

A ‘Respectful Relationships’ Approach: *Could it be the answer to preventing Gender Based Violence?*

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Introduction

Secondary Schools have been involved in Gender Based Violence (GBV) Prevention Education for many years. What, when and how this is done has always been difficult to assess. Programs come and go as governments react to public concerns and teachers and schools are expected to implement initiatives that are often reactions to public outcries. Teachers decide what they will teach and how they will teach it. Last year I returned to work on a new initiative after a near 20-year break. I was surprised by the lack of change that had taken place over this period. There was still a lack of focus in schools, teachers were still reluctant to teach about it and ‘best practice’ appeared to be little different to that developed and implemented twenty years earlier.

The purpose of this paper is to talk about the *Respectful Relationships* curriculum materials trialled in Victoria in 2010. I would first like to contextualise these materials in the past, as I think it will help to remind us that we need to look to the past as we develop strategies for the future. Otherwise, as Jo-Anne Reid (2011) points out, ‘if we don’t know our history we are bound to repeat it’. Using data collected from teachers and students as part of research to update the materials this paper explores the usefulness of the materials for teaching about GBV in secondary schools.

Understanding the past

In 1993 the Commonwealth Department of Education (DEET) in Australia released a position paper designed to guide school-based approaches to GBV (Ollis and Tomaszewski 1993). It argued that schools and classroom teachers were reluctant to address GBV as an educational issue. Rather, boys’ violence and girls’ inability to deal with it, were understood as being a product of individual pathology, biological determinism or social conditioning that could be resolved through the provision of student welfare (to improve girls assertiveness) or discipline (to address boys behaviour), (Ashenden et al., 1992; Ollis 1994; Ollis and Tomaszewski 1993).

The *Position Paper* drew on a feminist analysis to argue that any resources developed should include ‘a clear definition of violence against women; an examination of

the construction of gender in its social, cultural and historical context and an understanding of violence within a social and historical context' (pp.17-8). It argued that:

Consideration needs to be given to the relationship between the construction of masculinity, language and power and the use of male violence against women and children. Future materials should enable students and teachers to understand that there is a range of masculinities and femininities, some of which are clearly based on traditional notions of male power and domination but others that are not. Material needs to reflect the idea that men and women, girls and boys are not one dimensional, but rather are able to position and identify themselves in a range of ways, influenced by class, race, culture, age sexuality and ability. They must also assist students and teachers to understand that men and women and boys and girls embark upon both conscious and unconscious course of actions, rather than following roles ascribed to them on the basis of their masculinity and femininity (p 37).

This analysis was used subsequently to develop a whole school resource called *No Fear* that teachers could use to address GBV. Like the Position Paper on which it was based, the resource was based on a feminist framework designed to explore the structural inequalities of gender, power and violence inherent in the policies and practices of institutions such as the school, law, language, marriage etc. It drew heavily on the work of Connell (1987,1995); Kenway (1990,1993); Davies (1993) and Weedon (1987) and positioned gender identities as 'socially and culturally constructed' (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1995 (DEET, 1995 p .7). It rejected the liberal feminist principle of 'socialisation' (p. 13) on the basis of the static way gender construction and GBV was understood and the absence of any analysis of power.

...According to this position women learn how to be submissive, and men learn how to be dominant ...authors who use this theory to explain violence against women imply that women who remain in violent domestic relationships so because 'they learn to be victims' and men who coerce or physically force women and girls into unwanted sexual relationships also do so because their behavior is learned. It ignores all together the way power relationships are generated and mobilised through institutional structures, responsibility for which cannot be traced back to any single individual (DEET p.14).

Instead the resource drew on post-structural understandings of gender construction using the idea of multiple gendered 'subject positions' (Weedon 1987), made available through social settings that offer a range of ways to be male or female, separately, together, with some considered superior to others (Kenway 1990). Rather than being socialized, the materials examined the 'patterns, meanings and structures which influence' (media, language, family, school, law, language, sport, marriage etc.), how men and women understand themselves as male and female (Davies 1993). Further the materials drew on the work of Connell (1982, 1987) to explore the role of power in gender relationships and

violence, including an examination of masculinity, language and power, particularly the role of language in bringing about change (Weedon 1987) .

The resource was extensive, and provided a large kit that included classroom resources for primary and secondary schools, leadership material, parents' information and professional development resources.

The present: A Respectful Relationships approach

Twenty years on resources are again being developed for schools to address GBV. This time they are being positioned in a framework of respect and respectful relationships. The past few years have seen a proliferation of research, policy, programs and resources under this umbrella. In 2010 the Commonwealth government funded nine projects worth AUD \$ 2.3 million to build respectful relationships amongst young people and prevent violence against women.

As part of this a school-based pilot project designed to prevent GBV and build respectful relationships was trialled in four secondary schools in a Melbourne. The approach taken was based on findings of a commissioned report by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD 2009), which maintained that preventing GBV required a specific approach that differed to other violence prevention that had or was being undertaken. The authors of the report argued the need for a feminist theoretical framework that addresses the link between gendered power relations, inequalities and violence against women (Flood et al., 2009).

'Best Practice' - An overtly feminist approach linked to sexual health

Consistent with researchers in Australia and elsewhere, current thinking maintains that the approach must be overtly feminist, acknowledging both the agency of individuals and the influence of broader social structures such as gender, class, ethnicity/culture and power in the construction of sexualities and gender (Renold, 2006; Kehler & Martino, 2007; DEECD 2009). It starts from the assumption that sexuality is positive and links information and critical thinking with empowerment, choice and an acceptance of diversity (Carmody, 2009; Formby et al, 2010; Sieg, 2003; Ollis, 2002; Family Planning Victoria, 2006; Ferguson et al, 2008; Sinkinson, 2009). It further conceptualises violence as intimately connected to the concept of sexual health, which is seen as:

“...A state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.” (World Health Organisation, 2006)

It can be further considered as part of a ‘whole-school’ (or ‘health promoting’ school) approach, in which the broader school community (students, teachers, parents, school leadership, nurses and community agencies) are engaged in an attempt to promote a holistic or comprehensive approach to adolescent health (including sexual health and respectful relationships) (Mankin et al., 2010 Australian Health Promoting Schools Association, 2001; DEECD, 2008; Healy, 1998; Ollis, 2003; Ferguson et al, 2008; Clift and Jensen, 2005). This presupposes a comprehensive approach that includes effective curriculum delivery, relevant, inclusive and culturally sensitive practice and reflection and evaluation of the impact of strategies on the whole school community based on a framework ‘*for understanding violence that draws on relevant feminist research, in particular in addressing the links between gender, power and violence, examining violence –supportive construction of gender and sexuality, and fostering gender equitable and egalitarian relations*’ (Flood et al, 2009 p.38).

On close examination what is put forward as ‘best practice’ in the DEECD 2009, report looks similar to the approach developed and implemented by DEET 1993-95 in the *No Fear* resources. It also advocated for ‘A whole school’ approach (cf p. 32 DEET 1993; p. 27 DEECD 2009). The key difference is that the current approach has separated the elements of a whole school approach into what they have called the ‘five elements of good practice’ (DEECD p.23). In reality, with the exception of an important focus and emphasis on evaluation (p 57- 8) there appears to be little difference. The ‘program framework’ discussed on p. 33-5 includes the same key elements and understandings of GBV identified in the early work (cf DEET pp. 17-8, 37). In addition, ‘a theory of change’ was clearly articulated and developed in 1993-5 and guided much of the professional development strategies (cf *No Fear Facilitator’s guide* p.20; *Professional Development materials* p 93-96). Similarly, ‘the principles for effective curriculum delivery’, include similar considerations for content and practice as those identified and developed in 1993-5 (cf DEECD p.35-43; DEET, pp. 17-18, 32-37-39. 33). The importance of ‘relevant, inclusive and culturally sensitive practice’ can also be seen in the earlier framework under ‘Working Respectfully’ (cf ‘Guide p 25-31).

On this basis it would appear that little has really changed in the recommended approach, except for the inclusion of ‘respect’ as an underlying theme to focus this practice and the need for on going impact and process evaluation. This raises questions about whether developing a new resource will have any impact at all and whether in 20 years time we will find the same cycle begin again. While the data presented here does not definitively answer this question, it can shed some light on the experience of a group of teachers and students who have been using this framework in schools and assist in suggesting what might be relevant for future initiatives.

Respectful Relationships Education

Methodology

Using the feminist framework developed in by Flood et al., for DEECD (2009), a pilot project was funded and conducted by CASA House in 2010. The intention was to develop a whole school model to assist schools to prevent GBV and build respectful relationships. It was trialled in four targeted secondary schools in Melbourne 2010. Although the model developed by CASA House was a whole school one, this paper is primarily concerned with reporting on teachers' and students' experience of one component, the teaching and learning program.

This paper reports on teachers' and students' response to a ten-week teaching program that trialled the Respectful Relationships classroom resource. It explores the students' response to the concepts and activities and the teachers' experience of teaching the classes and using the activities in the resource with students. Teachers' response to the 2.5-day professional learning workshop, designed to prepare them to use the materials, was also canvassed during the data collection. The materials were used in a range of discipline areas. Two schools incorporated them into their health and sexuality curriculum whilst others used them in general pastoral care/life skills programs, with one school using the materials to replace their English program.

Data was drawn from 28 teachers (10 male and 18 female) from four schools and 32 students from 3 schools. All teachers completed a post-professional learning survey; 19 teachers were involved in focus group interviews from three schools; 5 provided written responses from two schools and 6 completed a detailed online survey from three schools. Eighteen students (12 boys, 6 girls), were involved in focus group interviews from two schools, including one all boy group. Thirteen students (7 boys and 6 girls) provided written reflections from one school not involved in focus group interviews. Ethics was obtained from University and Departmental ethics committees. Data was transcribed and pseudonyms were used for schools, teachers and students.

The curriculum

The teaching and learning component was a trial curriculum designed for year eight (13-14 years olds), and year nine students (14-15 year olds). The year 8 unit of work was designed to provide the grounding necessary to look more specifically at issues of GBV such as sexual assault, domestic violence and homophobia. This unit was designed to explore and develop a common understanding of the concepts of gender, relationships and respect. Students examined the implications of gendered assumptions around masculinities, femininities and sexualities on relationships and begin to develop skills in communication, negotiation, deconstruction, reconstruction, reflection and media literacy.

The year 9 unit built on the material covered in year eight and aimed to explore the nature of GBV and the implications for respectful practice. It specifically explored domestic violence and sexual assault in the context of power, social and institutional structure and young people's lives. It took a broad view of violence and covers not only the physical aspects of violence but looks at the emotional, social and the economic implications of

GBV , including homophobia. In addition it was designed to assist students to understand the nature of consent and respect and develop skills to take individual and collective action and responsibility for self and others.

Results and discussion

The teachers' experience, the impact of subject context

Teachers who were experienced health and sexuality educators, and were currently teaching sexuality education found the content and materials easy to integrate. They were accustomed to the strategies and techniques used in the resource and raised few concerns. They maintained that students were not surprised that they were covering sensitive issues with them because...*being we are health teachers, then they expect it, ... we are accustomed to using group work, and role play and those sorts of strategies (Health Teacher).*

The teachers that appeared to struggle most with the content and the teaching and learning strategies were teachers who were required to use the materials in their English curriculum. This occurred on a number of levels. The content was unfamiliar to the teachers and they found it personally very challenging, which they tended to rationalise in relation to students behavior or experience, rather than their own lack of confidence or discomfort. In addition a number of the strategies employed were unfamiliar to the teachers. The materials required them to set up learning experiences in which students moved about the room and for some teachers this lack of structure resulted in behavioral issues they were unable to deal with. In one example, the teacher enlisted the help of a local health organisation to teach the boys whilst she taught the girls.

... I found the program challenging. I found the kids hard work for the aforementioned reasons, therefore I don't think I enjoyed the program as much as I could have ...Boring, groaned... They said 'why are we doing this in English, why can't we do this with our parents? Boys don't like to talk, some girls dominated the discussion. The topics, scenarios and trans gender case study did not engage the Yr. 8 students. All struggled with the term 'partner'. Violence & harassment section did not emphasise strategies. Legal part on sexual harassment was not pitched at Yr. 8 level. Students not really up to the discipline of listening & speaking in a group. Had to get a male person (non teacher) to work separately with the boys (English Teacher).

Surprisingly the most positive experience of teaching the materials and working with the students was most notably from those teachers who were experienced teachers, yet inexperienced in teaching health and sexuality education.

...Apprehensive at first, but the PD days gave me confidence as well as the first couple of activities that I taught (Pastoral Care /Science Teacher).

My experience was really positive...I really enjoyed being a part of the program. Positive, enjoyed the interactive nature of activities generally (Pastoral Care/life skills Teacher)

These teachers covered the material in pastoral care/life skills type programs. They talked about the improved relationships they developed with the students, the broadening of the pedagogies they used, which they felt lead to improved student engagement, and the opportunity to work with the students in differing contexts.

I teach this group for science so they see a different side of me and when I start talking about this they just look twice and go you're not the person we usually talk about this stuff with...some of the kids who are not as academic, really wanting to be part of it...in role plays they would be the first ones to volunteer. So it's been really, really good. I'm surprised to be honest because I was a bit nervous at first...in my science class sometimes they go off a bit but in this class they stop and 'are we doing this again Miss? , What are we doing next, what's the next thing we're going to do? So they're really keen.

Although all teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of the professional learning on their understanding and preparedness to teach the issues covered in the resource, the previous examples show that some found it difficult to translate this into practice in the classroom.

Hiding gender based violence under 'Respectful Relationships'

A number of the teachers expressed concern about referring to the program as preventing issues of GBV and violence against women. They felt that it alienated both the boys and some male teachers, and apportioned blame in a way that males found offensive, were disinterested in or felt shame.

I know that sounds pedantic but when I went with that (Gender and Violence) you could also see it did seem to alienate a few kids, they just look at you strangely like what are we doing here?

...Honestly there was a few male staff when they went through the PD that was really quite put off by the whole thing. That's probably the same for some kids that are sitting there in class that are like this when you walk in and you say that.

These teachers maintained that the simple change to using the name "Respectful Relationships" had made all the difference to student engagement. There was also a call from several male teachers to take a broader approach to violence prevention education, rather than focusing on its gendered nature. One male teacher maintained that it...*'worked a little bit better for me since I've started calling it respectful relationships. But as soon as it's respectful, as it's been for the last four weeks for me, it's changed I think. We say that we think that respectful relationships is a good name for it.*

However, in reality other teachers provided evidence that this was not the case. The following comments by three of the female teachers illustrates the level of engagement they felt the boys had with the content and activities, and the lengths they would go not to miss a class. They also expressed surprise that the boys were so engaged with the material and had understood the structural nature of GBV and did not see the activities as positioning violence against women in a way that made the males feel they were to blame.

I had this particular naughty boy ...I had to pull him out of Kylie's class and I said right, you are going to have to go and do this and this now and he said, 'oh but can I just go into my health class first?' He was really keen to go back to it. So that was very good to hear that. So of course I let him go (Female Teacher).

Yeah. I had the all boys' class and at the start I thought oh my God here we go. But they were together. They were a good class and they were fun and they were naughty at the same time. But overall, the boys were really, really good. I couldn't say a bad word (Female Teacher).

They were okay - they could see that it was sort of a structural problem, that it wasn't the individual's fault. You know how sometimes - what I try really hard to make sure is that - is not to blame the boys, if you know what I mean. So that was okay. They were... well what about the boys and obviously they made a point that yeah actually - obviously it can happen with boys and men as well. So you need to be aware of that. So they came up with a few awareness comments that - but I think they got the gist of what it was about as well and they were aware of the problems. They were aware of some of the statistics, even though they didn't know them exactly, so I don't think they took it personally (Female Teacher).

The students' experience

Understandings

Although a lot of students articulated understandings of violence that included common terms such as 'Abuse', 'Violence', 'Mental' and 'Physical', others were able to describe more complex notions of a collective problem, ...*everyone works in groups, sort of,* and that violence can also involve threats, fear and being unable to change one's situation. *'I'm trying to think, it's sort of like there could be verbal abuse and physical abuse and being stuck in a relationship you're too scared to get out of (Year 9 boy).*

Similarly, there was a level of complexity demonstrated in the understanding some students expressed around gender, calling into question the binaries and unitary nature of the categories of male and female characteristic of many resources that deal with gender.

... It's good to think that they're teaching us that we're all equal and that it's not just the boys doing sexual abuse and we all have our own problems. But it's not just the girl and boy group now; it's basically the groups beyond the girl and boy (year 9 girl).

Boy's keep thinking to be masculine they don't talk about their feelings. They don't want to feel like they're a girl and get teased about expressing their feelings (year 9 boy).

Power was a key concept addressed in the materials. However, as the following discussion demonstrates, no amount of probing could get the students to identify the role of inequality and power as a cause of gender based violence. In many ways their understandings feed into many of the discourses, myths and misconceptions articulated about violence against women, such as blame alcohol, drugs and past experience as the causes. Moreover, rather than discussing the causes they begin to look for solutions.

Facilitator: What do you think causes gender-based violence?

Max: Different experiences the person's had in their life, can always lead to it. They could have been abused as a child sort of thing, make them abusive. Some people might already be like that.

Facilitator: What else? What else do you think causes gender-based violence?

Max: Alcohol and drugs and stuff.

Emily: Opinions on different subjects. Drugs, alcohol, and all that sort of thing I guess.

Facilitator: Anything else?

Amber: Past experiences

Facilitator: Anything else?

Amber: What happens between say two people in a situation like that?

Max: Gender-based violence? Well, it depends on the people, gender-based violence like I said before could be verbal, so they could be verbally abusing you. They could be physically abusing you. We were looking at cases where some people got locked in their basement and stuff like that and not allowed to leave, and too scared to leave the relationship, which is pretty scary considering people do that.

Facilitator: So what's at the core of that? Say a situation like that?

Max: Better to talk about things and don't be scared to talk to friends and family and other people.

Emily: People could possibly help with the problem

Facilitator: What's happening in the relationship between two people?

Emily: It's not really steady, lots of conflict

Max: Not communication, misunderstanding leads to other things.

Amber: Some fault. The lights go on and off and the noise goes.

Emily: It's a bit scary.

Learning about gender based violence

The student's expressed very positive comments in relation to their experience of learning about gender based violence. The activity-based nature of the classes clearly engaged the students. Many of them referred to the connection between doing and remembering *...informative and even a little fun. I enjoyed how the activities get you involved and up and around in the classroom...you learn more (year 8 girl).*

They constantly referred to the importance of being able to talk about issues such as violence against women and homophobia because it increased understanding and reduced fear. *Yeah, 'cause it's the sort of thing if you don't know about it, it's sort of scary. Whereas, people who get called gays and stuff like that, it's all blown out of proportion way too easily because we don't have a greater understanding of it (year 9 boy).*

The students also saw discussion and the development of communication skills as essential. *I think we need to do a course or something on it just to get people's confidence up to be able to talk about that sort of thing (year 9 girl).*

Building empathy, developing understanding, raising awareness and reflecting also featured in many of the student's comments and reflections on their experience of learning about GBV.

I think this was better than normal curriculum, because I think people understood more of what people actually feel...especially cause you get to see what other people think, how their opinions are different to yours and things like that...I was amazed by the fact that my feelings on the situation dramatically changed once I heard Peter's point of view (year 9 girl).

It's very important that students are aware of what can happen in relationships and what is right in relationships... getting students to see what gender based violence can do ...It raised awareness over some of the sensitive topics we otherwise wouldn't discuss. It was fun and I enjoyed it as well as learnt heaps (year 8 girl).

The almost weekly reflections were a hassle, though they made you think about what you have done (year 9 girl).

Discussion

It is not surprising that the health and sexuality education teachers had little difficulty integrating the content into their classes. The approaches inherent in the resource are consistent with those used in other sensitive areas of health and sexuality education. A number of the activities in the resource had been modified from other sexuality education and school based gender and violence resources that use similar techniques. In addition, students expected these teachers to cover sexuality issues as part of the health curriculum.

In contrast, teachers who were required to trial the materials in English struggled both at a personal and professional level with the content, understandings and approaches. Resistance to being forced to teach the material instead of their current program is likely to have impacted on the teachers' willingness to engage with the resource and the teaching. In addition, unfamiliarity with the student centred and interactive nature of the activities and the change to the physical structure of the classroom has been shown to impact on teacher comfort (Health Canada 2004; Ollis, 2009). However, this doesn't explain the difficulty teachers' had with discussion and analysis characteristic of many of the activities and techniques, which are also common to the teaching of English. One teacher maintained it was the *'non compliance with class rules'* that resulted in students not being able to participate in activities and *'listen to other points of view'*. Another referred to the material as *'a bit difficult for students'* and *'some of the scenarios and the questions, I think I*

needed an answer sheet'. Consistent with other research such comments suggest a lack of comfort with the potentially sensitive content (Smith et al., 2011; Milton et al 2001; Harrison and Hay 2001; Harrison and Hillier 1999).

It is important to discuss whether the structure and focus of the professional learning may have impacted on the inability of these teachers to translate their understandings to practice in the classroom. The approach taken in the professional learning was designed to raise awareness of the need to address GBV. However the activities used to model practice were those characteristic and more suited to a health education classroom¹. Teachers of English would have struggled to see how they would conduct a unit of work in English using the trial materials. Modelling the activities with teachers has been shown to be an enabling factor to addressing sensitive issues (Freeman et al., 2010; Ollis, 2009, Milton et al., 2001), and this was not modelled in relation to teaching English. Although the response to the professional learning was very positive, the English teachers felt...*it could have prepared us better...there was a lot for me to take in...it was a little overwhelming at times... the questions...*

Yet this doesn't explain why the teachers who were using the trial materials in pastoral care type contexts, many of which had no experience of teaching health or sexuality education, had such positive results. The data suggests that it was a combination of a number of factors that worked together to build a sense of commitment, confidence and a willingness to take a risk. These include the professional learning, the positive student experience, a raised awareness of the need to address gender-based violence, an openness to engage with the students and the activities, and some personal and professional reflection and risk taking. Sam sums up the sentiments of many of these teachers in the following reflection.

Before every lesson I would always take a deep breath of reassurance just due to the seriousness of the topic and the need for it to be delivered to the best of my ability, it was really about me not being overwhelmed by that... I learnt I was willing to take risks and try new ways of teaching content (especially around such a sensitive issue) to try and really make a positive difference in the community...It was a personal challenge to provide stimulating and honest discussions as a facilitator without ever trying to subconsciously interject an opinion... You need to be passionate, to understand the complexity of the issue and its importance to be delivered... You need to be willing to take a risk or broach a delicate conversation... You need understanding, being prepared for a wide range of responses and not to let your personal opinion interfere, the content challenges the perceptions and guides students to change without being told to. It was really effective in increasing the students understanding of gender and violence, it may not have changed some opinions but it challenged them to think beyond some social norms. It did a lot to empower individuals. It was a really supportive and understanding environment for the students and myself and a journey for us as a collective... The professional development helped me to deal with the challenges. It prepared me well; it

¹ I attended all 2.5-day workshops as an observer.

allowed me to get comfortable with the issue, and activities without just diving in the deep end with 25 pairs of eyes watching (Pastoral care/life skills teacher).

The teachers experience also points to the importance of professional learning and some 'supported risk taking' that ends up being a by product of this type of trial (Ollis, 2009, 2010; Freeman et al., 2003). These teachers had regular contact with the researcher, the project team and other teachers involved in the pilot². Giving them a number of opportunities to reflect, seek advice and share their experiences. It also supports the advice from education departments (DEECD 2008; Home Office 2011), that without this level of support, sensitive sexuality education should be part of a curriculum context such as health and sex and relationships education.

Conclusion

Teaching about gender and violence was in the main a positive experience for the teachers involved in this trial. Partly this is explained by the professional learning that developed their understanding of GBV, a commitment to addressing issues with students, and some preparation to take the risk to use the activities in their classroom. More importantly, and of course interrelated, was the positive experience of their students. It was clear that many of the teachers developed positive relationships with the students through the program, which had assisted in the students developing skills and abilities to discuss and listen to the opinions of others about gender based violence and respectful relationships.

Whether positioning the materials in a respectful relationships framework will make a difference to schools using the materials and addressing issues of GBV, is a question for further research. Issues of supported implementation and resourcing are key factors in the success of any new initiative. What is clear nonetheless, is that the teachers and students involved in this pilot were not alienated by the explicit focus on gender and violence. According to the students, covering issues in a supportive, inclusive classroom where they are actively engaged in their learning, where they have a chance to discuss and compare opinions, can reflect and develop empathy are key. The other important known ingredient of course, is the teacher. In the words of one of the students ...*it is a very good, organised and a wise teacher to teach this subject/topic. She knows what she is talking about (Year 9).*

Finally, I would like to finish with the following advice from one of the teachers who worked with a group of disengaged year 9 boys. Although he highlights the difficulties and challenges in educating boys around gender and violence, he also provides some hope that engagement is possible and with engagement comes the opportunity to teach.

² The teachers who trialed the materials in English had far less contact with the researcher and project team than those in the schools that implemented the materials in pastoral care and health education.

You have to get to the boys who need it...get rid of the stupid factor, the smart comments ... what they say and they think are often two different things. Boys can bring out the worst in boys. Boys are about image and performing with their peers... It's a real challenge dealing with the homophobic and sexist language. They don't see a problem with a term like 'slut'.

You have to be in there for the long haul... they don't always get it. It has to be worked on ...It needs to be fairly loose... let the kids set the direction...discussion and reflection.

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