



feature article

Anti-homophobia education in PDHPE

Our society is becoming more aware of the forms and effects of discrimination and less tolerant of violence and harassment. Homophobia is one form of violence and harassment which has been identified as a problem within school communities.

How can PDHPE play a role in both reducing homophobic violence and improving the health and well-being of gay and lesbian young people in our schools?

About homophobia

Statistics from the NSW Anti-Violence Project and the NSW Police Service show that the major perpetrators of homophobic violence are young people, mostly male, aged between 16 and 24. Lesbians are three times more likely to experience harassment and violence than gay men and six times more than the heterosexual community. Gay men are more likely to be victims of vicious one-off attacks. Since 1990 there have been 30 gay hate related murders in Australia. Authorities in the NSW Police Service are also aware of a large number of unreported attacks, due mostly to the victims' fear of experiencing more harassment for making their complaint public or the fear of disclosing their sexuality.

Homophobia appears in different forms and it is important to be able to identify the category in which you are working.

Personal or internalised homophobia stems from a personal belief that homosexuality is unacceptable. This belief may be held by the young gay and lesbian people themselves, which can result in low self-confidence and self-harming behaviours.

Interpersonal homophobia may manifest itself as name-calling, discrimination or verbal and physical harassment, and is a useful focus for school initiatives to reduce homophobia.

Institutional homophobia refers to ways in which government, business, churches and other organisations discriminate against people on the basis of sexual orientation.

Cultural homophobia is more hidden and refers to social standards and stereotypes which tend to portray only heterosexuality. Young gay and lesbian people can be adversely affected when they lack positive role models or information about homosexuality. This can leave them feeling isolated from their friends, families and community.

Where does anti-homophobia education fit into the 7-10 PDHPE syllabus?

The following content strands and key ideas provide the scope for teaching and learning about homophobia in PDHPE.

Growth and development

A significant number of physical, emotional and social changes occur during adolescence.

Sexuality is an integral part of an adolescent's development.

Interpersonal relationships

Relationships change and take many forms.

The peer group may provide support and reinforcement for its members.

The development and maintenance of positive relationships relies on communication and consideration for others.

Positive relationships involve acceptance of responsibility and acknowledgment of individual rights.

Relationships are influenced by and also influence an individual's well-being.

Personal awareness

Individuals can take steps to develop and maintain their own self-esteem and support the self-esteem of others.

Developing a sense of comfort with others requires individuals to become accepting of the right of others to be different.

Personal choice

There are many decisions individuals must make in relation to sexual behaviour.

How can we implement anti-homophobia education in PDHPE programs?

Here are some ideas from schools which have successfully introduced anti-homophobia education into their PDHPE programs.

In your faculty

- Begin with a faculty meeting to analyse current programs and identify strengths and weaknesses. Liaise with the principal, student welfare team, parent body and school counsellor and build up a picture of student needs.
- Make use of the Department's resource *Resources for teaching against violence*. A particularly interesting stimulus is the audio tape of the panel of gay and lesbian people. Spend time discussing myths and concerns, in order for each member of the faculty to feel comfortable with the material and gain the necessary understanding of the issues involved.
- Ensure that the issue of homophobia is included in the permission note to parents to comply with the Department's *Controversial Issues Policy*. If not, a supplementary letter home to parents may be needed to gain active consent.
- Decide upon an approach for the faculty. You may decide to incorporate new activities into existing units of work on such areas as relationships, communication and sexuality. Alternatively you may decide to introduce new units of work.

In your programs

Here are a few examples of units of work that could be developed.

- A Year 7/8 unit on "Appreciating difference". Include activities which highlight differences between people, in terms of sexual orientation, disability, culture, religion and so on. Discussion of anti-discrimination laws, promotion of tolerance, empathy and non-violent solutions to conflict can also be included.
- Develop a new Year 9/10 unit based on sexual decision making which provides information and activities to examine influences, responsibilities and support in the development of sexuality.

- Include anti-homophobia education as part of the 25-hour Personal Development and Health Course for senior students.

A number of groups will conduct workshops for students and staff on issues surrounding homophobia. One strategy is to present a panel of young gay and lesbian people to talk about their experiences. This can dispel many myths and stereotypes related to homosexuality. Panels need to be carefully planned. The student welfare consultant or PDHPE consultant in your district can assist with advice.

In your teaching

- Do you manage your classroom in such a way that students are aware of non-violent alternatives to conflict and have opportunities to develop skills in communication, decision-making and developing positive relationships?
- Do you assume that a percentage of your students are gay and lesbian and therefore make teaching practices inclusive?
- Does the school have a policy that states discrimination is unacceptable, making specific references to homophobia?
- Do you display books, posters, videos and other resources in public areas of the school?

What resources are available to support anti-homophobia education?

- *Mates*. Video. NSW Department of School Education
- *Resources for Teaching Against Violence*. NSW Department of School Education
- *Out in the Bush*. Video. NSW Department of School Education
- Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project. Phone: 1800 637 360
- Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service. Phone: 1800 805 379; (02) 9207 2800
- Family Planning Association. Phone: (02) 9716 6099 (regional services available)
- PDHPE and student welfare consultants in your district office.

Watch out for the *Homophobia—what are you scared of?* campaign material which will be advertised in *School Education News* in terms 3 and 4.

Thank you to Kathryn Steward (PDHPE Consultant, Penrith and Mt Druitt Districts) for her contribution to this article.