



## Youth workers vs teachers

While youth workers have been involved in the delivery of in-school programs for many years, a paper by Tim Corney in the September edition of *Youth Studies Australia* (v.25, n.3) highlights recent changes in the role of youth workers within schools, and the challenges these changes present to students, teachers and youth workers.

Increasing numbers of youth workers are being employed in schools to meet students' welfare needs and to provide support to at-risk students. In Victoria, 'student welfare' has been incorporated as a specialist stream within Graduate Diploma of Education courses accredited by the Victorian Institute of Teaching, enabling youth workers to be employed as teachers in schools. These developments are blurring the long-standing professional boundaries between teaching

and youth work practice in school-based contexts.

The potential convergence of the roles of teacher, youth worker and welfare officer is not without its problems, given what Corney describes as the 'historical antipathy' between youth workers and teachers (and school administrations). This antipathy is based on the differing ways that youth workers and teachers relate to young people in the course of their work and the differences each perceive in their role and position within the school context. For example, teachers may perceive youth workers as performing a 'subserving' and 'supplementary' role to teachers, while youth workers may perceive their work as being more targeted and 'specialist' compared with the generalist role of teachers. Corney says that these perceptions have often resulted in 'negative or distrustful

relationships between youth workers and teachers'.

A number of scholars have explained this antipathy in terms of the conflicting 'aims, cultures and procedures' of the 'community education' framework in which youth work is traditionally located and the aims, cultures and procedures of mainstream educational frameworks.

Corney's paper identifies the need for 'further documentation and development of the literature pertaining to the practice and pedagogy of youth work in schools and its relationship to the work of trained teachers', particularly in light of government initiatives such as the ACT government's commitment to place youth workers in all public high schools and the proposed 'blending of the roles of youth workers, teachers and school welfare officers' in Victoria.

### Extracts from Youth Monitor YSA V.25 N.3

#### Worrying trend in maths education levels

A study conducted by the International Centre of Excellence for Education in Mathematics (ICE-EM) revealed a 20% reduction in the number of Australian Year 12 students studying intermediate- and advanced-level mathematics over the past decade. ICE-EM director Garth Gaudry said that the results indicate that Australia may be heading towards a 'dire shortage of mathematically-trained people'. The study indicated that Queensland and Western Australia experienced the largest reductions advanced maths student numbers (6/6/06: *Australian*, p.3, 15; *West Australian*, p.1).

#### Sex ed program gets the nod

An external evaluation of a trial sex education program for South Australian high school students in Years 8–10 has recommended that the course be expanded to all high schools across the state. Experts from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University found that the three-year program, known as 'Share', gave students more confidence to speak to their parents about sex and relationships and generated 'slight improvements in the teenagers' ability to practise safe sex and refuse unwanted sex' (*Adelaide Advertiser*, 14/7/06, p.1).

# Abstracts from recent education-related youth studies

## Two steps forward and one step back? Australian secondary students' sexual health knowledge and behaviours 1992–2002

P.A. Aguis, S. Dyson, M.K. Pitts, A. Mitchell & A.M.A. Smith, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, v.38, n.3, 2006, pp.247-52.

This study compares the sexual health knowledge and behaviour of Year 10 and Year 12 students across three waves of the Australian Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health (1992, 1997, 2002). A total of 6,781 students from 263 government schools across Australia took part in the surveys, which measured student knowledge of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs) and hepatitis through a series of true-or-false questions. Students were asked to report their experiences of sexual intercourse, number of sexual partners and consistency of condom use. While surveys reported high levels of accurate knowledge about HIV/AIDS, there was a decline in knowledge levels between 1992 and 2002. Knowledge about hepatitis and STIs increased in each survey, but remained 'unacceptably low'. An increase in sexual behaviour was recorded over the 10-year period, most notably among Year 10 students. Consistency in condom use improved, but a 'considerable minority' of students still reported using condoms only 'sometimes' in 2002. Personalised, gender-specific sexual health and behaviour education programs are required to provide students with relevant safe sex information.

## Homophobic bullying and schools – Responding to the challenge

I. Warwick, R. Goodrich, P. Aggleton & E. Chase, *Youth & Policy*, n.91, 2006, pp.59-73.

In 2004, the UK Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned the University of London's Thomas Coram Research Unit to review the extent and impact of homophobic bullying in schools and to identify ways to control it. Data were gathered from British, Australian and American studies and publications relating to homophobia in schools and from semi-structured interviews with 28 'key informants' with relevant expertise. A thematic analysis of the data revealed that 30–50% of gay, lesbian and bisexual young people experience 'homophobic harassment in an educational setting'. Such bullying often went unreported and potentially had serious long-term emotional, physical and educational effects on students. Homophobic bullying was experienced by both same-sex attracted students and those whom their peers perceived 'not to act in ways they should for their gender'. While direct, whole-school action is needed to address heteronormative school cultures that potentially legitimise homophobia, homophobic bullying can also be addressed through existing anti-bullying programs and programs designed to make schools a 'safe and positive learning environment for young people'.

## Extracts from Youth Monitor ...CONTINUED

### Project tracks student values

Findings from a 7-year study that followed 26 Victorian students through their secondary school careers is about to be published as a book in Australia. The study, called *The 12 to 18 Project*, aimed to see whether the 'values, ambitions and expectations' of participating students were influenced by their particular school environments. Each of the four schools involved in the study was found to have 'strong effects' on the values of its students. One of the study's authors, University of Melbourne professor Lyn Yates, said that the research identified a tension among the values promoted by the different schools. 'We have schools producing people who care about each other and schools producing people whose main agenda is to do better than the other. The real challenge for schools is to produce a balance between these two approaches,' she said (*Age Education* supplement, 10/7/06, p.5).

### Phone school

Phone bill management has been added to the Year 9 commerce curriculum at Liverpool Girls High School in Sydney. Heather Brown, head of social science at the school, designed the module in response to reports of high mobile phone bills among her students, including an instance where one student accumulated a \$2,000 bill in a month. The course teaches students to compare the benefits of different mobile phone plans and pre-paid cards and alerts them to the 'hidden costs' of some mobile services. Deputy principal Maria Allan said that 'many of the students didn't realise the difference between calls made during peak and off-peak times'. The course is sponsored by the Commonwealth Bank Foundation (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17/5/06, p.1).



## ➤ Youth Field Xpress

*Youth Field Xpress* is a monthly electronic newsletter published by ACYS. It provides a summary of current issues in youth research and news from organisations working in the youth field. The September 2006 edition contains a number of items relevant to the education sector. To view the newsletter, visit: <http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/yfx>

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