

The Whole-school approach to sexuality education in Victoria

Steven O'Connor
Senior Policy Officer
Student Wellbeing Division
Office for Government School Education



Every
child,
every
opportunity



Presentation outline

1. Overview of sexuality education policy in Victoria
2. The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project
3. What the Victorian Department currently provides
4. Future directions



1. Overview

- It is **compulsory** for all Victorian government schools to provide sexuality education from prep. to year 10.
- Parent permission is not required for VELS-based sexuality education.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

1. Overview

- Shared responsibility for sexual health:
 - parents
 - school programs
 - local community health.
- The key is to develop effective partnerships of these areas to support school capacity.
- Supported by experts such as Family Planning Vic. and ARCSHS (La Trobe Uni).



1. Overview

- The two most important Gov't education policies sexuality education is integrated into:
 - Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide
 - ➔ guides the running of a school
 - Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)
 - ➔ guides learning, teaching and assessment.



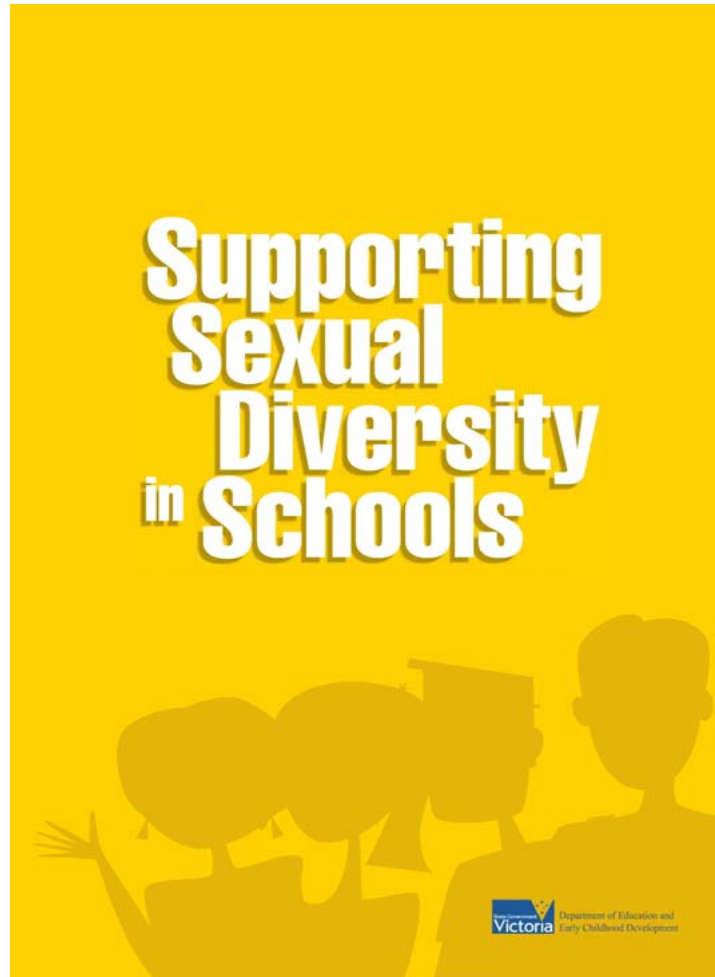
1. Overview

- DEECD and DoH: close partnership since 2004.
 - Public Health
 - Student Learning/Student Wellbeing
- Demonstrates the shared responsibility of the two sectors.



1. Overview

- Sexuality education plays the lead role in ensuring learning and teaching is inclusive of sexual diversity.



Every child.
every opportunity

2. The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project

- ARCSHS, La Trobe University (Sue Dyson) and DEECD (with DoH support).
- We basically asked:
 - What would a whole-school approach to sexuality education look like?



Whole-school learning in sexuality education (overview)

Learning and Teaching

- Comprehensive sexuality education (e.g. abstinence, relationships, identity and safer sex).
- Compulsory in H&PE domain and included across curriculum.
- Student achievement assessed and reported against the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.
- Use of government and policy-appropriate external resources to support learning and teaching programs.
- Education materials readily available.
- Respectful of diversity.

Community links, partnerships and services

- School promotes a shared responsibility approach with the local community and parents.
- The use of external providers complements the comprehensive, whole-school learning approach.
- School networks with other schools for teacher support and resource sharing.

School organisation, ethos and environment

- Policy, responses to critical incidents and student discipline procedures reflected in learning and teaching.
- Compliance with relevant legislation (e.g. Equal Opportunity) and policy (e.g. government health policy) reflected in student learning.
- Student wellbeing support and prevention programs inform student learning and teaching.
- Staff role-modelling supports learning.
- Displayed materials support learning.
- Professional learning is available for school staff.
- Student input has been sought.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

2. The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project

- Funded 27 sexuality education programs through 2006 and first half of 2007.
- 23 programs successfully completed.
- 50 schools involved.
- Wide range of school types.
- Funded a supporting literature review (Sue Dyson).



Every
child.
every
opportunity

2. The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project

Sue Dyson's literature review

- Few references to using a whole-school approach in sexuality education.
- Without the consistency of a whole-school approach schools can undermine what they teach.
 - For example, there's no point in teaching about respect for sexual diversity if incidents of homophobia or bullying go unchecked.



2. The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project

Sue Dyson's literature review

- Short term programs have no measurable impact on behaviour.
- Passive resources are less effective than interactive ones.
- Baby Think It Over resource/virtual babies
 - Popular with teachers, nurses, parents and the media.
 - Evaluation demonstrated that virtual babies had little effect on young people's attitudes towards parents, sexual behaviours or contraceptive use.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

2. The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project

- Schools tended to take an issues-based approach. Hence the emphasis on learning in the final model.
- Whole-school *learning*:
 - ➔ shifts it from a response to an issue (prevention of something) to ongoing learning for competency and health literacy
 - ➔ places the teacher as the driver and wellbeing staff/external agencies in an important support role.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

2. The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project

Leadership Support:

- Projects with support and involvement of the principal were more successful than those who lacked support.
- Schools with a steering group that included the principal, or principal's representative, staff members, parents and students were more successful than those without.
- Where leadership support was inconsistent, staff were less likely to be released to attend professional learning.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

2. The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project

Community Connections:

- Collaboration with local agencies and services added value to school programs.
- It was important for the school to take the leadership role, not the local agency.
- Roles and responsibilities between schools and community agencies, need to be clear so that a common understanding could be reached.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

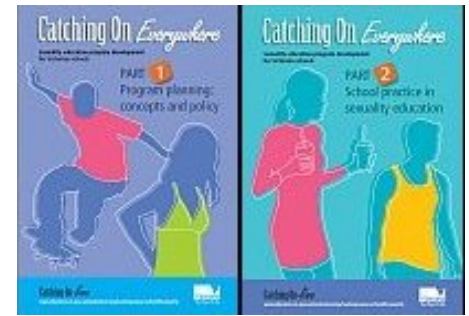
2. The Whole-school Sexuality Education Project

- Professional learning was the most important factor for effective sexuality education programs.
- Important that professional learning address staff comfort, not just knowledge and skills.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

3. What we currently provide



- *Catching On Everywhere* – program development resource developed from the findings of the WSEP.
- *Catching On for Years 9 and 10* – secondary school curriculum resource (since 2004).
- *Catching On-line* – extensive sexuality education website for school principals, teachers, parents and stakeholders.
- Empowering policy.



Every child.
every opportunity

4. Future directions

- Primary and secondary school teacher professional learning grants.
- Extension of existing curriculum materials.
- Primary school curriculum resource.
- Evaluation for program effectiveness.
- Parent engagement kit.
- Assessment of student achievement kit.
- Values in sexuality education kit.
- Targeted school principal education
- Strategies to assist local health agencies and schools when working together.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

4. Future directions – culture shift

- Responsive to an identified issue such as unwanted pregnancy, homophobic bullying, sexual assault, chlamydia. That is, prevention of 'XXX'.
- Time limited to the duration of concern about the issue and while funding related to that issue exists.
- Reliance on external providers to do the job.
- Left to one or two passionate people to drive.
- Provided for ethical reasons - not perceived as core business.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

4. Future directions – culture shift



- Issues-based education placed within a whole-school learning approach.
- Integrated and ongoing across all year levels.
- Developed, monitored and reviewed by a program committee.
- Understood as central to school's function in the same way as education for literacy and numeracy.
- Teacher assesses student achievement in sexuality education and includes it in the student's academic report to parents.



Every
child.
every
opportunity

Final vision

A national framework for sexuality education could give us:

- increased understanding of health education in the public domain
- increased school leadership support
- emphasis on sexual health in university training and within teacher professional standards
- development of student health literacy standards
- state-by-state comparisons of student health literacy rates
- identification of and support to underperforming schools.



Every
child.
every
opportunity