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Communicating with kids about school issues: seminar report

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Centre for Children
and Young People



Seminar Report

COMMUNICATING WITH KIDS ABOUT SCHOOL ISSUES

22nd June 2006

Lismore



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SEMINAR OVERVIEW

Invited Speakers

Ms Helen Cahill

Helen Cahill is Deputy-Director of the Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne and a former teacher, with interests in youth, education and health promotion research. She has developed a number of national drug education, resilience, anti-bullying and mental health school resources including *MindMatters*, *Rethinking Drinking*, the *School Health and Alcohol Harm Reduction Project (SHAHRP)* and *Get WISE: Working on Illicits in School Education*. She lectures in school leadership and student welfare and provides training for schools in the use of interactive pedagogy and in social health promotion. She works with adolescents and uses role-play techniques to train doctors and teachers how to communicate with young people about health and social issues which impact on learning and well being.

Local High School students

Key participants in the seminar were 13 drama students from two local High Schools: Chantelle Andreas, Rachel Dean, Tannah Gravelis, Jackson Green, Gabrielle Huxley, Julian Maule, Cheyenne O'Brien, Hari Price and Dane Tatton from Alstonville High School and Clelie Day, Samuel Hillier, Elke Jacobsen and Tegan Nelson from Murwillumbah High School.

Seminar Summary

This seminar took a strengths-based approach to examine the challenges facing parents/carers and young people as they attempt to negotiate school-related, relationship and behaviour issues. Two initial discussions explored and compared the audience's and the students' thoughts about factors worrying young people and factors worrying parents. Both groups nominated similar issues as concerning young people – peer pressure, bullying, study pressures, living up to others' expectations, etc. However, there were quite different perceptions about the issues concerning parents – with the audience expressing concern about a broad range of issues, most not directly related to their children themselves, whereas the young people perceived themselves (their behaviour, attitudes or achievements) as the major focus of parents' concern.

In the second part of the seminar, the students acted out a number of scenarios they had prepared during a day-long workshop with Helen Cahill – from their perspectives. These scenarios covered a range of issues concerning the students or perceived to concern parents – including peer pressure, bullying, amount of studying, negotiating boundaries, partying and appropriateness of clothing.

During the seminar, the students acted out each scenario – firstly, demonstrating their experiences of the negative approaches often taken by parents or friends when expressing their concerns about the issue. Each scenario created much laughter and was followed by a facilitated discussion between the students and the audience regarding the likely impact of this negative approach and ways it could be approached more constructively. Then, the students acted out the scenario again, demonstrating some of these more positive strategies and approaches – and how they were more likely to result in positive outcomes.

The seminar closed with each of the students sharing a final thought regarding their suggestions for ways parents could better approach discussions about issues of concern with their adolescent children.

Seminar Attendance

Apart from Helen, the students and their teachers, 33 people attended the seminar – representing a mixture of parents and/or people working with children and young people.



SEMINAR FEEDBACK – ATTENDEES

Response Rate

A total of 18 seminar feedback forms were completed, representing 55% of attendees (excluding the students, whose feedback was collected separately – see next section).

Overall Satisfaction

As shown in the table below, attendees found the seminar extremely satisfying and useful.

Question	Number of Respondents Selecting Each Rating							Mean Rating
	Not at All				Extremely			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Overall, how satisfied were you with the seminar?	--	--	--	--	2	4	12	6.55
And, overall, how useful did you find the seminar?	--	--	--	--	3	5	10	6.39

What Attendees Liked Most

18 attendees made comments in response to the question – **The best part was ...** (see Appendix A for the full comments). The most common response topics were:

- The positive and interactive approach of the seminar, especially the role-playing scenarios. (13 comments)
- Hearing from the young people about their thoughts / wisdom / advice / concerns. (10 comments)
- The young people’s honesty. (4 comments)

What Attendees Felt Could Have Been Improved

6 attendees made comments in response to the question – **You could have improved ...** (see Appendix A for the full comments). The most common response topic was nothing or very little (3 comments). The three other comments were to make it longer, to cover less in more depth and a wish the person had brought their own child with them.

What Attendees Found the Best Tip

15 attendees made comments in response to the question – **The best tip was ...** (see Appendix A for the full comments). The most common response topics were:

- The importance of good / honest / trusting communication & relationships between parents and young people. (10 comments)
- The need to really listen to / allow space for / respect young people’s views and opinions. (6 comments)
- The wisdom of the young people’s thoughts. (3 comments)

Suggestions for Future Seminars

9 attendees made comments in response to the question – **My ideas for future seminars ...** (see Appendix A for the full comments). The most common response was wanting more time / discussion on the same topic (4 comments). Most of the other comments suggested new seminars topics – including bullying, child and adolescent depression, parents’ social and emotional wellbeing, communicating with tweens (8-12 year olds) and young people’s attitudes towards learning.

Other Comments Attendees Made

9 attendees made comments in response to the question – **Any other comments?** (see Appendix A for the full comments). The most common response was an expression of appreciation or thanks regarding this seminar (6 comments).



SEMINAR FEEDBACK – STUDENTS

Students' feedback about the seminar was collected simultaneously with their feedback about a conference for teachers delivered the following day. Therefore, some questions asked the students about the two events separately while others asked them about them overall. Hence, some of the results presented below relate to only this seminar, while others relate to the seminar / conference combined.

Response Rate

A total of 10 student feedback forms were completed, representing 77% of the 13 students participating in the conference.

Overall Satisfaction

The table below summarises the students' ratings on the two overall questions – showing that students enjoyed their involvement in the seminar and perceived that the attendees did too.

Question	Number of Respondents Selecting Each Rating							Mean Rating	
	Not at all				Extremely				Missing
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Overall, how much did you enjoy being involved in the parent seminar?	0	0	0	0	4	3	3	0	5.9
How much do you think the parents enjoyed you being involved in the seminar and conference?	0	0	0	0	2	7	1	0	5.9

Nine of the ten students were happy with the amount and nature of their involvement in the seminar and conference. The other student expressed concern that their involvement was too staged and did not necessarily express their own views.

What Students Found the Best Part of Being Involved

10 students made comments in response to the question – *What was the best part about being involved?* (see Appendix B for the full comments). The most common response topics were:

- The opportunity to communicate openly and share ideas with teachers and peers. (7 comments)
- Socialising with other students, meeting new people. (5 comments)

What Students Found the Most Challenging Part of Being Involved

10 students made comments in response to the question – *What was the most challenging part about being involved?* (see Appendix B for the full comments). The most common response topics were:

- Expressing opinions clearly on the subjects presented. (6 comments)
- Aspects of performing the role-plays, including improvising and projecting your voice. (4 comments)

What Students Learned from Being Involved

10 students made comments in response to the question – *What was the main thing you learned from being involved?* (see Appendix B for the full comments). The most common response topics were:

- How often parents, teachers and young people misunderstand each other. (4 comments)
- The need to understand and appreciate different perspectives. (4 comments)
- The benefits of working cooperatively. (3 comments)



How Students Benefited from Being Involved

10 students made comments in response to the question – ***What are the benefits of involving young people in events like the seminar and conference for young people?*** (see Appendix B for the full comments). The most common response topics were:

- It provides a forum for expressing the perspectives and concerns of young people. (8 comments)
- Gaining an understanding of the pressures and perspectives of teachers and parents. (7 comments)
- Feeling included and respected by their community. (3 comments)

What Students Thought Parents Learned from the Students' Involvement

10 students made comments in response to the question – ***What do you think parents learned from the students at the seminar?*** (see Appendix B for the full comments). The most common response topics were:

- How to communicate better with their children. (7 comments)
- Better understanding about their children / how we think. (6 comments)
- To listen more to their children & their point of view. (2 comments)

How Students Thought Parents Benefited from the Students' Involvement

10 students made comments in response to the question – ***What are the benefits of involving young people in events like the seminar and conference for parents and teachers?*** (see Appendix B for the full comments). The most common response topics were:

- They will have a better understanding of young peoples' issues and attitudes. (6 comments)
- It provides a forum for respectful and honest interaction between adults and young people. (6 comments)

What Students Thought About Young People Being Involved in these Events

10 students made comments in response to the question – ***Do you think young people should be involved in events like the parent seminar and the teacher conference? Why?*** (see Appendix B for the full comments). All students agreed that students should be involved and the most common reasons suggested were:

- This communication is beneficial for all involved. Everyone gains a better understanding. (6 comments)
- Adults get an honest insight into the opinions, perspectives and issues affecting young people. (5 comments)

Other Comments Students Made

6 students made comments in response to the question – ***Any other comments or questions?*** (see Appendix B for the full comments). The most common response topics were:

- Generally appreciative comments thanking the organisers. (3 comments)
- There was a perception that there was a bias against students from one of the schools. (2 comments – 1 regarding each school)
- Students were happy to provide teachers and parents with a better understanding of their opinions. (2 comments)



APPENDIX A: WRITTEN FEEDBACK COMMENTS – ATTENDEES

What Was The Best Part

18 participants made comments in response to the question – *The best part was ...*:

- Listening to the thoughts/wisdom of young people.
- Teenagers' opinions, that there are great seminars around looking at the issues in a caring way.
- Honesty and advice from the young adults.
- Being involved with the young people and getting their perspective.
- Honest and open communication.
- The Kids' perspective.
- Scenarios and problem solving.
- The interaction with the students and hearing their thoughts and concerns.
- Insight into the views of the young people.
- The skilful way the facilitator, Helen, ran the group.
- Hearing what the kids think.
- The role plays – using parents' suggestions.
- Scenarios are a learning experience.
- Re-doing the scenarios.
- The interaction with the young people.
- The role playing scenes and the different advice given.
- The scenarios and also the honesty of the participants – particularly with some parent tips.
- The interaction with children.
- Honesty of children.
- The wonderful wisdom and honesty of the young adults – they were fantastic.
- The way the role play brought out the issues.
- The variations on each situation and the opportunity for parents to give input.

What People Felt Could Have Been Improved

6 participants made comments in response to the question – *You could have improved ...*:

- On doing less, having the teenagers express their views on issues, role discussion between parents and teenagers and solutions.
- Nothing - all great.
- Very little.
- Most enjoyable – no real improvement.
- Longer.
- I would have loved my own teenager to have been here to share this with me.

What People Found the Best Tip

15 participants made comments in response to the question – *The best tip was ...*:

- Wisdom of the students at the end!
- Teenagers were great, refreshing, and the speaker (Helen) passionate.
- Communication with parents.
- Good relationship with teachers.
- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Give them their space, listen, kids don't want to incur our disapproval, they are entitled to their opinion.
- Listen and talk with your kids on all topics.
- How to deal with your child when a situation comes up.
- Listening – hearing – opening up the communication.
- Need to hear 'you can always call'.
- Leave communication open at all times.
- Honest open communication. Trust.
- Respect decisions – let them grow – communicate.
- Communication.
- Respect.
- The honesty of the concluding comments by the young people.
- Plan for the possible behaviour responses by giving the child options.



Suggestions for Future Seminars

9 participants made comments in response to the question – ***My ideas for future seminars ...:***

- Continuing this discussion further.
- Role playing was good, but more discussions. Some issues were totally irrelevant to my issues.
- Have parents attend with their children.
- Parents with 'Tweens' (8-12 year olds).
- More time to explore thinking of both adults and students.
- More time – intermission.
- Attitudes by students to learning would be good.
- Bullying – specific one.
- Children/Adolescent depression.
- Understanding social and emotional wellbeing for parents.

Other Comments People Made

9 participants made comments in response to the question – ***Any other comments? :***

- Loved how everybody contributed so easily.
- Although I felt it was interesting I didn't get really much in the way of solutions, fair consequences, etc. (I hope I have made myself clear).
- Great, and thank you for inviting Helen and the students.
- Am interested in the work of the centre.
- Inspiring.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Very enjoyable – thanks.
- Again I would have loved my own child to be able to listen to this – it would have made for a great 'communication' on the way home!



APPENDIX B: WRITTEN FEEDBACK COMMENTS – STUDENTS

The Best Part Of Being Involved In The Seminar And Conference

10 students made comments in response to the question – *What was the best part about being involved?*

- Hearing other opinions, meeting new people.
- Fun, get to work with other drama students from other schools.
- Meeting new people; broadening views; discussing some of the issues; role playing.
- Meeting students from another school and being able to work with them.
- The feeling that we could say exactly what we think and that we were teaching about teenagers' awareness to the teachers and parents.
- It will look good on my resume and I think the parents and teachers got good inside info.
- The feeling that we could help increase awareness about the issues that young people are facing.
- The best part was doing the whole preparation & getting to know everyone.
- Giving parents/teachers the chance to see things through a teenager's point of view.
- Being able to tell them what I don't get to tell my teachers and parents.

The Most Challenging Part Of Being Involved

10 students made comments in response to the question – *What was the most challenging part about being involved?*

- I don't think the program was challenging, it just forced everyone to really think about their opinions.
- Being put on the spot and asked questions, though this was fun, I found it the hardest part of the conference.
- Being put on the spot to come up with something suitable and relevant to the issue in discussion.
- Projecting my voice while playing a character that keeps his head down.
- Getting your point out clearly.
- Getting a point clearly across.
- That we weren't really achieving anything. A shallow talked up approach perhaps.
- The most challenging thing was performing for the parents and teachers.
- Organising realistic performances and trying to get our opinion across successfully.
- Improvisation and speaking louder at the teacher conference.

What Was Learnt By Participating

10 students made comments in response to the question – *What was the main thing you learned from being involved?*

- Confidence in expressing thoughts and views.
- That it is very beneficial for both young people and parents/teachers to work together.
- How little parents knew about how teenagers act and think.
- Issues and problems in both seminars - other people's views (from both other students and the teachers and parents).
- That parents and teachers have little to no knowledge of how a student/child feels.
- That there is a lot of misunderstanding from teachers to students, and parents to children, and that opposites have to think in their perspective.
- That between the teacher-student and parent-child there was a lot of misunderstanding.
- How much of the research can be detached from human emotion. Statistics are just numbers on a page, not real for people.
- The main thing I learned was working with newly formed friends.
- We got a chance to really listen to the parents and teachers points of view in certain situations.
- That a lot of other teenagers think the way I do.



What Did Parents Learn From The Students

10 students made comments in response to the question – *What do you think parents learned from the students at the seminar?*

- How to improve communication with their children.
- I would hope that the parents learned how to better communicate and listen to their children.
- Personal views – helping them to hopefully understand their children a bit better.
- Better ways to go about dealing with problems.
- Closer to understanding their child.
- That they should think in their child's shoes and understand and communicate better.
- How to communicate better and understand each other.
- That their children also perceive the difficulty the parents encounter, and understand safety concerns and such.
- The way we think about situations.
- How to talk to their kids more.
- That kids really want to be respected and understood. Kids also want parents to empathise with us when making decisions concerning us.

Why Should Young People Be Involved In Seminars And Conferences

10 students made comments in response to the question – *Do you think young people should be involved in events like the parent seminar and the teacher conference? Why?*

- I think this is beneficial for teachers/parents and young people. Both groups have their opinions heard and questions answered. This makes it much easier to manage issues present.
- Yes, because what better way to learn about young people than to have young people there to ask for their point of view.
- Yes in both cases, communications between the students and parents/teachers can help broaden views, possible actions and help one another understand.
- Yes, it helps the audience better understand the kids.
- Yes, so the two will learn more about the understandings.
- Because there are more truths said so you can then understand each other and build a better bond.
- Yes. If they want to know about students, then the best place to start is with them.
- Yes, because the students (as well as the teachers and parents) could learn a lot from it.
- Yes, because it's the children that can give the teachers an honest opinion of our situation. An adult cannot get a young person's views and opinions across as well as we can.
- Yes, to get the point of their feelings across and also learn how adults think/react about that stuff.

Students' Level Of Satisfaction With Their Involvement

10 students made comments in response to the question – *Were you happy with the amount of young people's involvement in the seminar and conference?*

- Yes, I think it worked well.
- Yes, I think any more people and it would dominate over the audience and especially make the parents more intimidated at the conference.
- Yes, I think it was the right amount, any more and it would be hard to control discussions and role playing.
- Yes.
- Yes.
- Yes it was pretty good.
- No. I think we were involved to parade the notion that it was our opinions, yet much of what was displayed had nothing to do with us. We were fed by 'professional' opinion.
- Yes I am.
- Yes, I thought it was good because the audience would not only get to view our performance but also ask us questions and hear our views on the situation.
- Yes, the group of students were very enthusiastic and involved in the conference.



The Benefits Of Involvement For Young People

10 students made comments in response to the question – ***What are the benefits of involving young people in events like the seminar and conference for young people?***

- Young people are given the chance to have their views heard and don't feel like parents/teachers aren't listening or trying to help.
- We get to see what the parents and teachers thought about young people.
- It's getting our points of view, the interaction helps better understanding.
- It helps the audience better understand the kids.
- Everyone can tell you their opinions which will make understanding between adults and teenagers easier.
- They can say what they want to say and it can be taken seriously and into consideration.
- Young people can feel like they are a part of their community. That their issues are not being ignored. You can know that teachers have difficulty as well.
- The benefits are that the young people get a better insight into the bullying, pressures etc. of school life.
- In the seminars I also got a chance to see where the adults were coming from, and I felt good knowing my opinion had helped and made an impact.
- So everybody thinks about stuff in a different way (a way they wouldn't usually think about it) and appreciates/understands young peoples' and adults thoughts.

The Benefits For Parents And Teachers

10 students made comments in response to the question – ***What are the benefits of involving young people in events like the seminar and conference for parents and teachers?***

- Parents/teachers are able to get a better understanding of young people.
- The interaction level is greater, and ideas can be put together forward to adults and teenagers alike.
- It's getting our points of view, the interaction helps better understanding.
- It helps the audience better understand the kids.
- Everyone can tell you their opinions which will make understanding between adults and teenagers easier.
- They can say what they want to say and it can be taken seriously and into consideration.
- You can know that teachers have difficulty as well.
- The benefits are the same as for the young people, gaining a better insight into bullying, pressures etc. of school life.
- They get an honest opinion of what we feel, with no adults to change our opinions.
- So that adults and parents understand stuff they wondered about.

Other Comments People Made

6 students made comments in response to the question – ***Any other comments or questions?***

- Why did Murwillumbah get to have more students there than Alstonville High School?
- Thank you it was fun.
- Chocolate, mmm.
- We thought we were getting chocolate! We were jiffed! Bias to the Alstonville kids!
- It was a great two days and it felt good to know we've helped parents and teachers have a better understanding of our opinions.
- Did you survey the adults (teachers and parents) and if so, did they learn anything?

