

What Works?

when tackling bullying in schools
Anti-Bullying Network National Conference, May 2003

May 2003



ORGANISATION Family Planning Association, Scotland

FOCUS Tackling Homophobic Bullying

Can you briefly describe how your initiative or project helps to tackle bullying?

I am currently involved in 2 relevant strands of work

- 1) In March 2003 the fpa published (I co-authored this with my colleague Adrienne Hanna) *Equality Diversity Inclusion: Challenging Homophobia*. It is a 3 day training course for public sector workers (incl teachers) with an accompanying documentary video of lesbian and gay men's experiences of homophobia and how they deal with it. The aim of the course is to help teachers (and others) to understand the nature of homophobia and heterosexism and develop skills in challenging it in their practice and work place. This was a direct response to teachers telling us that they did not feel able to tackle either homophobia or address same sex relationships in sex education classes.
- 2) I am involved in writing a report following examination of relevant literature on homophobic bullying in schools and its effect on the health of LGB adults. This work was commissioned by Gay Men's Health UK in London and was funded by the Elton John Foundation. As such it should attract wide circulation and we hope it will impact on policy relating to how schools address this issue.

How is this initiative being monitored and evaluated?

- 1) We evaluate each training course immediately on delivery by getting verbal and written feedback from participants.
- 2) Gay Men's Health UK meet with us and are steering the writing process throughout this work.

What are some of the biggest challenges faced by teachers and young people or members of your organisation, in implementing the initiative or project?

Homophobia is so rife in schools and unlike other forms of bullying is mixed in with the moral debate of whether same sex relationships are or are not acceptable. This complicates the issue greatly for many people particularly those influenced strongly by religious institutions. Homophobia is also strongly linked to masculinity and this perpetuates it for boys who do not fit the typical masculine role.

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These are huge issues to tackle that cut across many aspects of Scottish culture, so there is no quick fix. What is needed is a commitment to supporting cultural and social change over time. This will take time but I believe that through a combination of experiential learning backed up by policy, we can change how Scotland and Scottish schools tackle homophobia.

What has worked well?

Those people who have participated in our training say it really helps them recognise the issues and leaves them feeling more skilled to challenge homophobia.

What did not work and what lessons were learned?

There are big gaps in policy that recognise the extent of homophobic bullying and there is little in place to make sure it is recognised and dealt with effectively. At times teachers actively condone homophobia.

The numbers of teachers who need to address this is huge as I would like to see all teachers having the opportunity to explore homophobia in depth. I believe in the value of taking time out for experiential learning that helps teachers really look at the roots of oppression and how this has impacted on their personal and professional attitudes. However, time out is an issue within our education system.

Future plans?

Deliver our training to as many teachers and educators as we can.

Ensure our research report receives maximum publicity and circulation.

Any materials the school/institution is willing to share or relevant publications that are for sale?

Equality Diversity Inclusion: Challenging Homophobia. S. Stewart and A. Hannah (2003) Published by FPA. It is available for sale at £29.99 plus £5 p&p.



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