

**AIDS & Mobility Europe Working Group III
Young migrants living with HIV/AIDS**

Good practices – Belgium-Flanders

Shalimar: an educational game

SENSOA



Sensoa

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Shalimar

Educational game for 14- to 16-year-olds
to be used in a school context

General description

Context

For young people around the age of 16 it is not so easy to engage in a dialogue that goes beyond one's own values and norms. Adolescence is a developmental phase in which people strongly identify with norms and values. Finding your own identity is an important part of this stage.

Intercultural communication presupposes openness towards another perspective than the one that is constructed out of your own cultural representations.

Research in Belgium and in other countries shows that youngsters of Turkish and Moroccan origin have great difficulty to find their way and their own identity when it comes to relationships, sexuality or sexual health. This is mainly due to what we call bicultural socialisation. They find themselves balancing between two different cultures, between the expectations of their parents and the expectations of their peers and school. This makes it more difficult for them to find their own 'selves'. All this makes it a bit more complicated to openly discuss issues of sexuality in a classroom with boys and girls of different cultural backgrounds.

On the other hand, things have also changed for non-immigrant teenagers. Unlike their parents they grow up in a multicultural society. For them as well it is important to learn that norms and values are cultural constructions and are part of a context of family and education.

And we should not forget that talking about such an intimate subject as sexuality is difficult for everybody, 'black or white'. That is why we propose that sexual education in multicultural groups start by taking one step back and engaging in true intercultural dialogue on relationships and sexuality in a broader context before teaching about penises and vaginas.

The final goal of a dialogue between cultures is not only that people can understand and show respect for other cultures, but also that people find common ground and discover that differences are not only cultural. A lot of individual differences have nothing to do with culture.

One consequence of this is that sex education in a mixed classroom demands certain competences and skills of a teacher. Teachers have a need for tools and support to help them with this task. This means specific educational tools are needed.

In developing such a tool, Sensoa and partners set forth three basic principles:

1. Individual empowerment: showing respect for the sexual and reproductive rights of the individual.
2. Collective empowerment: showing respect for the enjoyment and expression of ethnic and cultural identity.
3. 'Interculturalisation': a clear choice for a dialogue between cultures as a basis for a multicultural society.

Goal

- Students are conscious of the fact that their knowledge, attitudes and opinions regarding relationships, sexuality and sexual health are social and cultural constructions.
- Students are encouraged to develop the essential skills to deal in an open and constructive way with cultural differences regarding relationships, sexuality and sexual health.
- Teachers feel supported and have educational tools to encourage students to engage in an intercultural dialogue on relationships, sexuality and sexual health.

Target group

The primary target group are 14- to 16-year-old students of the second grade, secondary school in Belgium. It is an explicit choice for this project not to focus on one specific subgroup but on ALL adolescents, regardless of social status, educational level, sexual identity, cultural background etc.

It is a clear choice of Sensoa not longer to consider 'young people' automatically as a homogeneous group of young people of Belgian origin, but to regard them always as a multicultural group with a mix of ethnical backgrounds. As so many young 'migrants' have a Belgian passport, they are a much bigger group than statistics suggest. In a lot of schools in the big cities 'migrants' are an ethnic majority.

The secondary target group of the project are the teachers of these students.

Practical information & needs

Budget, funding

This project was developed with the financial support of the Levi Strauss Foundation. We created a working group with field workers and experts.

In a second phase, Sensoa asked the Flemish Ministry of Education to fund the production of the game on a larger scale (500). The francophone Family Planning Association has been contacted to finance the French version.

The production cost is € 50 per unit. The game will be distributed for free to schools.

Time investment

For developing the tool, including preparatory research, analysis of determinants, creation of the working group, developing, pre-testing etc., Sensoa invested 130 days, spread out over two years. This is without counting all the time other colleagues and external experts invested.

Production and implementation will be +/- 100 days.

Contacts

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www.sensoa.be (information on the game will be on the website of Sensoa in a later phase)

Profile user

Secondary school teachers who want to integrate education on relationships and sexuality in their courses. Probably teachers who work in schools with a large ethnic minority population will be most interested in the tool.

Data (population, epidemiology)

It is impossible to provide accurate data on the size of the group of second- and third-generation 'migrants' in Belgium. A lot of these boys and girls are Belgian nationals or even have parents who have a Belgian passport. In research, ethnic background is not registered.

Of course we do have some indications and we know that in the big cities over 30% of school youth is of Moroccan or Turkish descent. Another important group are of central African (especially Congolese) descent.

For the largest group of young migrants in Flanders HIV is, statistically, not a big health threat. Young Moroccan and Turkish boys and girls seem to be no more at risk of acquiring HIV than are 'Flemish' young people. 'Seems', because the data are not very accurate.

Other sexual health problems are more important for the target population. Unwanted pregnancy, for instance, is an important issue.

The seriousness of health problems also depends on the social situation and the social consequences. A Moroccan girl in an average Moroccan family will probably face more serious problems when she is pregnant without having planned this, than will a girl from an, often more liberal, 'white' family.

Even if the few data we have do not show a higher level of sexual health problems for Moroccan or Turkish teenagers, the consequences of such problems are often more important.

Also it is important to note that sex education, although absolutely feasible, will demand specific attention and a specific approach.

Methods

Involvement of the community

In making the game we involved a lot of young people. They gave us the basic material for the game, helped us develop it and tested the game before it went into production. Their parents were not directly involved, although we encouraged young people to talk about their family; about what their parents taught them regarding sexuality and relationships.

School education

The game was designed for use in schools, but it can also be used in other contexts, like at a youth club.

Because of this primary focus, we developed a one-day training for teachers. This training will be organised in different places in Flanders (two in every province).

Evaluation

Advantages/difficulties

The advantage of the game is that young people discuss sexuality and relationships in a very spontaneous way. It also gives a very clear structure to the discussions and a perfect pretext to talk about these things. The teacher doesn't have to play a teacher's role telling about values and culture etc. Rather, they are facilitators.

The difficulty is that the teacher has to be a really good facilitator. He has to be able to explain clearly the rules and objectives of the game and has to lead the small working groups through the different steps of the game. This demands very good skills to listen to and lead young people. But maybe that is what defines a good teacher in any case.

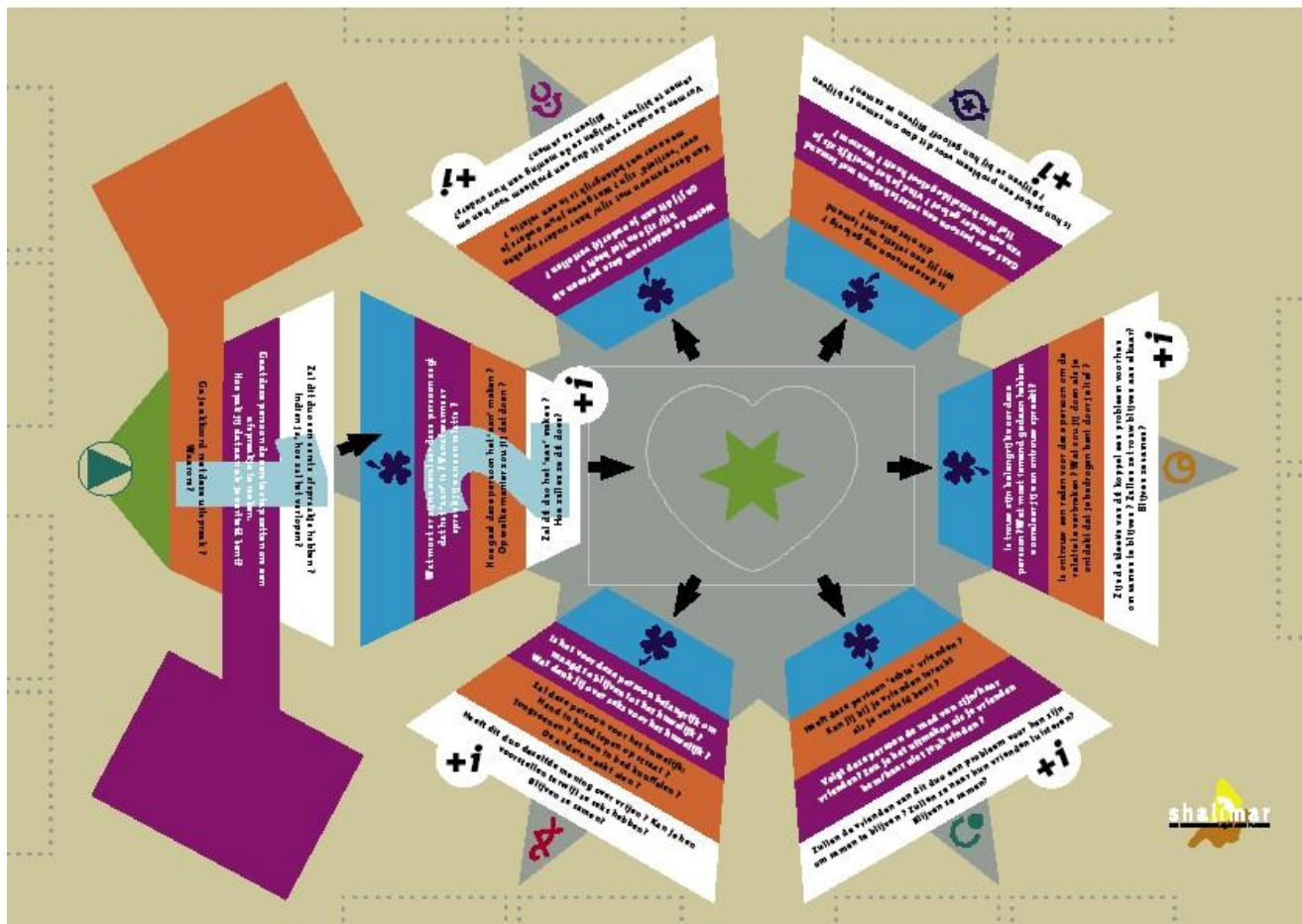
Knowledge/behaviour/values

The basic idea, and the basic value of the game is to listen to one's classmates. This way, young people, from whatever culture, learn to broaden their perspective. The most important thing is to learn where values and norms come from, and to discover that maybe we are not so different in the end, that a lot has to do with education, with being loyal to your roots.

Number of people reached

For the pre-test, two hundred teenagers played the game. From October 2006 on, five hundred games will be distributed in schools. This means an optimistic average of 10,000 young people will have a chance to try the game each year.

Materials



This is what the game board looks like.

The basic idea is that students in groups of four or five are appointed 'relationship consultants' for two persons. In each phase of the game they learn more about the characters, through typical sayings of that character.

Each of the game's seven phases deals with an important issue, like: sex before marriage, friends, parents, religion, etc. The Students make the acquaintance of certain characters. Most of the time the characters will be a boy and a girl, but there also are a gay boy and a lesbian girl. They learn about these persons through typical phrases, like "I say 'I'm dating someone' when we go to the movies together and kiss." There are twenty characters in the game. All these phrases we got through interviews we held in a special tent during a street festival in Brussels.

In each phase the students have to answer a few questions. E.g. "Do you think being faithful is important for your character?" At the end of each phase they have to decide if they advise the two persons to stay together as a couple, or to break up. In the last case, they keep one character who then meets a new boy or girl.

In a grid, the students write down their advise (yes or no) and a short motivation.

Each phase also includes a small, fun game (like Pictionary). One of the groups can thus win extra information.

At the end of the game the teacher stops all groups and there is a short evaluation. "Which phase was the most fun? Which was the most difficult? etc.

Teachers can use the grids in later classes, for instance when talking about marriage, sexuality etc. The game is like an appetizer, a warming up for more sexuality education classes later on.