



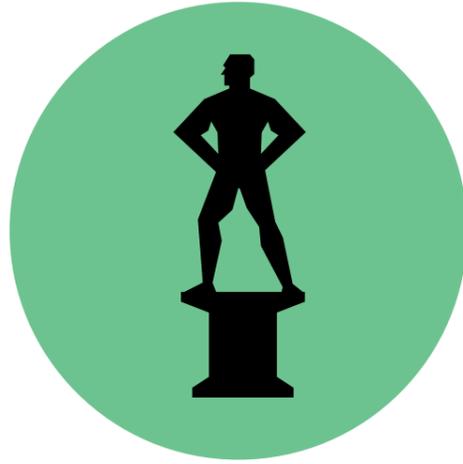
**PEER
EDUCATION**

according to

The

IMAGINE

Project



Peer education is a popular concept. But what is it exactly? What defines a good peer educator, and where do you find them? These are all questions that the teams of MÄN, GoodLad and Emancipator have dealt with before and during the IMAGINE project.

In short, one could say that peer education stands for peers learning from peers. In other words, people from a specific target group transfer knowledge, skills and/or certain behaviors to members of that same target group. In the case of IMAGINE, it is young men who transfer their knowledge, skills and behaviors related to masculinity, gender inequality and sexual violence, to other young men. When applied correctly, it can be a very successful method.

Diversion is a Dutch organization that has been doing a lot of research on peer education. According to them, the condition to the success of peer education is that the peer educator and the peer need to see each other as equals.

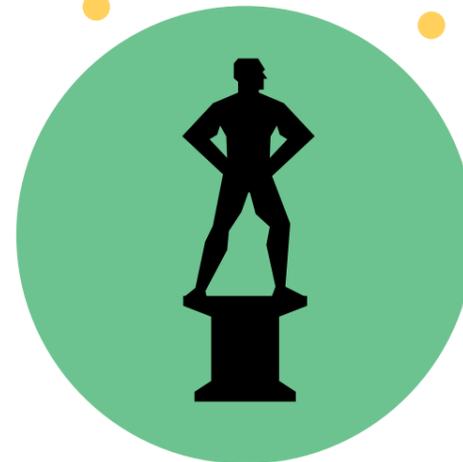


– In peer education, it's not just about transferring information top-down, it's more about creating a dialogue with the target group, Diversion states.

– Therefore, peer education is most suitable for creating a safe space in which topics that are sensitive within the target group can be discussed.



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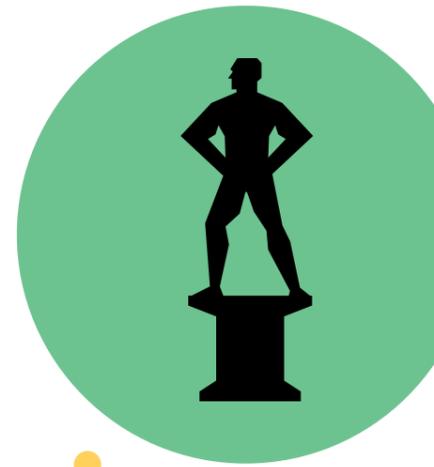


Relatability

The peer educators of the IMAGINE project were required to embody a certain profile and set of skills to be suitable for the project. Since IMAGINE focuses on teenage boys, the peer educators shouldn't be much older to be relatable. Within the IMAGINE project, only male peer educators have been recruited, since the target group exists of boys and young men.

Jurhaily Sling from the Dutch Emancipator team shares his thoughts on this:

– In my opinion, based on my experience with this project so far, I don't think that an IMAGINE peer educator necessarily needs to be a man. A peer educator needs to first and foremost be someone who is able to speak and act in a way that enables them to enter the world of the target group and reshape that world. I definitely believe that women can connect to a group of boys as well.



Sling shares an experience:

– I remember this one workshop where we were discussing whether or not a girl in a short skirt or hot pants is asking for sexual attention or not, and most of the boys said ‘yes’ to this question. My male colleague and I weren’t able to change their minds on this. Then the teacher, who was also present, stood up, and shared her experience. She told about this time when she went jogging in sports leggings, when two boys on a motorbike touched her on the butt and yelled all kinds of things. She explained how this made her feel. Now that the boys heard this story, most of them wanted to beat up the two guys on the motorbike. This woman was their teacher, whom they respected, and that made them think twice about harassment. So in some cases, it’s better to hear from a woman than from a man.

This example raises interesting questions regarding peer education in relation to identity politics: is it possible for a male-only target group to fully grasp a complex issue such as sexual violence?

Jurhaily Sling:

– When I’m leading a workshop, I definitely feel like I’m one of the guys, I never position myself above anyone else. When a guy says that he likes to make certain sexist jokes, I say to him: listen, I have made the same jokes, I thought they were funny as well, I still find them funny sometimes. But I know they are wrong, so let’s just be honest about that. That’s when we really connect in a way that no outsider could connect to the group, and that’s when you can have an impact as a peer educator.

Erik Schrammel, from the Swedish team of MÄN, recognizes this:

– I meet a lot of guys that say the same things that I said ten years ago so I actually understand where they are coming from and what it means. I think it’s a very gradual process to gain awareness.

– It comes down to using your gut-feeling and being sensitive about when to use which strategy. I know that there are some places where I can discuss sexuality freely with the boys, but if a woman were to do the same thing, she would be judged, and they would call her a slut. This double standard makes things very complex, but then again: it is exactly this kind of sexism that we’re trying to eradicate, Sling adds.

A very important element of peer education is the ability to be relatable to the group. Erik Schrammel applied two other qualities in his search for peer educators: experience in working with young people, and experience in working with any kind of gender related topic.

– The applicants were asked to describe their skills and experiences in these two fields. We graded them by scoring their skills in both fields. And we anonymized the application, to make sure that there was no bias and that we were only scoring how well they had described these competences.

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Credibility

Another quality, according to Sling, is credibility:

– You need to believe what you’re saying, you need to stand for it and live it. Otherwise, these kids will definitely notice. These are teenagers who are going through very confusing years of their lives already, so they are not in for someone who is giving them mixed signals. This is the very basis to me.

– You need to share that fundamental understanding of gender inequality to be able to work with our material, because our material is always based on this analysis of power relations between men and women as groups in society. In MÄN, we ask all peer educators have to reflect upon this analysis and describe what parts they agree with. This way we make sure that the applicants share our vision, Schrammel adds.

Genuine communication

Subscribing to certain values is one thing, but a peer educator needs to be able to transfer these to the participants as well.

– When it comes to communication, a peer educator needs to have the skills to listen, ask questions, summarize and paraphrase. When you do this well, you can get to the core of what a kid is sharing. But you need to be able to understand their language and speak their language as well, Sling says.

– For example, I never use the word feminism during my trainings, because that’s a word that makes them lose interest. So instead, I talk about personal boundaries and autonomy, for example, which are words that do resonate to them. And then afterwards, I say: we just had a very feminist conversation, because we discussed gender equality. That’s when they get it. If you can adjust to their world successfully, then I don’t care if you are a white peer educator standing in front of a group of black kids, or a gay peer educator standing in front of a group of straight kids. When you are genuinely interested in what they have to say, and listen to their stories, then most of the times it will work out. However, sometimes there are situations where for example a peer educator of color understands more about the lives and the minds of a group of black and brown kids. So, we should at least make an effort to look for diversity among our peer educators.

Recruitment

So far, it appears that relatability, credibility and genuine communication skills are important competences of a peer educator. But how do you find the people who have these competences?

– We used our external networks, consisting of our social media followers and people who read our newsletter, our internal network, consisting of current activists and volunteers that are active within our organization, and then we also used Facebook ads where we targeted men between the ages of 20 and 30, Schrammel says.

After the applications came in, a selection needed to be made.

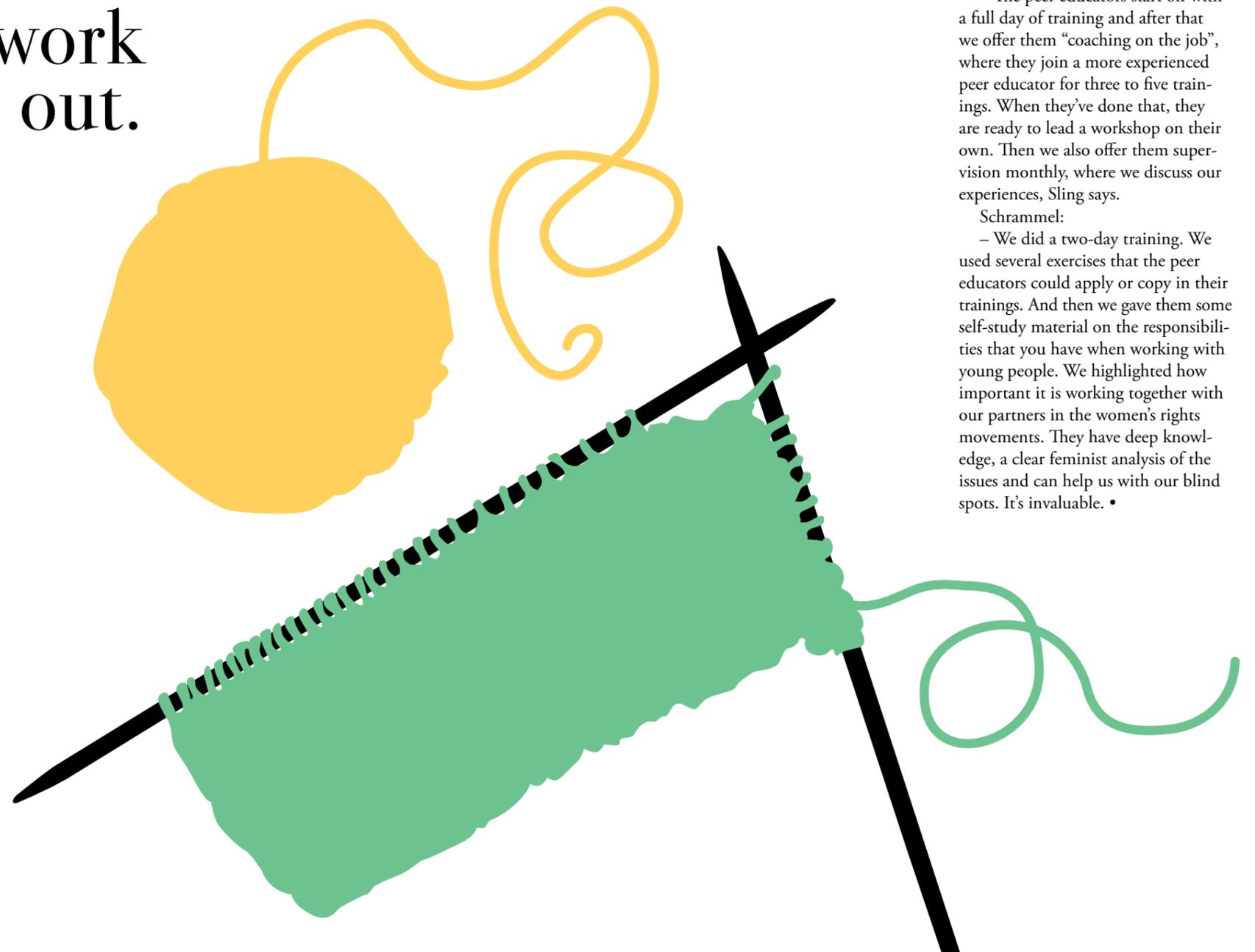
– We scored all the applications based on their experience in working with youth and experience in working with gender related topics, Schrammel describes. Jurhaily Sling used a different approach after receiving the applications:

– I decided to arrange a few meetings where we would share a meal and have a talk in small groups consisting of all the applicants. We discussed gender related issues and based on the impressions that I got from these meetings, I could already make a selection.

– The peer educators start off with a full day of training and after that we offer them “coaching on the job”, where they join a more experienced peer educator for three to five trainings. When they’ve done that, they are ready to lead a workshop on their own. Then we also offer them supervision monthly, where we discuss our experiences, Sling says.

Schrammel:

– We did a two-day training. We used several exercises that the peer educators could apply or copy in their trainings. And then we gave them some self-study material on the responsibilities that you have when working with young people. We highlighted how important it is working together with our partners in the women’s rights movements. They have deep knowledge, a clear feminist analysis of the issues and can help us with our blind spots. It’s invaluable. •



Peer Education according to The IMAGINE Project
by Frans Blokhuis