

Diversity in school curriculum

by HARLEY DENNETT
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Although comprehensive diversity training has become part of public school life, last week's That's So Gay conference in Sydney was told that compulsory sexual diversity discussions have been dumped, simply on the whim of individual principals.

Teachers claimed some principals lied to the Education Department about whether senior students had completed the Crossroads program. In 25 hours spread across years 11 and 12, Crossroads looks at

defining intimate relationships, sexual identity, and rights and responsibilities in sexual relationships, including consent.

In 2005 NSW's then Education Minister Carmel Tebbutt banned a Crossroads question asking students to "consider how these pressures [to find a partner] may affect the way gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people see themselves", after a conservative backlash.

A media storm ensued last week, when it was implied that the NSW Government, using the conference as a mouthpiece, was demanding the use of the word "partner" (instead of, for example, "husband" or "wife") in schools –

a claim denied by the government and the conference. The ABC's *Media Watch* dubbed the story a "cynical, shameful beat-up".

This beat-up detracted from a number of important issues raised at the conference, at a time when the NSW Government has been accused of failing gay students.

One issue discussed was the Education Department's over-zealous internet filters. In late 2007, the department's chief information officer boasted of a new filter that blocked any material that hadn't been pre-approved. This includes information about support services.

"Whenever you type in 'gay',

or 'gay youth support services' to a search engine, it comes back with 'this is unauthorised' – what kind of message does that send?", asked Juvenile Justice school deputy principal Daryl Hood.

NSW AIDS Council CEO, Stevie Clayton, said too many same-sex attracted students were abused at school, making it crucial that they and their teachers could access support while at school.

"It is most likely that they will look for that help on the internet, so it is dangerous to deny them that access," Clayton said.

However, some Sydney schools have embraced diversity awareness programs, teaching years 7 and 8 students to

recognise homophobic bullying and understand the barriers victims face in reporting it. Year 9 and 10 students are asked to clarify their personal values and challenge negative community attitudes that demonise sexual minorities.

Julie Mumford, from Macarthur High, said girls in her classes often didn't have the vocabulary to express their values, even when supportive of sexual diversity.

"We hear the words 'normal' and 'not normal' over and over again," Mumford said. "We spend a lot of time repeatedly correcting [hurtful] language. At that age, they don't want to be seen as different; they want to be seen

as normal."

Diversity programs aim to change classrooms and playgrounds from centres for bullying into safe places, but teachers warn that some principals undervalue diversity programs, which are not externally assessed.

A spokesman for the Department of Education and Training said discrimination and harassment were not tolerated in public schools, and its policies required principals to act against such behaviour.

Sydney Star Observer,
www.ssonet.com.au

Open Day at the Archives



The Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives proudly presents its Open Day this Saturday, 27 April with tours of the Archives, special guests and the opening of new collections.

A new collection honouring the Australasian Lesbian Movement will be unveiled by special guests Phyllis Papps and Francesca Curtis. The ALM, formerly the Australian chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis, ran from 1970 to 1973, and the unique collection includes a near-complete set of its newsletters, recordings of

television interviews conducted by Phyllis and Francesca, plus an interview conducted for the Archives' oral history project.

Dr Catherine Barrett will be another of the Archives' guests at Open Day. She will discuss the findings of a recent study by Vintage Men and the Matrix Guild of Victoria, and funded by the Reichstein Foundation, on the experiences of GLBTI seniors in aged care services. There will be a particular focus on the importance of history in shaping seniors' experiences of aged care.

Also on display is a collection

of family photos from around 1928, complete with their extraordinary story, recently donated by the daughter of a Melbourne gay man. A number of new acquisitions will also be on display.

Join the team at the Archives (at the Victorian AIDS Council) from 1pm to 5pm for tours, talks and refreshments. And if this piques your interest in our history, ask about becoming an Archives volunteer.

ALGA, Victorian AIDS Council
6 Clarendon St, South Yarra

HEADLINES

Beat alert

Users of Melbourne's Point Ormond beat are advised to take care after a gay man had his car stolen from the site last week. In what is thought to be a set-up, the incident occurred after the man's car keys were stolen from his pocket by another beat user. St Kilda police have been notified and the theft is under investigation.

ACON campaign

If you are willing to defend your friends from homophobic slurs, why doesn't racism elicit the same response? This is the question posed by ACON's latest social campaign, "Would you wear it?", as the health organisation broadens its scope to take on the subject of racism in the GLBT community. Featuring images of GLBT community members from various ethnic backgrounds alongside slogans that read "Asians are all the same" or "Aboriginals are all the same", ACON is raising awareness and encouraging people to tackle racism with the same fervour as they tackle homophobia. ACON Aboriginal Project Team Leader Michelle Sparks said racism in the community needs to be challenged.

"There are many people who are not racist but who turn a blind eye and allow racist behaviour to go unchallenged," she said. "Basically we're asking people to stand up for something they believe in."

Brighton Equality Walk

Gay and lesbian people and their friends have been signing up for a major gay day out in Brighton (UK) during the May

Bank Holiday. The 5th Annual Equality Walk is a demonstration of solidarity against hate crime, a nice day out and a good bit of exercise. The 10km stroll begins at the Pavilion Gardens on Sunday, May 4, and follows a route set by BLAGGS (the Brighton lesbian and gay sports group), ending in a prize-giving party. Because of the continued sponsorship of American Express, all money raised will go towards Stonewall's campaign to ensure anti-gay hate crimes are reported with more confidence, and eventually stamped out altogether. Last year 300 people took part and the walk raised more than £40,000. Ben Summerskill, Stonewall chief executive, said homophobic hate crime is still a sad reality in today's society. "Too many people are still afraid to report it," he said. "We'll continue to work to raise awareness around the issue and hope all lesbians and gay men, their friends and families who also want to show their support will join us in Brighton."

Salt Lake registers partners

Domestic partners began registering their relationships with the City of Salt Lake on Thursday. The registry was unanimously approved by city council in February but ran into trouble with the legislature over its name. Earlier this month the Utah House gave its approval of the ordinance, as long as it was not called a domestic partner registry. The registry had been a campaign promise by Mayor Ralph Becker who worked with members of city council to ensure the

provisions did not run counter to a state constitutional amendment that bans same-sex marriage. In a deal brokered by Becker and lawmakers, the registry is called a mutual commitment registry. The registry is open to adult unmarried couples who live together in an interdependent relationship.

Gay couples divorcing

Gay couples had to struggle mightily to win the right to marry or form civil unions. Now some are finding that breaking up is hard to do too. In Rhode Island (USA), for example, the state's top court ruled in December that gays married in neighbouring Massachusetts can't get divorced in Rhode Island because lawmakers have never defined marriage as anything but a union between a man and woman. In Missouri, a judge is deciding whether a lesbian married in Massachusetts can get an annulment. Over the past four years, Massachusetts has been the only state where gay marriage is legal, while nine other states allow gay couples to enter into civil unions or domestic partnerships that offer many of the rights and privileges of marriage. The vast majority of these unions require court action to dissolve. Gay couples who still live in the state where they got hitched can split up with little difficulty; the laws in those states include divorce or dissolution procedures for same-sex couples. But gay couples who have moved to another state are running into trouble. ☐