeing it as a victory for LGBT students. “We are really proud of it not so much because we showed we could reach an important political goal, but especially because the situation for LGBT students in Dutch schools is not good.” He believes that this policy will help
to introduce sexual diversity to students who have little to no exposure to it and in doing so, tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity will increase. “And 81%, if I’m correct, of the LGBT students thinks that more education about homosexuality, transsexuality, would mean, would lead to a better situation for them.” He does acknowledge the potential for schools to discuss sexual diversity negatively, however he feels that with this policy, the bulk of Dutch schools will integrate the sexual diversity discussion positively. Currently, “66% of the Dutch students never get any education on sexual diversity” (interview, Philip), and Philip is optimistic that this figure will shrink with the implementation of this policy.

The other interviewees did not seem as excited as Philip, though none viewed it negatively. Joke had not actually known of the national policy until our interview. When I explained what the policy was and that it had no parameters or criteria regarding how sexual diversity should be discussed, she said “And I think that’s what’s lacking... because otherwise what I think will happen is that school teachers will say ‘we do it already’ and that’s nonsense.” So she fears that little will change with the policy.

Dennis felt that the policy was good in that it fit in with Dutch society. “Yes, I think that’s good. Yeah, because I found it’s (sexual diversity) normal. It’s part of everything now… I think in Holland, I think it’s going quite well. So the policy is good.” He felt that sexual diversity should be discussed in a positive way and while he did recognize that some schools may discuss it negatively, he was not overly concerned. In his opinion, that group would shrink overtime.

Krzysztof is hopeful that the policy will raise awareness of the COC program, specifically increasing contact with those schools in Amsterdam that currently do not use the
COC dialogues, but clarified that it was difficult to predict. He summed up his opinions with an interesting metaphor:

“Yeah, the policy’s quite open, but I think it will help a little bit. It’s like advertising in the newspaper, you know? The first time someone sees a newspaper, they throw it away. The second time, it may ring a bell, the third time, they’ll think ‘oh well, that’s cool’.”

Peter also sees the policy as positive in that even now, before its implementation, it is causing discussion among schools. However, he still sees that there is much to be done.

“I think in a way it’s very good because it started discussion in schools, they need to discuss about sexual diversity, say you have to do it. It’s already now, even when it’s not really on paper, it’s a part of discussion, so they cannot say we don’t have gays or we don’t talk about that or it’s not an issue, so they have to do it… So it’s more an issue to talk about it than it was before. That’s a good thing. So the only situation is that government cannot tell schools how to do it. So we have to be very careful about how it’s implemented in schools, that’s what we have to check. The rest it can be very wide, that’s ok; there’s a lot of stuff that’s very wide. Schools can also decide if they want to talk about Adam and Eve, or they want to talk about evolution.”
Michél seemed to have little opinion regarding the policy itself. He knew of it, but not very much, and was not sure where his party stood on it. When I asked him what he thought of the policy, did not specifically say he was for it or against it. Rather, he described a bit of what he thought sexual education should entail, and that if a school decided to incorporate sexual education at a given age, they should also include an element of sexual diversity.

The questions specific to the policy not only gave me information pertaining to their opinions, but also served as a catalyst to other forms discourse. The answers to the policy-specific questions would quickly branch out onto other avenues of conversation. These other avenues, when built upon one another, form the various themes which this analysis will explore. So, ‘What is being said about the policy?’ leads to ‘What is being said around the policy?’, which connects back to the primary question, ‘What is the discourse surrounding the policy?’.

**Sexual Diversity in the Classroom**

Because all of the interviewees’ are pro-LGBT, they all had shared the common goal of national tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity. All of the interviewees’ discussed their philosophies on how to best approach sexual diversity discussion in the classroom. All agree that sexual diversity should be integrated into schools in a positive way, which makes sense, seeing that each wants to bring about in increase in tolerance and acceptance towards sexual diversity. However, beyond that level of agreement, each interviewee has different ideas about how to integrate sexual diversity into the classroom, both within a single discussion or lecture and throughout the whole structure of the lesson plans.
Dialogues/discussion

The format of the dialogue, in which an individual leads and joins group discussion among students, seems to be a commonly accepted and supported one with multiple interviewees. To some, this style seems preferable to simply giving the students information. Joke’s specific stance within this group was grounded in the idea of Socratic dialogues with the children, having multiple discussions over general diversity, leading to specific themes such as homosexuality. Since she fears that the policy as is will not lead to much change within the schools due to the lack of criteria, it is obvious that she feels more criteria would be beneficial. When asked about what specific criteria she thought should be added to the national policy, Joke feels that sexual diversity—and sexual education as a whole—should be approached through dialogues surrounding love as a theme. I asked, “Do you think it [the national policy] should be modified at all?” Her reply—

“Well they should give some criteria, because otherwise what I think will happen is that school teachers will say ‘we do it already’, and that’s nonsense. So there should be some criteria and some material for the school.” When talking about sexual education in general, she says, “Most schools take it [sexual education] as a technical subject, biology. But talking about love in general, I like this.”

Within these dialogues, she feels that the topic of love can act as common ground between the educator and the student.
“It [sexual diversity] should be integrated in lessons or workshops about being different in general, or about love in general. Because then you make clear that it’s not a new thing, but you can either…. Maybe it’s even better in love in general, because every time you ask the children about the feelings connected with love, then they understand ‘oh yeah’, like I said, ‘loving a person and it doesn’t matter, the love is still probably the same.’”

Also supportive of the dialogue style is Krzysztof. While he did not reference a dialogue oriented around ‘love’, he does say that “we [the COC volunteers] organize lessons about tolerance, well, acceptance, of sexual diversity in high schools, so mostly 14, 15 years old.” I find it important to bring attention to the distinction Krzysztof makes with this quote, initially saying ‘tolerance’ and then correcting to ‘acceptance’. Tolerance vs. acceptance is not a theme that came up during the interviews outside of this instance, nor was it a theme I was specifically searching for. But it is an important theme of Dutch culture. Tolerance, while it does have a positive aspect to it, implies a sense of superiority from the tolerating group over the tolerated group. Acceptance has no such connotation. It is a common argument in The Netherlands that while homosexuality is tolerated in the culture, it is not fully accepted.

“The general level of intolerance for homosexuality that lies at 5% for all Dutch, goes up to 45% of the men who say to be offended by two kissing men in public versus 7% affronted by a straight couple – and probably more than this 45% will feel slighted because the Dutch know to give politically correct answers” (Hekma, 2008).
The Netherlands legalized gay marriage in 2001 (Dittrich, 2011), but legal acceptance of something is not the same thing as cultural acceptance of that very same thing. The tolerance vs. acceptance discussion is one that Krzysztof is almost certainly aware of, which is why I believe he switched his terminology to ‘acceptance’ instead of ‘tolerance’. I find this distinction telling; it shows that Krzysztof’s aims are higher than mere tolerance. Perhaps Krzysztof uses the theme of ‘acceptance’ as opposed to ‘love’ because of the age of his audience. Secondary school children may be more likely to fully comprehend the idea of acceptance of sexual diversity, whereas primary school children may have a harder time even understand the concept of sexual diversity, let alone its level of acceptance within a culture.

While both Joke and Krzysztof have similar goals for sexual diversity acceptance in The Netherlands, they each have slightly different approaches in how to achieve acceptance due to the age level of their audiences. The differences in Joke’s and Krzysztof’s approaches to their respective dialogues suggest that educators should adjust their teaching depending on the age of their students.

Peter is also in support of the dialogue style, as shown by his involvement leading dialogues with students through both the diaconie and the COC programs. He offers insight to how he runs his dialogues—

“When I teach homosexuality it’s more I teach being different. And then what is being different, how does it feel being different, and then what is secret, so how do you deal with a secret, and with whom do you share your secret, you don’t share your secret. And then we go towards very bad words for homosexuals in different
cultures. And the good thing is that even when I’m much older than the kids, is that they feel free because we start with a game, and then with the game we go to talk with the issues, and the issues are their issues and not my issues. And they can talk about how they think of being different. And then age is not a problem.”

Peter brings up the point of age here—referring to the age of the educator or discussion leader—because I had been voicing thoughts regarding age of the educator and if that had any effect on the outcome of the quality of the dialogue. I thought that perhaps maybe with younger discussion leaders, the students thought they could relate more. Here Peter discounts that idea.

While Peter is supportive of dialogues that are set aside specifically to talk about sexual diversity, he also encourages teachers to incorporate discussion of sexual diversity into all realms of the classroom, into all topics.

“What we did all these years in talking about homosexuality is to do it in 50 minutes, and the rest of all their [students] life they will not talk about homosexuality. So therefore, I think the best way, I said for many years, start in primary school, and make that the publishers of all these books, make it more sexual diverse, or relational diverse. And not only that whites can be gay, but also that Muslims can be gay. You know the situation in my class was I was the one to be a gay teacher and to use in economy, in Dutch, in English, in law, in all subjects, I could talk about homosexuality. So I implemented in all my lessons the sexual diversity. Well the
students did the straight stuff, and I did the gay stuff, so every lesson was relational and sexual diverse. And that it should be, because not only one time, in one part of your life, no. All the time.”

Peter is very passionate about this idea, intertwining discussion of sexual diversity into all topics of the class. He gives examples of how to do this: “With art, you know history, when you say that someone was straight and had concubines, you can also say that someone was gay. Or gay and had to marry because he was a king, and was homosexual, include that.”

Michél agreed with Peter about how sexual diversity should be included on an integral level in materials and topics of the classroom.

“But like you said, if there is a lesson saying like ‘oh there are 2 men and they are doing the shopping with their little baby boy or something, which they have adopted’, I don’t know, then yeah, it’s like ‘oh, so, this is basically normal’.”

Dennis partially supported the dialogue style for implementing the topic of sexual diversity with students, specifically with primary school children. At one point, the Elout school that employs Dennis had three different organizations speaking to the children about various topics related to sexuality: the diaconie, Discussiëren Kun Je Leren, and another group that discussed lover boys\(^6\) with the girls of the class. Dennis did not like that the group on lover boys was taught only to the girls.

\(^6\) A growing phenomenon in which women and girls are coerced into human trafficking by men, called ‘lover boys’, that act as if they are a romantic partner of the woman or girl in order to get them into trafficking.
“I say ‘ok, and the boys then?’[They don’t think about it]. So I said ‘I don’t want them to come’. I can also say to the girls in the class ‘Don’t go with a man when he gives you money, don’t go’, and I can say it in 10 minutes. I can explain it in 10 minutes as well. So [it] is not necessary to have 7 lessons about it.” He prefers “one organization who comes and triggers the children that they’re going to think about it, and then maybe in the year they can talk about it. When the time is right.”

While Dennis seems to be in support of the dialogues, he wants keep the use of them limited. Also, he wants to be sure to be in agreement with the information presented in the dialogues.

“When they [students] ask it [topics of sexuality] to me, then I can explain it by myself… Maybe he [the dialogue leader] said things I don’t like. So that’s why I think a teacher [should] do it.”

He seems to be in favor of fusing the use of dialogues with teacher-led discussion as students seem to need them. During the interview, he references a lesson in which a student asked a question about prostitution which led to a discussion on sexuality.

“And I say ‘They come for this and for that’, and one child put their finger up and said ‘Yeah but they also come for sitting in the red light district in the windows’. I said ‘Yes!’, and we could start a conversation with the class about the red light district, about escorts, about gigalos(?), about the sickness from what you can get from the sex. About a lot of things, it was a very good discussion, but it was not [planned]… And that’s more! I think that is much
better, they learn a lot more than [if] they are going to sit and we
are going to talk about.”

It is clear that Dennis prefers to lead the discussions on his own as the children bring them up, but as demonstrated by the above quotes, he does think that the dialogues have their place in introducing the topic to the children so that they can form questions at their own pace.

As seen by the above five interviewees, structure and content of dialogue and discussion pertaining to sexual diversity is an important issue connected to the national policy. Since the policy itself offers no criteria in which to implement sexual diversity discussion, it will be very important for schools to understand the discourse surrounding how sexual diversity should be implemented. The lack of national criteria means that the burden of ensuring—and defining—a healthy way to integrate sexual diversity into the classroom falls onto the schools and the teachers.

**Safe Environment**

Safety of the environment in which sexual diversity was discussed was another theme found within my interviews. The idea of an ‘unsafe environment’ is primarily linked with a lack of structure in the class setting, according to the interviewees. Joke described a situation in which the teacher had little to no control over the class, creating an unsafe environment.

“But one of the classes, there was a very not safe climate. The climate was not safe, children bullying each other, and the teacher was just begun on that school, and she couldn’t handle the class, she had an order problem.”
Krzysztof also gives an example of an unsafe environment due to lack of structure in the class.

“If the class is unsafe, in most classes it needs structure. I did that a couple of weeks ago. It’s not that the class was unsafe; it was rather that they did not have any structure at school. Nothing. ‘Class starts at 1, ok if you come quarter past 1, whatever. You know? Why not?’ And the teacher didn’t even say anything. Nothing. And one of our rules was you don’t mobile phones… And then one girl used her mobile phone… I told her ‘listen, you told me you would not use your mobile phone, you still did so you have the choice. I would regret if you had to leave the class because you participate well, so it’s up to you; do you want to leave the class or do you want to stay and give me your mobile phone?’ Well, she did [give the phone]. Hardly 5 minutes passed and the teacher allowed another girl to call someone out of the classroom.”

A situation like the one that Krzysztof describes is ‘unsafe’ because

Importance of a Homosexual/Bisexual Instructor

A few of the interviewees expressed, in their opinions, the importance of students having exposure to homosexual and/or bisexual educators. Joke told me “And what is very important is [there] should always be at least one lesson with a person who is homosexual… it’s talk with a homosexual instead of about [a homosexual].” Krzysztof said “Then we give those lessons with 2 people, or try too; a woman and a man, who are either bi or homosexual.” For these dialogues,
it is a rule that they through them, the children are exposed to interaction with homosexuals and/or bisexuals. I believe that this serves to help reduce a perceived gap between the students and an orientation that they may have little to know exposure to, helping the students understand the dialogue leaders as people who are defined by more than simply their sexual orientation.

Amount of Information

Both Dennis and Michél expressed opinions regarding a limit to how much exposure to sexuality and sexual diversity a child should have while in primary school. Dennis stated—

“They are children. They will learn it [sexuality] in their own way growing up, and I think that’s more, that’s better for them, and you have maybe a little lesson or one lesson that you are triggering the subject, but… a lot of lessons about it, I think it’s too much… And I think that too much talking about it, the subject, that will be negative.”

When I asked Michél about his own experience with sexual education within his schooling as a child, he told me “that was two lessons or something… No, it was not enough. And in the text book there was one or two, literally one or two sentences about homosexuality.” I then asked how he would restructure sexual education, and he replied “Well, I wasn’t really discontent. Yeah, maybe just should be a little bit more, but year, I think it was quite ok. Life’s also a bit like an experience, and adventure; you should leave something to discover.” These quotes from both Dennis and Michél express the idea that within sexuality—and with it, sexual diversity—too much information prior to an individual’s own experience with sexuality can take away from the sexual experience. The end of Dennis’ quote actually claims that too much information can
have a negative impact on the student. Even within the realm of people who are in support of sexual diversity, there is disagreement on the appropriate level of information that should be passed on to students.

**Limit of Governmental Power Over/Autonomy of Schools**

Another recurring theme found as an allusion to the level of autonomy that Dutch schools have to teach their topics in the way they deem appropriate. Multiple interviews brought this idea into conversation, mentioning it on the sides of their main points. Peter told me, “So the situation is that government cannot tell schools how to do it [discuss sexual diversity]… Yeah the problem with politics is they cannot influence the publishers of books.” Krzysztof drew a comparison between the government’s power over how schools integrate a given topic with its power over where people purchase their fuel.

“So I think they [the government] leave the policy so open in order to give those schools [schools that are not in favor of discussing sexual diversity] some place to move, and also of course they will not say you have to invite COC… you cannot pass a law saying that you have to buy your fuel at Shell’s. That’s not possible.”

Peter mentioned when school autonomy came into being. “But then in the 80’s and the beginning of the 90’s, the government said ‘we don’t want to tell schools what to do, they can make their own decision.’” Michél brought up the same point.

“And now we’ve more or less made them autonomous. And yeah, sometimes I still feel that it’s a bit weird they did that, because now we can’t really interfere or intervene if something happens
and we don’t like that. So in many cases actually, I feel that shouldn’t be the case.”

When the national policy is considered in relation to the high level of autonomy of Dutch schools, it then makes sense for the policy to be so open. To do otherwise and add specific criteria in which sexual diversity is implemented into schools—while it may have support from those in favor of sexual diversity—could bring about harsh reactions from those who hold school autonomy at such a high value.

**Normalcy**

The idea of normalcy, to my surprise, came up in my interviews on numerous occasions, mainly during Dennis’ interview, but in others’ as well. Within the interviews, I noticed that the term normal (or variants of it, such as ‘normalcy’) was used in two overlapping but distinct ways. In one form, ‘normal’ is equated with ‘natural’ or ‘naturally occurring’. An example of this form of normality can be seen from Krzysztof. “For some it [COC dialogue] really may be helpful because they struggle themselves, for others it’s a helpful first encounter and they see we aren’t Martians, we’re quite normal people, you know?” Within this quotation, one sees the dichotomy that Krzysztof has established between normal and Martian. In this sense, normal connotes natural and understood, while Martian connotes otherworldly, unnatural and unknown.

Normal is also used in a way that is equated to accepted and non-deviant. Joke stated—

“If I have a school with children, like you call them in Holland, ‘black schools’, then children are always reacting at first [to the
dialogue on homosexuality] like ‘blaaah!’, and if you have a
school with white children, then they are always reacting ‘oh,
that’s normal’.”

Within this example, Joke discusses perceived differences among different ethnicities within Dutch schools. According to her, for ‘white’ children (referring to children of parents who are natively Dutch) homosexuality is seen as accepted. Michél uses normal within the same way as Joke, as seen in a previously-used quote:

“But like you said, if there is a lesson saying like ‘oh there are 2 men and they are doing the shopping with their little baby boy or something, which they have adopted’, I don’t know, then yeah, it’s like ‘oh, so, this is basically normal’.”

Once again, normal is equated with accepted.

A more extreme version of normal equated to accepted, one which I find far more meaningful than the above examples, is seen with Dennis. When I asked if he thought the national policy would affect the way that the Elout School integrated sexual diversity, he tied his answer into how The Netherlands viewed homosexuality.

“And they make, here in Holland, what the people think ‘oh you’re gay, are you on a boat, in the Gay Pride [Parade]?’ That’s the picture they have about gays, but that’s not true. When they have the Gay Pride here, I go out of town because I don’t want to be there because I don’t feel me like that. I’m a normal person.”
Within this quotation, Dennis has set up a dichotomy within homosexuality between what he describes as homosexuals who partake in the Gay Pride Parade and *normal* homosexuals, the latter of which he defines himself as. By saying that he actively leaves town during the Gay Pride Parade, not only is he not associating with as a homosexual who takes place in the parade, he actively rejects that identity.

In a later quote, Dennis goes even deeper in his use of *normal* as *accepted*, equating it with *positive* and *progressive*. I asked him “You wouldn’t change it [the national policy] at all, you wouldn’t add, make it stricter, like ‘sexual diversity has to be discussed in a positive way’, you would just leave it open?” He replied “Yeah, but positive, because you have always being positive, because you have to be normal. But I think also here [in Amsterdam] it’s a big city, it’s more normal than a small village.” Still under the umbrella of *accepted*, Dennis further equates *normal* with *positive* in the first sentence and *progressive* in the second sentence. The second usage within this quote is what stands out most to me, for *progressive* can be equated with *modern*, (see *modernity* discussed in Theoretical Framework). Dennis is thus equating *normality* with *modernity*, conveying that to accept sexual diversity is to be modern and progressive, which implies that anything short of acceptance of sexual diversity is the opposite of modern and progressive, which is primitive and backwards. This connects back to the national policy. A nation that passes a policy requiring schools to discuss sexual diversity views sexual diversity, at least to some degree, as an important topic. The goal of many of the interviewees is to increase the tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity, and Philip stated within his interview that one of the main goals was to decrease the incidents of anti-LGBT violence. With this in mind, one can see how the national policy is an attempt at normalizing sexual diversity.
Racism within Policy Implementation

While I found no evidence in the interviews to suggest that racist discourse is at all interwoven within the motivations and goals of the policy (see the Assumptions section of the Introduction), I was given an anecdote by Peter that does suggest the possibility for racism in the implementation of the policy. He told me of two schools in the southern part of Amsterdam and a part of the same school district, one ‘white’ and the other the Elout School. Both had signed contracts to have the dialogues through the diaconie. Peter was the one leading the dialogues, allowing him to give me the finer details of what happened. With the ‘white’ school, he had taught five of the six lessons, each one leading towards a discussion of homosexuality but not actually discussing it, for that was done in the final dialogue. When the school found out that the final dialogue was on homosexuality, they refused to have Peter conduct it.

“When I didn’t come for the last lesson, then the kids said ‘teacher, we know why, what was the secret of teacher Peter. He’s gay’. So for the kids it’s not an issue, for the teachers it’s an issue. It was not only that class, it was not allowed to talk about it in all classes. So there were 5 classes, so not only in that class, in all classes it was not allowed to talk about it, because they said ‘in our school it is not an issue, the kids don’t use the word [homosexuality]’. Because they were afraid that if you talk about it, they will go to use the word.”

The Elout school also wanted to stop using the dialogues through the diaconie, but for different reasons.
“I think it was the Elout, because that was with teacher Dennis, they decided to do another project, Learn to Discuss. And therefore they said ‘we don’t want to do the philosophy and we don’t want to talk about homosexuality’. And then because it was already ordered to do that project, and then they said ‘no we do another project’. And then the local government went to talk with the director and said ‘no no no, do the philosophy and you have to talk about homosexuality’. But the local government didn’t go to the white school.”

Peter further discussed the racism within this example.

“So it’s already in the contract with diaconie to talk about homosexuality. So when a school refuses, and another school also refuses, but the local government is talking with the black school and not with the white school, that’s wrong. It’s not implemented that black schools should talk about homosexuality, no, all schools should talk about homosexuality. So when the school’s refusing, they should talk with the school who’s refusing. Not only go to the black school, because that’s racist. Why should we go to a black school and not a catholic white school? It’s wrong.”

This anecdote refers to schools enacting a local policy which is disconnected from the national ‘sexual diversity within education’ policy which this paper discusses. However, if racism is
present within an implementation of the local policy, one can easily see how situations such as this one can occur with the implementation of the national policy.

**What Should be Done**

Peter voiced some specifics on what more should be done in conjunction with the existing national policy. While the COC is much larger than it was in the past, it still does not have enough volunteers to meet with the demands of the increasing number of schools that would like the COC to give the dialogues to their students. Peter stated his ideas on how to meet the growing demand.

“I think we should focus more on teacher training situations. So COC should have one group who do the teacher training, and the rest who give information in schools about homosexuality, that would be the best thing. Because we need all these straight teachers, who use the diversity in classes. Without that, the students will not ask questions. Like what Dennis said, it should be discussed by the students, with the kids asking questions, but if you don’t stimulate them to ask questions, they will not ask the questions.”

Coordination between teachers and the COC volunteers seems to be the best strategy for Peter. To address the policy’s openness and future implementation, he told me that two additional areas must be stimulated. “So that means that you need, the COC for instance, to try and also schools, and the students, the gay students with the gay/straight alliances, to stimulate the publishers to
give also diversity into books.” Also, “So the COC needs to stimulate that organization then they go to check all schools if they have a way to talk about homosexuality.”

Michél also offered an idea with how to allow more detailed exposure to sexual diversity for students on a local level.

“Well, what you can do is very simple. We do a lot [of] extras, so we have preschool, we have activities around school, after school activities, stuff like that. There’s the base not very far from here, where youngsters can do all kinds of projects under supervision, and it’s actually quite cool. And already that person who is in charge of that foundation asked me a couple of times ‘can I talk to the schools? …Because if we combine topics, the school can start something, we can pick it up after school, so we can really go into depth with some topics.’… So you can really go into depth. And that will also work of course with sexual education and homosexuality, why not?”

Michél proposes a local approach to furthering sexual diversity discussion and education. This type of available education would be able to give additional depth to those students who wanted it without threatening the autonomy of schools in The Netherlands.
Conclusion

This research sought to answer the question *What is the current discourse surrounding the “sexual diversity in education” policy?* I did answer this question, but only in part. Without realizing it as I was forming the primary question for in my research proposal, the most I could ever do in answering this question is to find *some* of the discourse; finding all is impossible. I wrote the question as if it was entirely answerable, as if ‘discourse’ was some tangible thing that could be found and fully understood. Even with the simplified definition of discourse I give earlier in this paper, discourse will always to some degree be unattainable. Chloe Kanas struggled with the definition of discourse in her ISP, *Teaching Sexual Diversity within Educational Spaces in Amsterdam: A Journey of Misguided Theory and Empirical Research*, and gave one definition which, though far more complex, I believe still fits within the use of ‘discourse’ in this paper:

> “Complexly constructed but often invisible systems of meaning created by the habitual, diverse, material, collective and learned forces that make us ‘know’ what we know—that shape the way we perceive one another, mobilizing an innumerable array of ideas, meanings, and connotations to the different things in our lives.”

(Kanas, 2008)

A key feature to this definition which I did not acknowledge in my proposing of the research question is the term *innumerable*. Countless, immeasurable; that is discourse. I did discover some of the discourse as portrayed and reinforced by the six individuals whom I interviewed, and
this allows one to speculate on what else may be referred to as ‘discourse surrounding the policy’.

While only some of the discourse has been witnessed through this research, what has been found is quite rich and suggestive of the underlying themes of this policy. It is simple to look at a policy such as this and offer quick judgment, either by showing excitement that the policy is helping to bring about sexual diversity acceptance, or by showing little hope of change in the light of the lack of criteria given to the policy. The policy itself, while simply stated, is complex in what people think of it, what they are saying about it, and what it means to them. In other words, its discourse is complex.

Ideas for Future Research

Since discourse is innumerable—as well as constantly in flux—no amount of future research will ever fully comprehend it. However, because of this, there is also no limit to the amount of knowledge that we can glean from future research. I suggest that future research focus on checking in with the policy years from now to see what has changed with the discourse surrounding the policy, as well as offer speculation as to why it has changed. This same research question would breed an entirely different project with a different group of interviewees, especially if those interviewees were against promoting sexual diversity tolerance and acceptance. Also, a large scale approach to answering this question—such as by using detailed survey method—could render a more holistic view of the discourse.
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*education in Dutch primary school classrooms.* Amsterdam, the Netherlands


Appendix

Interview Guides

Philip:

- First, what exactly does the policy require of schools (just to make sure I don’t misunderstand anything)?
  - As I understand it, the policy requires all schools to include discussion of homosexuality into their programs. Are there any exceptions, any schools that do not have to follow this policy?
  - Are there any restrictions or parameters for how homosexuality is discussed?
- What was the COC’s involvement in the policy?
- Is the COC satisfied with this policy?
  - If not, what about it must be changed?
- Do you know if gay/straight alliances had an effect on this policy? If so, could you talk about it?
- Has there been much controversy over this policy, within politics or general public opinion?
- Do you know which political parties are for it? Against it?
  - And for those parties, do you know their reasoning to support or go against the policy?
- What was the process involved in getting the policy instated?
- Is there anyone that you would recommend I contact to gain more information on the topic, such as any politicians, activists, organizations, etc.?

Joke

- What do you know specifically of that policy, that recently passed policy? Have you heard much of it before?
- What is your occupation fully?
- I believe Peter said that sexual diversity/homosexuality is discussed with the philosophy unit of the school?
- This is a very broad question, and I imagine there’s a lot of diversity, but in your experience, do children typically react the same way? Or are all classrooms totally different?
- Do all the schools within southern Amsterdam have to have this dialogue?
- Do you think that the project that you and Peter are working on will become more popular with the national policy?
- Could you walk me through the logistics of the dialogues?
• What are your thoughts on the policy, the national one, do you think it should be modified at all?
• What are some other tools that the dialogue, or you and Peter, those running the dialogue, use, what questions do you ask the children?
• Are there any other teachers, program workers, or anyone that you think would be useful for me to contact, to set up an interview to get information from?

Dennis
• So, as you said in your email, you are the “coordinator and member of the management team” here at Elout, and that you also are a teacher for 2 days. Could you explain what that means?
  o What do you do as coordinator?
  o What do you teach?
    ▪ What age level(s)? Topic(s)?
• What do you know of the recently-passed Sexual Diversity in Education policy?
• Has it already been implemented into this school?
  o When?
• How has this school (or how will this school, if is hasn’t been implemented yet) integrated discussion of sexual diversity into the curriculum?
• The national policy states that all schools must simply discuss sexual diversity. Does the local policy that applies to this school set any extra boundaries or parameters within that?
  o If so, do you know the reasoning behind those parameters?
• Prior to this national policy, has this school ever integrated discussion of sexual diversity into its teachings?
  o If so, how did it do so?
• What are your opinions of the policy?
  o Is it a good policy? Bad? Why?
  o If you have problems with the policy, then how would you change it?
• Do you anticipate any problems with the integration of this policy?
• Have you ever personally discussed sexual diversity with your students?
  o If so, how did you approach the topic?
    ▪ How did the conversation(s) go?
  o Do you know of the experiences with other teachers?
• In light of this new policy, how will your discussion of sexual diversity with your students change, if it does change?
• Do you have any experience teaching or interacting with LGBT students within the school?
  o If so, would you mind sharing some of those experiences?
• What do you think that the students’ parents’ opinions are regarding this policy?
• Are there other teachers or people within the educational system that you believe I should contact for an interview?

Krzysztof

• So Philip Tijsma, who I interviewed, and Peter van Maaren, who is my adviser for this project, tell me that you are the coordinator of the COC programs that are used in schools in Amsterdam. Could you tell me just a bit about your work?
  o What schools do you work with?
    ▪ Type, secondary vs. primary, etc.
    ▪ How many schools currently use the COC programs for sexual diversity, both in Amsterdam and in all of Holland?
      • What percentage of total schools?
      ▪ (I hope I use the terms correctly); do ‘white’, ‘mixed’, and ‘black’ schools use the COC programs?
        • Do they all do so equally?
    o Do you personally design the programs, or is your job more connecting the program coordinators with the school? Or something else entirely?
  • How are the COC programs/sessions structured?
    o Are all the programs similar? Do you have different programs geared towards different audiences?
    o Are there set guidelines for all of them, or is each one unique, depending on the program/discussion leader(s)?
  • Will this new policy (sexual diversity in education) effect how many schools use the COC programs, in your opinion?
  • As I understand it, the policy states that all schools in Holland must integrate discussion of sexual diversity into their programs, however they see fit.
    o Why is it structured to be so open-ended?
      ▪ Is that something the COC intended, or was it something that they settled for because anything more specific/with more criteria would be more difficult to have passed?
    o Some have told me that while it is a step in the right direction, they fear that the lack of parameters and criteria given to it will lead to little change in how sexual diversity is discussed.
      ▪ Do you share this concern?
  • Former ISPs have argued that when topics such as sexuality and orientation are discussed in the classroom, the culture and ethnicity of the students should be taken into account so that the information is presented in culturally appropriate ways, allowing the information to be better accepted/understood.
    o Is there/should there be a level of ethnic awareness when dealing with a topic such as sexual diversity, specifically in a classroom setting (in your opinion)?
Is ethnicity taken into consideration in the COC’s programs with schools?
• If so, do you think that ethnicity should have been taken into account within this policy?
• What does the COC (and what do you) think will come of the policy?
  • Is it seen as a gateway that will hopefully lead to future policies?

Peter

• *general discussion about interviews thus far*
• How should sexual diversity be discussed in a class?
• This policy is so open-ended do you think it should have more criteria?
• What is your general opinion of the policy as it is now, what do you think of it?
• Do you think that there should be any sort of further policy to say how it should be implemented at all?
• I know you do the work with Joke, with the diaconie and then work with Krzysztof and those dialogues. What other work do you do outside of that, or is that your entire profession right now?
• With the primary school children, when you have those dialogues over diversity, can you talk about how that’s set up, how that’s structured, and how they normally go?
• When the policy is enforced in August, do you think that more schools will use the COC program, or is it just because the COC programs are run so thin, like you said before, you’re focusing more on teacher training?”
• Any last comments or anything that you want to say before the interview is done?

Michél

• What is the VVD, what does it stand for?
• My whole project, all about the sexual diversity in education policy, what do you know of it? Do you know of it?
• What is the VVD’s stance regarding this national policy?
• Back when you were in school, primary and secondary, do you remember within the school, discussions of sexuality, sexual diversity at all?
• If you could go back in time and you had the power to rewrite sex ed, education, how would you structure it? What would you think would be useful?
• Would you have liked more discussion about sexual diversity, homosexuality?
• What do you think of the policy, do you think it’s that it should be discussed in all schools?
• Do you think it’s a good thing to allow schools to discuss it however they see fit, with no further criteria given by the government, which I think is how most courses are in schools?
• What criteria would you give that policy?
- Knowing this policy, knowing Dutch culture, do you think this policy will really change much, have any big effects, positive, negative, neutral?
- Do you know of anything that the local government can do or does do to stimulate schools to talk about sexual diversity, homosexuality?