



Breaking a spell of silence

The Tasmanian evaluation of the 2006 Pride & Prejudice program



In this paper, published in the March 2007 edition of *Youth Studies Australia* (v.26, n.1), Doug Bridge discusses findings from the Tasmanian evaluation of the Pride & Prejudice program, a program developed by Deakin University and the City of Greater Geelong to help teachers address homophobia and associated bullying within classroom and other school contexts. Following positive findings from the trial of the program in Victoria, the Tasmanian Department of Education commissioned the University of Tasmania's Faculty of Education to conduct a formal evaluation of the program among Tasmanian secondary students in 2006.

Rather than explicitly seeking to change students' attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality, Pride & Prejudice aims to create a 'safe, supporting and nurturing' classroom environment where students can express their viewpoints on sexual diversity and explore 'social differences, discrimination, gender issues and how these relate to gay and lesbian people'. It also provides students with 'opportunities for dialogue with gay men and lesbians'. The interactive program is delivered in six 45–55 minute whole-class sessions.

Sixty-one Year 8 and 9 students from three Tasmanian schools (two government high schools and one Catholic independent school) took part in the program in August–September 2006. Participants also completed a number of pre- and post-program assessments, including assessments of their self-esteem, their attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, their attitudes towards race and an evaluation of the content and delivery of the program itself.

Data analysis found that students' attitudes towards gay men and lesbians were 'significantly more positive' after participation in the program, mirroring the results of the Victorian evaluation. Neither self-esteem nor racism was correlated with homophobia among students. Students assessed the program highly in terms of its content and delivery. Despite this positive evaluation, Bridge suggests that the program alone is not enough to address 'deeper issues of heteronormativity and homophobia in schools', recommending that the program be used as a 'starting point for the development of further, comprehensive anti-homophobia programs'.

Further information about Pride & Prejudice can be found at:
www.prideandprejudice.com.au

Extracts from Youth Monitor YSA v.25 N.4

Teens cheat on ethics

A teen ethics survey conducted in the USA last year found that 60% of the 36,000-plus high school students surveyed said that they had cheated on a test. Approximately one in three students admitted to plagiarising material from the internet to complete a school assignment. Adding a certain amount of confusion to the findings, 27% of students said that they had even lied on at least one of the questions in the survey! The national survey was conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics (*Age Education* supplement, 23/10/06, p.6).

Students not so hot on Aussie history

A report commissioned by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has raised concerns about Australian students' lack of knowledge of Australian history and Australian political and legal systems. The report found that 84% of Year 6 and 77% of Year 10 students did not know what Australia Day commemorates, while 80% of Year 6 and 65% of Year 10 students did not know why some Australians refer to Australia Day as 'Invasion Day'. Only half of the Year 6 students and 39% of the Year 10 students surveyed achieved a proficient standard in civics and citizenship, according to the report. The report's authors called for more targeted, formal and consistent teaching of civics and citizenship in Australian schools (*Australian*, 27/11/06, pp.1-2).

Abstracts from recent education-related youth studies

Examining school connectedness as a mediator of school climate effects

A. Loukas, R. Suzuki & K.D. Horton, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, v.16, n.3, 2006, pp.491-502.

Defined as 'the quality and frequency of interpersonal interactions', school climate is regarded as contributing to the behavioural and emotional adjustment of students. To examine the role of school connectedness as a mediator of the effects of school climate, researchers studied 489 10-14-year-old middle school students (51% female) from a suburban area of central Texas, USA. In the first wave of data collection, students completed questionnaires measuring their perceptions of aspects of school climate (cohesion, friction, competition among students and overall satisfaction with classes), school connectedness, personal conduct problems and depressive symptoms. These measures were compared with a second measure of student conduct problems and depressive symptoms, conducted one year later. Path analysis revealed that school connectedness mediated the relationship between student-perceived cohesion, friction and overall satisfaction with classes and student conduct problems reported one year later. Further research could extend these findings by including parent, teacher and peer reports of student adjustment.

Promoting social inclusion in schools: A group-randomised trial of effects on student health risk behaviour and wellbeing

G.C. Patton, L. Bond, J.B. Carlin, L. Thomas, H. Butler, S. Glover, R. Catalano & G. Bowes, *American Journal of Public Health*, v.96, n.9, 2006, pp.1582-87.

The Gatehouse Project intervention strategy was designed to 'promote a sense of social inclusion and connection in secondary schools', using student feedback about the social climate of a school to determine 'priorities for action'. A cluster-randomised trial was conducted in 25 schools (both government and Catholic/independent) across Victoria to determine whether the intervention affected measures of student health risk behaviour and emotional wellbeing. In 1997, 1999 and 2001, Year 8 students completed questionnaires measuring their substance use, antisocial behaviour, initiation of sexual intercourse, emotional problems and school commitment. After four years, data analysis showed that the prevalence of 'marked health risk behaviours' was 25% lower among schools in the intervention group than those in the control group. No significant differences were recorded in measures of student emotional problems in either intervention or control schools. These findings support the further development of tailored interventions in which the 'social milieu' of a school is used to generate better health and learning outcomes for students.



Extracts from Youth Monitor ...CONTINUED

Later starts may benefit sleepy youth

Oxford University neuroscientist Professor Russell Foster believes that secondary schools should begin classes in the afternoon to better accommodate teenagers' sleeping patterns and improve their academic performance. Professor Foster said that teenagers' body clocks can be delayed by two to four hours compared to those of adults. He also noted that later starting times adopted by schools in Germany and the USA have resulted in improved exam results and reduced rates of truancy and depression among students. Similar results have emanated from two Victorian schools that changed their starting times to 10am, according to research conducted by clinical psychologist Andrew Fuller (14/1/07: *Sun Herald*, p.3; *Sunday Tasmanian*, p.22; *Sunday Times*, p.29; *Herald Sun*, 18/1/07, p.18).

School leavers uncertain about future directions

A nationwide survey of 8,000 Year 12 students suggests that the majority are unsure about their future career path. The survey was conducted by Brisbane-based not-for-profit group the Australian Youth Development Organisation. When asked about their future directions after leaving school, almost one-quarter of students surveyed reported having 'absolutely no idea' what to do, one-third were 'very unsure', 30% had 'some clarity' and 14% were 'absolutely certain'. AYDA director Bernie Kelly said that an increasing number of students were feeling pressured to make career decisions despite their uncertainty (*Sunday Mail*, 31/12/06, p.21; *Herald Sun*, 6/1/07, p.11).

➤ 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 December 2006 edition contains a number of items relevant to the education sector. To view the newsletter, visit: www.acys.utas.edu.au/yfx

◆ Youth Studies Australia

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