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Attitudes toward LGB peers and students' citizenship competences: peer education for a double purpose?

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ABSTRACT

Peer education regarding respect for LGB individuals can be understood as citizenship education with a specific content. Students who participate in an intervention to increase respect for sexual and gender minorities may also increase their general citizenship competences. Also, participation in such an intervention may strengthen students' awareness of the relationship between reflections on citizenship and attitudes toward LGB people. A peer educator intervention on sexual and gender minorities was implemented in pre-vocational secondary education by peer educators and 13 to 17 years old students. We examined the impact on attitudes toward LGB peers with a one-group pretest post-test design, and also used this method to examine reflections on acting as a democratic citizen. We found one significant (positive) correlation between a positive judgment of LGB peers and reflection on acting in a socially responsible manner, which was one of the three democratic citizenship reflection scales we used. No effects were found on either attitudes toward LGB peers or reflection on acting as a democratic citizen. Peer education that is more integrated into the daily social practice of students may increase impact.

Introduction

Young adolescents view rules and norms in society as arbitrary and imposed (Nucci, 2009), but they should be aware of norms and values of democracy and human rights in order to protect the rights of minority groups in society, such as sexual and gender minorities. In the Netherlands, Geboers et al. (2015) examined the extent to which students aged 12–16 years show development of citizenship competences. Citizenship competences include knowledge, attitudes, skills, and reflection on

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citizenship. Following Westheimer (2008), these authors described citizenship as the willingness and capacity to: take into account different social and cultural perspectives, reflect upon (in)equality, act upon issues of social (in)justice, and in a socially accepted and responsible manner. According to Geboers et al. (2013), students in daily life will apply a set of social tasks that represent citizenship competences. These social tasks are acting democratically, and in a socially responsible manner, as well as dealing with differences. They relate to respectfully dealing with various peers in and out of school, and also with peers belonging to minority groups.

In schools, dealing respectfully in particular with the topic of sexual and gender diversity is not natural for students. Rather, students who belong to sexual and gender minorities are often victims of name calling, bullying, and exclusion (Horn et al., 2008; Poteat et al., 2009). Several studies show that full acceptance of LGBT[1] peers among youth is not yet widespread (Hooghe & Meeusen, 2012; Passani & Debicki, 2016; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). In the Netherlands—the location of our study—a nationwide representative study by the Dutch Municipal Health Services shows that youths who are 12–17, in particular, showed negative attitudes toward homosexuality and gender non-conformity (De Graaf et al., 2017). In another Dutch study (the Dutch national study Health Behavior in School-Aged Children (HBSC)Stevens et al. (2018) report that a small majority (54%) among 12–16-year-olds believed that a LGBT student can be open about their sexuality at school. Furthermore, the authors report that only 40% of youths with a migrant background think positively about homosexuality. Finally, students in pre-vocational education hold relatively more negative attitudes toward LGBT compared to students in pre-university education (De Graaf et al., 2017). Also, according to the Dutch Inspectorate of Education (2020), Dutch schools must be clearer regarding values of tolerance and equality for all citizens in a democracy when they teach students about sexual and gender diversity because too often these lessons do not reflect the basic values of the democratic constitutional state in terms of equality, tolerance, and rejection of discrimination (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2020). This may explain why Geboers et al. (2015) found a decline in citizenship competences of students aged 12–16.

Students' attitude toward LGBT and citizenship competences

Ten Dam and Volman (2004) recommend that programs for citizenship education should be focused on the citizenship practices of young people as part of their daily life. Dealing respectfully with peers from gender and sexual minority groups (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender peers) in school or in their peer group is a good example of an event that occurs in the daily

life of a student. When students are invited in class to discuss and reflect on this specific topic, this may improve their attitudes toward people from sexual and gender minorities, as well as enhancing their citizenship competences in general. Scholars in the domain of social studies also expect that respectfully dealing with sexual and gender minority peers will have an impact on students' citizenship competences (see Mayo, [2017] for an overview). An intervention that uses students' daily practice at school of dealing with LGBT peers relates to citizenship competence reflection on acting democratically, in a socially responsible manner and dealing with differences because it might stimulate reflection and awareness of students' attitude toward, and dealing with, LGBT peers. The aim of our study is to provide insight into how students' awareness of LGBT rights and attitudes toward LGBT after an intervention that promotes social acceptance of LGBT are related to students' citizenship competence reflection about acting democratically, in a socially responsible manner, and dealing with differences.

Human rights education, citizenship education, and sexual and gender diversity

Human and citizenship rights, by their very nature, include sexual and gender diversity. Kollman and Waites (2009) show how human rights discourse has made an essential contribution to the adoption of LGBT rights in legislation and anti-discrimination law, especially in European countries. Also, human rights discourse is applied to offering LGBT refugees asylum on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Pizmony-Levy and Jensen (2017) designed and evaluated an Human Rights Education (HRE) workshop about helping refugees who fear persecution because of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This workshop was meant for professionals who support refugees.

Bajaj (2011) shows that in HRE—whether stimulated by the UN or by nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International—the core goals are liberation from oppression, the fight against social injustice and inequality, and promotion of solidarity with deprived people and groups. Definitions of citizenship and citizenship education focus on the ability to evaluate different perspectives, reflection on social justice and (in) equality, democratic engagement, and the ability to deal with diversity, as well as on instances of interpersonal conflict (Geboers et al., 2013; Westheimer, 2008).

Citizenship and the rights of sexual and gender minorities

In practice, citizenship education and HRE rarely refer to sexual and gender diversity, despite the great importance human rights discourse has

for LGBT rights and its embodiment in civil rights for people of LGBT orientation in various countries. This is a missed opportunity, because in order to create a realistic and concrete picture of the holders of human rights, the relationship between citizenship and the rights of sexual and gender minorities must be established in HRE. For example, DesRoches and Sweet (2007) argue that, in HRE, encouraging students' awareness of the citizenship rights of disadvantaged groups, such as members of sexual and gender minorities, is better than teaching abstract and theoretical concepts of human rights which relate generally to humanity. According to DesRoches and Sweet (2007), teaching about human rights with reference to the specific topics of women, people of color, and LGBT people will also prevent students from developing implicit images of citizens as white, heterosexual males.

Interventions on attitudes toward LGBT and citizenship

In the social studies domain, Alter (2017), Mayo (2017), and Maguth and Taylor (2014) suggest that attitudes toward sexual and gender minority members (e.g., LGBT people) could be a topic of citizenship education, as respect for LGBT and civil rights are related. Mayo (2017) argues that students can learn about citizenship from studying the women's and civil rights movement, as well as from LGBT themes. As proposed by Maguth and Taylor (2014), an example of such a topic in social studies would be legislation for same-sex marriage. However, the assumed benefits of discussing sexual and gender minority topics in acquiring general citizenship competences have not been empirically examined by these authors. Pettijohn and Walzer (2008) and Van de Ven (1997) did some empirical research that analyzed the impact of an open discussion of beliefs about homosexuality on attitudes toward lesbians and gays. Van de Ven (1997) carried out a series of six sessions in which students exchanged personal experiences and discussed their needs and feelings, and received non-judgmental reactions on stereotyped or homophobic thinking. However, Van de Ven (1997) only reports on the impact on attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, not on the impact on citizenship.

A limited number of educational programs have implemented teaching of respect for people from sexual and gender minority groups and citizenship rights. The content of the programs of Beck (2013) and Boulden (2004) was similar, and included daily life situations of adolescents getting in touch with peers who were (advocates for) LGBT people. Beck's (2013) study aimed to promote students' understanding of citizenship rights through a program on understanding the desire of same-sex couples to formalize their relationship in marriage. The author showed that students increased their understanding of the relationship between citizenship rights

and respect for sexual diversity such as same-sex relationships. This program consisted of five lessons. First, students were introduced to the topic of same-sex marriage. In lessons 2, 3, and 4, they participated either in a group that argued in favor of same-sex marriage or in one that argued against it. Each group consisted of nine students, who generated arguments by using a variety of sources provided by the teachers. The teachers assisted both groups with working on their arguments and finding more sources on the Internet. In the final lesson, the students presented their arguments in a class discussion. It appeared that students in the group in favor of same-sex marriage gained an awareness of civil rights including rights of people from sexual and gender minority groups, whereas students in the other group wanted to question, in a prejudiced manner, the characteristics of members of sexual and gender minorities. These latter students were not interested in arguments that sought a parallel with the equal rights of other types of minorities. An open discussion with students who voiced critical views on people from sexual and gender minority groups created the possibility for the students in the group in favor of same-sex marriage to oppose their peers and experience agency in supporting LGBTs.

Like Beck's program, Boulden's program included a discussion and exchange of opinions on LGBT issues and citizenship rights (Boulden, 2004). This program was carried out in cooperation with educators identifying as LGBT. In a seven-day program to promote an understanding of the oppression suffered by disadvantaged groups including people from sexual and gender minority groups, students had open discussions in both small groups and plenary groups about discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, age, disabilities, sexual orientation, and religion. During the day in the program that addressed LGBT people, students carried out exercises simulating "coming out," in order to understand what this was like for a young LGBT person. Students met people from sexual and gender minorities from a speaker panel and sexual and gender minority fellow students who participated in the seven-day program. The day ended with an exercise about how to be an ally of people from sexual and gender minority groups. Finally, the students reflected on their experiences of the day in small group discussions. The program was carried out five times by about 40 trained staff members with, in total, 223 students over three summers. The author of the paper administered pretest and post-test questionnaires assessing students' attitude toward people from sexual and gender minority groups and their awareness of—and willingness to take responsibility as citizens against—the oppression of LGBTs. After the intervention, students had gained significantly more awareness of the oppression of sexual and gender minorities in their community. In response to an open question

about the effect of the intervention on the participants themselves, they most often mentioned an increase in the importance of being aware of one's own beliefs and discussing these beliefs with others. Many of the participants also became more aware of their capacity to make a difference in combating oppression. The findings of Beck (2013) and Boulden (2004) give us reason to expect that a program with discussion about, and contact with, peers from sexual and gender minority groups might have a positive effect on students' attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities as well as on their citizenship competences.

In studies on citizenship competences, Warwick and Aggleton (2014) and Fulcher (2017) suggest that LGBT affirmative action may promote the acquisition of citizenship competences. In a study at three schools in England (UK), Warwick and Aggleton (2014) found that students thought that gay-negative language was normal, even though they claimed to respect their LGBT peers. The authors suggest that students' understanding of the homophobic nature of their "normal" social talk in school could be improved by discussions about social norms and respect for minority rights from the perspective of human rights education. In her study in Australian schools, Fulcher (2017) also found that students who use homophobic language do not consider themselves to be against peers from sexual and gender minority groups. The author argues that human rights education and sexual and gender minorities affirmative education should be combined to promote students' understanding that homophobic utterances are disrespectful to sexual and gender minorities, and do not respect their human rights. Horn et al. (2008) found students judged teasing and exclusion of lesbian and gay peers in their school to be wrong, but simultaneously did not support the rights of lesbians and gays to express themselves freely, and to have meetings in school. The authors argue that this has to do with the different dimensions of social knowledge that adolescents are still learning to combine. These dimensions are that, on the one hand, LGBT peers have a right to be free from fear and harm, but, on the other, that students are entitled to their own opinion about LGBT orientations. An intervention that gives students the opportunity to express their personal opinions and offers insight into the similarities between LGBTs and heterosexuals might promote bridging the gap between general human rights and the rights of members of sexual and gender minorities. In her study of a gender sexuality alliance in a secondary school in Canada, Lapointe (2016) found that student-led dialogue about sexual and gender diversity offers a promising educational approach for teachers. While Lapointe's (2016), Fulcher's (2017), and Warwick and Aggleton (2014) suggestions seem plausible, these have not been investigated empirically.

This study

The above-mentioned studies support the belief that sexual and gender minorities affirmative education and citizenship education might promote similar objectives. Discussing the topic of attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities with peers and with educators identifying as LGBT is expected to have an effect on citizenship, as shown by the studies of Beck (2013) and Boulden (2004). However, these studies do not examine whether students participating in interventions to increase respect for sexual and gender minorities also increase their citizenship competences in general. In this study, we define citizenship competences as the capacity to act in a socially responsible manner, critical thinking and evaluating different perspectives, and reflecting and acting upon equality and democratic engagement (cf., Westheimer, 2008). We chose a peer educator intervention because, from a students' perspective, regular teachers that teach about LGBT often use outdated examples according to a study by Snapp et al. (2015). Probably for this reason and because teachers do not always feel comfortable teaching about sexuality, LGBT-inclusive curricula are most often implemented by LGBT guest educators who tell their personal coming out story. However, in this way, Snapp et al. (2015) think the lesson becomes a stand-alone activity. If we implement a series of peer educator sessions, students have the opportunity to build a relationship with their guest educators. The peer educators should be both heterosexual and LGBT to make students aware that LGBTs and non-LGBTs both develop a sexual identity, although non-LGBTs do not have a coming out story. According to Donahue (2014), heterosexuals should also tell their personal stories of developing their sexual identity, because it teaches students that a sexual identity applies to everybody, not only to sexual minorities. Furthermore, in the studies of Beck (2013), Boulden (2004), and Van de Ven (1997), females show more positive attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. In addition, female and male adolescents generally respond differently to interventions on citizenship in school (Geboers et al., 2015). Therefore, we also addressed gender differences in the current study. The following research questions directed our study:

1. To what extent are attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers and reflection on democratic acting related?
2. What is the effect on attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers, as well as upon reflection regarding democratic acting, of peer education in showing respect for LGB peers?
3. Is the effect in research question 2 different for males and females?

Method

To answer the research questions, a pretest post-test one group design was used where the data in pretest and post-test were matched with a unique identifier code for each participant. Grade 9 students from two schools for pre-vocational secondary education completed a pretest questionnaire, and participated in a subsequent peer educator intervention. After the peer educator intervention, a post-test questionnaire was administered.

Peer-educator intervention

In spring 2016, students from universities of applied sciences aged 18 years or older were recruited for training as peer educators. We choose peer educators who were somewhat older than the students because we expected they would be better able to command the authority necessary to conduct orderly lessons compared to peers of the same age as the participants. Seventeen students were trained as peer educators; seven of them came from a migrant background, nine identified as heterosexual, four as bisexual, two as queer, one as gay, and one as transgender. The training consisted of four four-hour training sessions in which the students experimented with several discussion methods such as debates, small group discussions, and dialogues. Exercises to tell a coming out or other personal story, and to carry out playful icebreakers were also part of the training. Subsequently, a peer education intervention consisting of five sessions was implemented in pre-vocational secondary education. We chose pre-vocational education because that student population has less positive attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men compared to student populations in pre-academic tracks (De Graaf et al., 2017). Pre-vocational secondary education (Grades 7–10) prepares students for further vocational training and education. Moreover, in pre-vocational secondary education, we were able to allow culturally diverse classes to participate in the intervention. The classes consisted of students with a migrant background and students from poorly educated families who are more likely to have a negative attitude toward sexual and gender diversity (Kuyper, 2017). These background characteristics have repeatedly been confirmed as correlating relatively with more negative attitudes toward LGBT (Aerts et al., 2014; Collier et al., 2013; Lehavot & Lambert, 2007). The students were able to increase their knowledge in the lessons, by asking their peer educators for examples. The peer educators applied teaching tactics that were culturally sensitive; students had many opportunities to have their say during a lesson, and peer educators had an open and respectful attitude when they reacted to misconceptions about sexual and gender diversity. The main objective of this

series of lessons was to raise students' awareness of sexual and gender minority issues, by facilitating interaction between peer educators and students and among students. Students received information about homosexuality and bisexuality and were informed about respectful ways of interacting with people from sexual and gender minority groups, especially in school. Students were encouraged to ask questions, especially after the coming out stories told by the LGBT peer educators. The peer educators encouraged the students to express their views, and they related their personal views and personal experiences. The exchange of opinions between the students and the peer educators and among the students took place during and following different tasks. Teachers were present in class to support the peer educators. The general structure of the intervention was as follows:

1. Lesson 1: a film followed by discussion about the film;
2. Lesson 2: coming out stories told by the LGBT peer educators, and personal stories told by the heterosexual peer educators;
3. Lesson 3: a House of Commons debate about the life of LGBT people and LGBT rights, and information about transgender people;
4. Lesson 4: a dialogue and brainstorming session about making respect for LGBT students visible in school;
5. Lesson 5: a session in which students made posters or showed PowerPoint presentations or other projects about respect for LGBT students in school.

Throughout this paper we use the term LGBT to include the broad spectrum of sexual and gender diversity. However, we expected that issues with transgender peers were not part of pre-vocational students' daily lives because of the limited visibility of transgender youth in wider society compared to LGB youth and the lack of exposure to transgender youth in the phase of adolescence (Acker, 2017; Barbir et al., 2017). We therefore only measured attitudes toward LGB people. Since we have only measured the reflection on citizenship with regard to citizenship competences, we only speak about citizenship reflection from this point onwards.

Participants

The participants were Grade 9 students from two pre-vocational secondary schools. In school 1, 71 Grade 9 students participated, and in school 2, 85 Grade 9 students participated, making a total of 156 students (107 males). We did not gather information about students' migration

background as schools are not allowed to share this background information with us. We could deduce from the student names that of students in both schools the majority had a migrant background, a fact which has been confirmed by the teachers. The participants' mean age was 15.36 years (SD = 0.80).

Data collection

Pretests were administered one week before the first intervention lesson. Post-tests were administered two weeks after the fifth lesson of the intervention. The same questionnaire was used for both the pretest and the post-test.

Measures

A questionnaire with seven scales was used. To measure attitudes toward a gay, lesbian, or bisexual classmate, two scales were adapted from a questionnaire of the regional Public Health Institute of the Netherlands that measured class climate with respect to a gay/bisexual boy and a lesbian/bisexual girl (GGD Regio Nijmegen, 2008). To measure positive and negative judgments about a gay peer and a lesbian peer, two scales were adapted from Heinze and Horn (2009) Justifications for Attitudes to Homosexuality Scale. Three scales for measuring citizenship reflection (*Reflection on Acting Democratically*, *Reflection on Acting in a Socially Responsible Manner*, and *Reflection on Dealing with Differences)* were used from the Citizenship Competences Questionnaire (Geboers et al., 2015).

Class climate for a gay or bisexual classmate
We used four items from "Class Climate for a Gay or Bisexual Classmate" following a short vignette: "Imagine: There is a boy in your class who is attracted to boys (he is gay or bisexual). What would you do or maybe not do?" One example item is "I could make friends with him." We used a five-point Likert type scale with 1 = "I certainly would not" to 5 = "I certainly would." Three items were recoded, which means that, for all the scales, the higher the score, the more positive the attitude.

Class climate for a lesbian or bisexual classmate
We used the same four items from "Class Climate for a Gay or Bisexual Classmate," but then rephrased them for a lesbian or bisexual girl. We used a five-point Likert type scale with 1 = "I certainly would not" to 5 = "I certainly would." Three items were recoded, which means that, for all the scales, the higher the score, the more positive the attitude.

Positive and negative judgment of gay or lesbian peer

A short vignette about a gay peer was used, followed by ten items with statements to judge this peer: "Tom (15 years old) is gay. He is in the pre-vocational level. He plays football at a club in The Hague. He looks like most other boys at his school. In fact, there is nothing that could tell you that he is gay." A short vignette about a lesbian peer was also used, followed by the same ten statements, but rephrased to judge a lesbian peer: "Saskia (15 years old) is a lesbian. She is in the pre-vocational level. She is taking dance lessons at a dancing school in The Hague. She looks like most other girls at her school. In fact, there is nothing that could tell you that she is a lesbian." To judge the gay and lesbian peers, ten statements were used for each scenario. Two example items are, "I think you should treat Tom [Saskia] as you wish to be treated yourself," and "I think to tease and exclude Tom [Saskia] will hurt him [her]." We added an eleventh item to the original ones: "I think Tom [Saskia] is different from other boys [girls]." One item was deleted from the original list, namely "I think God teaches us not to hurt others," because this did not fit with the Dutch climate that is strongly secularized. We used a five-point Likert type scale, with 1 = "totally agree" to 5 = "totally disagree." Five items were recoded, which means that, for all the items, the higher the score, the more positive the judgment. Based on factor analyses with varimax rotation on the ten items for each scenario, two scales were extracted; 57.8% of the variance was accounted for, in the Tom scenario, and 57.4% for the Saskia scenario. One scale had six items to measure a positive judgment of a gay/lesbian peer, and one scale had four items to measure a negative judgment of a gay/lesbian peer.

Reflection on acting democratically

We used six items to measure students' reflection on acting democratically. Students answered items about how often they reflected about democratic actions in society and school life. Two example items were "How often do you reflect on equal rights for people of color?" and "How often do you reflect on whether the government listens enough to people who desire change?" We used a four-point Likert type scale (the higher the score, the greater the reflection) with 1 = "almost never" to 4 = "often."

Reflection on acting in a socially responsible manner

We used six items to measure reflection on acting in a socially responsible manner. Students answered items about how often they reflected on acting in a socially responsible manner in society and their daily school lives. Two example items were "How often do you think about why it is that there are rich and poor countries?" and "How often do you think about

whether it is fair or unfair that some children have more friends than others?" We used a four-point Likert type scale (the higher the score, the greater the reflection) with 1 = "almost never" to 4 = "often."

Reflection on dealing with differences

We used eight items to measure reflection on dealing with differences. Students answered items about how often they reflected on dealing with differences in society and their daily school life. Two example items were, "How often do you think about whether religion matters to who you are?" and "How often do you think about why it is that some children think they are better than others?" We used a four-point Likert type scale (the higher the score, the greater the reflection), with 1 = "almost never" to 4 = "often."

In Table 1, the number of items, the scale range and Cronbach's α for the pretest and post-test are shown.

Analyses

Data were available on both moments for 151 different students (92 male and 59 female). Items were clustered into scales and their reliability were computed. In Table 1, the number of items, the scale range, and Cronbach's α for the pretest and post-test are shown. There are small differences in Cronbach's α between pre- and post-test data, but all met the minimum of 0.70, which is commonly used as a criterion for acceptable homogeneity.

Correlations between all the variables, in both the pretest and post-test, were performed to answer RQ 1 about the relationship between citizenship reflection and attitudes toward LGB people. To answer RQ 2 and RQ 3, we performed separate repeated measure ANOVAs, with time (pretest and post-test) and gender as independent variables, and the three scales on reflection on citizenship and the four scales on attitudes toward LGB people as dependent variables.

Results

Relationship of attitudes toward LGB people and citizenship reflection

In Table 2, we show the correlations between attitudes toward LGB people and citizenship reflection separately for the pretest and post-test scores. In general, the correlations were low and insignificant for both the pretest and the post-test. The highest correlations refer to the association between Reflection on acting democratically and the four scales of attitudes toward

Table 1. Measures.

Scale	Number of items	Range	Pretest Cronbach's α	Post-test Cronbach's α
1. Class climate for a gay or bisexual classmate	4	1–5	0.78	0.74
2. Class climate for a lesbian or bisexual classmate	4	1–5	0.76	0.68
3. Positive judgment of gay or lesbian peer	12	1–5	0.79	0.92
4. Negative judgment of gay or lesbian peer	8	1–5	0.82	0.84
5. Reflection on acting democratically	6	1–4	0.75	0.78
6. Reflection on acting in a socially responsible manner	6	1–4	0.84	0.86
7. Reflection on dealing with differences	8	1–4	0.85	0.86

Table 2. Correlations between attitudes toward LGB people and citizenship competences.

	Class climate for gay / bisexual classmate	Class climate for lesbian / bisexual classmate	Positive judgment gay or lesbian peer	Negative judgment gay or lesbian peer
Reflection on acting democratically				
Pretest	0.09	0.22**	0.02	−0.04
Post-test	0.10	0.14	0.14	0.00
Reflection on acting in a socially responsible manner				
Pretest	0.30**	0.24**	0.18*	−0.12
Post-test	0.24**	0.11	0.24**	−0.03
Reflection on dealing with differences				
Pretest	0.12	0.11	0.05	0.00
Post-test	0.10	−0.02	0.13	0.06

**significant at $p = 0.01$; * significant at $p = 0.05$.

LGB people. The highest correlations refer to the association between Reflection on acting in a socially responsible manner, on the one hand, and Class climate for gay/male bisexual classmates or lesbian/female bisexual classmates and Positive judgment of a gay or lesbian Peers on the other hand. In the pretest, we found a significant correlation between Reflection on acting democratically and Class climate for a lesbian/female bisexual classmate, which disappeared after the intervention. Overall, there is little relationship between the variables within the concepts of citizenship reflection and LGBT attitudes, as well as between both concepts.

Effect of peer education on attitudes toward LGB people and citizenship reflection

The results with regard to attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers are summarized in Table 3. We found only one significant effect: Students showed a less positive judgment about a gay or lesbian peer in the post-test than in the pretest ($F(1, 149) = 28.23$, $p \leq 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.159$; see Table 3). The mean scores on Class climate for a gay or male bisexual

Table 3. Mean scores in pretest and post-test assessments for attitudes toward LGB people.

	Pretest			Post-test		
	Males $n=92$	Females $n=59$	All $N=151$	Males $n=92$	Females $n=59$	All $N=151$
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Class climate for a gay or bisexual classmate	2.80 (0.90)	3.86 (0.73)	3.21 (1.00)	2.90 (0.80)	3.94 (0.80)	3.30 (0.94)
Class climate for a lesbian or bisexual classmate	3.50 (0.93)	3.79 (0.80)	3.61 (0.89)	3.54 (0.80)	3.79 (0.80)	3.64 (0.81)
Positive judgment of gay or lesbian peer	3.67 (0.80)	4.01 (0.78)	3.80 (0.81)	3.38 (0.58)	3.61 (0.71)	3.47 (0.64)**
Negative judgment of gay or lesbian peer	3.00 (0.70)	2.51 (0.72)	2.80 (0.75)	3.02 (0.68)	2.57 (0.89)	2.85 (0.80)

**significant at $p=0.01$; * significant at $p=0.05$.

classmate, resp. a lesbian or female bisexual classmate, and Negative judgment of a gay or lesbian peer did not change significantly. For the Reflection on acting in a socially responsible manner and Reflection on dealing with differences we found that the scores of students had not changed.

With respect to effects on citizenship reflection we also found only one significant effect: Students showed a decrease in their score for Reflection on acting democratically (RAD: $F(1,149) = 6.52$, $p = .012$, $\eta^2 = .042$; see Table 4).

In Tables 3 and 4, we report a slight decrease of the standard deviations (SDs) for most scales. This indicates that after the intervention students seems to be more alike compared to prior to the intervention regarding their attitudes toward LGB and their reflection on citizenship, except for negative judgments of gay or lesbian peers.

Differences of effects for males and females

With respect to gender differences, we found a main effect for all four scales for attitudes toward LGB people: class climate for a gay or bisexual classmate ($F(1, 149) = 71.92$, $p \leq 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.326$); class climate for a lesbian or bisexual classmate ($F(1, 149) = 4.764$, $p=0.031$, $\eta^2 = 0.031$); positive judgment of a gay or lesbian peer ($F(1, 149) = 8.04$, $p=0.005$, $\eta^2 = 0.051$); and negative judgment a gay or lesbian Peer ($F(1, 149) = 19.451$, $p \leq 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.115$; see Table 3). In all cases, female students showed a more positive attitude toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers than males, which means that female students were more positive after the intervention. For citizenship reflection, we found one significant gender effect: Female students generally showed higher scores for Reflection

Table 4. Mean scores at pretest and post-test assessments for acting democratically scales.

	Pretest			Post-test		
	Males $n = 92$	Females $n = 59$	All $N = 151$	Males $n = 92$	Females $n = 59$	All $N = 151$
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Reflection on acting democratically	2.21 (0.52)	2.30 (0.66)	2.24 (0.58)	2.07 (0.53)	2.18 (0.59)	2.11 (0.55) *
Reflection on acting in a socially responsible manner	1.91 (0.64)	2.18 (0.69)	2.01 (0.67)	1.92 (0.58)	2.06 (0.68)	1.98 (0.62)
Reflection on dealing with differences	1.83 (0.60)	1.84 (0.66)	1.85 (0.62)	1.80 (0.54)	1.88 (0.62)	1.84 (0.57)

**significant at p = 0.01; * significant at p = 0.05.

on acting in a socially responsible manner ($F(1,149 = 4.499$, $p = 0.036$, $\eta^2 = 0.029$), which means that female students were also more reflective of acting in a socially responsible manner after the intervention than male students. Female and male students did not differ after the intervention with regard to citizenship Reflection on acting democratically and Reflection on dealing with differences.

Discussion and conclusion

A peer education intervention with a series of five lessons was evaluated. Students generally showed no significant differences after the intervention in their attitudes toward lesbian and gay peers, and in their reflection on acting democratically in their daily life, and nor were differences found between males and females with respect to the effects of the intervention, although females generally showed higher scores for their attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers and for their citizenship reflection. We found only a few significant and positive correlations between attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers and citizenship reflection.

A possible explanation for the many non-significant correlations between students' attitudes toward LGB people and their citizenship reflection might be that the attitudes toward LGB people were measured at a different awareness level for the students, compared to citizenship reflection. Attitudes toward LGB people were measured by asking the students to respond to interactions and experiences with LGB people in their daily lives, whereas their citizenship reflections were measured by their responses to statements about acting democratically and socially in general. This difference between embodied daily life events, on the one hand, and general rules, rights, and procedures in the same domain, on the other hand, is confirmed by Horn et al. (2008). An additional explanation for the many non-significant correlations is offered by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. This report mentions that schools often do not make clear what the learning objective of citizenship education is, and LGBT content is taught implicitly in

citizenship education when reference is made to minorities in general (Dutch Inspectorate, 2020). It might be needed to address LGBT content not only in classroom discussions, but also in how learning objectives connect to students' daily experiences of general human rights.

As mentioned above, almost no significant differences were found between the scores after the intervention and the students' pretest scores. These many null effects on attitudes toward LGB classmates might mean that the main aspect of the intervention, contact, and interaction with LGBT peers was not powerful enough to impact students' attitudes. The period of four weeks for the intervention also might have been too short to change attitudes that students had already held for quite some time. In addition, students might not have transferred their attitudes from personal encounters with the LGBT peer educators during the intervention to their attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers in general. The peer education intervention of this study was a service to students at pre-vocational schools, and was part of an externally organized series of activities. It might be the case that the lessons became a stand-alone intervention that was not well integrated into the regular educational program of the school. As illustrated by Snapp et al. (2015), a particular level of integration of the intervention into the regular educational program would probably be necessary to have been effective.

Two significant, though negative, effects of the intervention were found. The negative impact of the intervention on reflection upon acting democratically may be a result of the students' increased awareness that democratic actions such as listening to students' views in class are rare in their school. This increased awareness of democratic actions in school practice might have resulted in lower scores after the intervention compared to students' pretest scores. An alternative explanation for this negative effect on reflection on acting democratically could be the lack of sufficient similarity between our program and the daily citizenship practices of young people as recommended by Ten Dam and Volman (2004). In our intervention, the peer educators were university students and not peers of the same age and from the same school. Students might have considered the peer educators in the current study to be teachers instead of peers, which would make the intervention less strongly part of their daily social practice with their peers.

Another explanation of the negative effects could be that some activities in the intervention were less suitable to engage students in personal interactions with LGBT and heterosexual peer educators in a similar way to interactions in daily life. In the second lesson, peer educators told their personal stories, which helps students build a relationship with their guest teachers. This relationship may be conducive to becoming aware of sexual

prejudice and possibly to feeling empathy for LGBTs. Perhaps in the third lesson with the House of Commons debate, this activity created more distance by encouraging disagreement instead of communality. In the fourth lesson students were asked to think of an activity for making respect for LGBT students visible in school. It might be that students who were not yet ready to commit themselves to supporting peers with a non-heterosexual orientation felt distance or dislike, and did not want to change their attitudes.

In conclusion, the peer education intervention in the current study offers the possibility for bridging the gap between positive attitudes toward encounters with specific members of the LGBT group and support for the human rights of the general target group of LGBT people. As Fulcher (2017) suggests, a peer educator intervention with peer educators who themselves belong to the LGBT target group might relate abstract human rights to a real-life person. However, it seems that students still have to transfer their personal experiences with LGBT individuals to their general attitudes toward LGBT people.

Limitations, implications, and future research

The current study has been carried out in two pre-vocational schools, which means that the conclusions should be read with some caution. However, including a few more schools, either in the intervention group or in a no-treatment group, would not much change the validity of our conclusions. Yet a large-scale study with many pre-vocational schools in the region was not possible because of the large efforts required both for the peer-educator intervention and the training of peer educators. We suggest applying a switching replication design in future research. With such a design, half the students would initially receive the intervention and the other half would participate at a later date. The latter group would form the comparison group for the former, and in the end all the students would participate in the intervention.

Additionally, we measured *reflection* on acting democratically, which provides little information about students' actual behavior. Measures of specific instances of students acting democratically, acting in a socially responsible manner, and dealing with differences, with items about particular democratic actions in the past ten days, would be more in line with the activities in the intervention. Measuring both reflection on acting democratically and actual behavior might provide insights into two types of possible transfer: the first between students' attitudes toward LGBT people and their citizenship reflection, and the second between specific behavior in school and society and general attitudes toward human rights.

An implication that could be derived from the current study refers to the use of personal stories and experiences. This seems to be one of the working mechanisms for peer interventions on LGBT attitudes. Students might be able to link their attitudes toward LGBT people to their daily lives when they are confronted with the personal experiences of peer educators. For example, a personal question like "Do you know how your friends accept you as you are?" can link students' attitude toward LGBT people to their personal experiences of being accepted within a group or class. Also, a question like "In what situations do you feel you are part of the in-group?" might trigger the exchange of many possible personal experiences and personal thoughts, which could make it easier for students to transfer class experiences to their daily life. These questions are examples of the activities of a peer educator intervention that stimulate the exchange of personal experiences with LGBT people, which can make the intervention feel more like a daily life situation. Also, the intervention might be more effective if similar activities are addressed in other parts of the school program or in daily life situations in school. If LGBT is not made visible or discussed at all in school outside the intervention, a series of 50 minute sessions with a peer educator is not enough to change attitudes toward LGBT. An intervention that is more embedded in school program and culture might encourage students to transfer their experiences with safe and comfortable face-to-face personal encounters with LGBTs in class to their attitudes and beliefs about anonymous LGBTs outside school. In such an intervention the peer educators can take on the role of moderator in order to encourage students to transfer their experiences with safe and comfortable face-to-face personal encounters with LGBT people in class to their attitudes and beliefs about anonymous LGBT people outside school. Such a challenging or transformational approach is also what Donahue (2014) pleads for in his discussion of an LGBT-inclusive curriculum, which commonly only includes individual role models. According to Donahue (2014), individual encounters must be placed in the larger collective story of human rights for all. Students' awareness of the relationship between their positive attitude toward individuals and their positive judgments about LGBT people can be a way to change general attitudes toward LGBT people.

Note

1. In the theoretical framework of this paper, we use the terms sexual and gender minorities and the acronym LGBT to indicate a wide spectrum of sexual and gender minorities. In order to increase legibility, we use the terms sexual and gender minority members and LGBTs interchangeably throughout this paper. In the current study, we focused on measuring attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers because we expected that within the context of secondary schools students would have little or no contact with transgender peers.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in this study. The authors also certify that this paper meets the ethical standards of the APA Code of Conduct, and the paper also complies with the authors' national ethical codes of conduct for research integrity.

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