

Sexual Identity and the Nature of Things

When children reach adolescence and become more aware of their sexual nature and its implications, boys see themselves attracted, perhaps sexually, to each other, as do girls. By the time they reach adulthood some continue to do so throughout their life, yet the majority will be attracted to the opposite sex. (See Appendix 1) Any programme aimed at assisting young people at this time, should be based on an understanding of this, and be balanced and moderate in composition.

The unbalanced nature of the programme devised by the Victorian group Safe Schools Coalition Victoria , (www.safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au), given exclusively to same sex attraction and sexual diversity, is not suitable to meet the needs of students.

This approach cannot be regarded as meeting best practice criteria. It should not be used in Tasmanian schools.

Statements of Principle

- 1) Parents welcome moves by the Department of Education in Tasmania to tackle the issue of school bullying. However they need to have confidence in the material being used.
- 2) Any programme must unite the students and the staff, not bring about division in the school community.
- 3) The involvement of parents is essential to keep them informed and to assist good communication with their children.
- 4) Best practice requires a holistic approach to targeting bullying in schools, a program that addresses all the issues that affect children.

The programme Safe Schools Hub (www.safeschoolshub.edu.au) fulfils the above criteria. Available nationally, it brings school staff, parents and students into a partnership and deals with the many issues about which children are bullied, including sexual orientation. Any programme must assure the safety of all students.

Use of the Victorian programme has the capacity to create division among staff and among students, thus compromising the smooth running of schools. For immature and vulnerable students the distraction caused by such emphasis on sexual diversity is unhelpful and likely to jeopardise their educational progress.

The proposed Victorian program has the capacity to:

- Sideline parents and override their authority
- Create division and anxiety
- Encourage disrespect for legitimate authority by linking with control groups outside the purview of school and parental authority.
- Manipulate vulnerable children... the visibility of in-crowd v the rest
- Promote divisive politics among the school community
- Encourage inappropriate use of school technology not necessarily supervised by the teachers or parents.

See Quotes from the material ... Stand Out

Appendix 2

During adolescence homosexual attractions are more fluid than fixed

Adolescence is well recognized for its sexual fluidity and instability of homosexual attractions. In 2007, Savin-Williams and Ream conducted a large longitudinal study that documented changes in attraction so great between the ages of 16 and 17 that they questioned whether the concept of sexual orientation had any meaning for adolescents with homosexual attractions. Seventy-five percent of adolescents who had some initial homosexual attraction between the ages of 17-21 changed to experience heterosexual attraction only. This is in stark contrast to the stability they found among adolescents experiencing heterosexual attractions. Among these adolescents, fully 98% retained their heterosexual-only attractions into adulthood. Another study demonstrating significant change away from homosexual attractions in adolescence involved 13,840 youth. Of those initially “unsure” of their sexual orientation, 66% became exclusively heterosexual.

Savin-Williams, R.C. and Ream, G.L. (2007) “Prevalence and Stability of Sexual Orientation Components During Adolescence and Young Adulthood.” Archives of Sexual Behavior 36, 385-394.

Quotes from the material ... Stand Out (www.safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au),

The proposed Victorian program has the capacity to:

Sideline parents and override their authority.

“Can you access websites from school computers that give information about sexuality, being intersex or gender diversity? Some students don’t have access to the internet at home, or it is monitored by their family so having access at school is really important.” **Stand Out**

Create division and anxiety

“Keep a log of every instance of homophobic or transphobic bullying you see or hear. Record the time, who was involved, what happened and who saw it. Record all incidents, even things you might consider ‘small’, such as name-calling or negative language. When you and your friends have collected a number of incidents, take them to a trusted teacher, year level coordinator, or principal and tell them what is going on. If something happens that needs urgent attention, tell a teacher straight away.” **Stand Out**

“Students across Australia have already set up gender and sexual diversity groups in their schools. These groups are sometimes called ‘Stand Out Groups’, ‘Gay-Straight Alliances’, ‘Queer-Straight Alliance’, ‘Diversity Groups’, or have their own unique name.”

“What advice would you give to other students? Be confident about whatever you do - the more you believe in what you’re doing, the more everyone else will. And don’t even worry about the kids who won’t appreciate what you’re doing. They’re probably douchebags anyway.” **Stand Out**

Encourage disrespect for legitimate authority by linking with control groups outside the purview of school and parental authority.

“For gender diverse students it can be hard to get everyone just to use the name and pronoun preferred by that person (e.g. he, she or they). It makes a massive difference if you can do this, and get everyone else to do it too.

If you have difficulty changing people’s language, you can report it to the school, or another adult. If all else fails and you still feel that your school has not done enough to challenge language, or respect students’ identities, you can check out one of the support organisations at the back of this guide.” **Stand Out**

Manipulate vulnerable children... visibility of the in-crowd V the rest.

“There is a whole range of other things you can use to spread the message about supporting gender identity, sexual diversity and intersex status, and challenging transphobia and homophobia.

This includes things like posters, stickers, wrist bands, pens, flags, badges, t-shirts and more! You can get a lot of these

things for free from local organisations or groups, and a bunch of them from Minus18 and Safe Schools Coalition. These items are really great to have at events or activities to give away to supportive students.” **Stand Out**

Promotion of divisive politics among the school community

“Speakout!

Invite some guest speakers, or line up some students and teachers to come along and ‘speakout’ on a relevant topic. It could be ‘why we support equal marriage’ or ‘why our school supports gender diversity’. Book a room or hall and advertise around the school.

Encourage the whole school to participate in events like IDAHOT, Pride, Mardi Gras, or even an equal marriage rally.” **Stand Out**

Encourage inappropriate use of school technology not necessarily unsupervised by the teachers or parents

Create an online space

Set up a website, blog, or closed Facebook page for your group. Ask a supportive teacher whether you can put a link to the group on your school’s website. **Stand Out**

Students risk becoming locked in to a stance about their sexuality due to immoderate social media postings which they later regret. Possibilities for cyber bullying can be stepped up.

