



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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difficult to distinguish whether we speak from within them, whether we can speak outside them, or whether we can speak at all without them.

Overall, the book is thought-provoking, reader-friendly, and poses questions for those who are practising ethnographers or about to embark on their own journeys. Its sentiment demands responses of agreement or dissent from the reader. Harrison has been courageous in revealing his understandings, misunderstandings and mistakes in the hope that others will be aware of some of the pitfalls involving power and authority of “being an ethnographer and pedagogue”. The book shifts between positions and periods of knowing through a persistent self-reflective process, which at times can become repetitive. However, there is much to recommend the text to prospective readers.

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# SEXUAL HEALTH FOR LIFE SERIES

Ian McAllister & Phil Brake

Australian Training Initiatives Pty Ltd, Beaumaris, 2004-, ISBN 0-646-43649-X

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The *Sexual Health for Life* series is a set of co-authored handbooks, divided into units for easy reference. The series is aimed at young adults and outlines a range of issues presented in a straightforward, workshop-style format. A range of significant issues are explored throughout the series: McAllister authored Unit 1, *Sexually transmitted infections (STIs/STDs) and other common infections of the genital tract* (2004), Unit 2, *Drug and alcohol awareness* (2004)

and Unit 3, *Contraception*, with section 7 (verbal contraception) of Unit 3 written by Hall. A *Values for your life: Decisions, values, destiny* (2005) workbook authored by Brake accompanies the series, although the style and content of Brake's edition does appear somewhat out of place with an otherwise useful set of workshop manuals.

McAllister, in the first three units, provides an excellent overview of the various issues facing young people today in relation to sexuality and drug use. Perhaps the most useful aspect of this series is the author's transition from latex to life, as he moves beyond the well-trodden path of facts and figures, and presents a variety of social contexts to be explored. Young people are asked to take part in exercises and workshops in which they think through situations, explore peer pressure, think about the implications of life choices, do various self-assessments and think through their own personal beliefs, before they are potentially confronted with those situations. The real-life implications behind the facts, makes the information that is presented all the more valuable.

These self-assessments are an excellent tool in assisting young people to define their own boundaries and take control of their own lives. In the first three units the overriding message to young people is to be smart, prepared, responsible and in control, “sexual health should be enjoyed for life, not something you worry about for the rest of you life”.

The information relating to substance use (Unit 2) presents a clear overview of the negative impacts of drug use, while also openly exploring the reasons why young people may use drugs in Australia. It is well-presented without sensationalism and explores alcohol and smoking in context as dangerous drugs. McAllister clearly outlines the variety of social, health and legal implications of drug use while also providing activities which ask young people to think through different aspects of drug use, identify warning signs, and complete activity sheets filling in appropriate addiction help lines.

The series also lends itself to the potential of cultural adaptations. In its current format the series is more suited to a mainstream youth setting. There is an assumption that many of the services and institutions referred to in this series are available to all young people. However, Indigenous young people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may find the reality of accessing these services quite different, presuming they are available in the first place.

The influence of culture and ethnicity is also an important aspect to discuss in relation to values and worth further exploration. Also the impact of racism greatly impacts upon our young people and the decisions they make in relation to their sexual health and decisions surrounding substance use. Future editions taking into account an understanding of

cultural and community values with recognition of the impact of discrimination would greatly improve the accessibility of this series, as these factors contribute greatly to a young person's ability to determine their own health.

The content should also be considered general knowledge, as any series on these subjects will require continual updating, so expect revised editions. The fields of HIV, hep C, sexual health and drug trends are constantly changing and the authors have often presented highly specific information (e.g. viral treatment trends) that change almost on an annually basis. However, these workbooks present a useful guide for teachers or youth workers to conduct sessions regardless of their level of expertise or skill in the area of sexual health or drug intervention training. They provide a format with easy to follow lesson plans, and information to facilitate both individual and group work exercises. This series would be a great advantage to the average teacher struggling through the complexity of sex education classes with young adults.

It is, however, an unusual choice of co-author to have Brake's edition accompanying this series. Brake's volume *Values for your life: Decisions, values, destiny* often contradicts the previous manuals, has a moralistic tone and erroneously uses morality as "evidence". Brake begins by claiming the unit is based in Christianity "as it is the number one religion in the world" and will apparently relate to the most amount of people. However, by the style and content of the volume it has more likelihood of excluding more young people than providing any source of value and information. It is neither necessary nor valuable in the context of these volumes to misuse the bible as a source of fear. Young people's values are important to discuss, but not at the expense of being exclusionary and at times arrogant.

Brake goes on to make claims about the total loss of the moral foundation of our culture and presents alarmist views to young people, using grossly inaccurate information, which presents a deteriorating society, to which the only "solution" to this devastation is "the absolute truth" that only the bible can provide. For example, he presents "evidence" of the "consequences" of the 1960s revolution, and the "dangers" of single parents in our society, claiming that a rise in violence and lack of values has occurred in society as a result of single parents. Ludicrous assumptions are stated as fact between the 1960s, single parent homes and a now violence society, with a complete lack of context and an oversimplification of statistics verging on the absurd.

He claims we are more drug-addicted, violent and in more despair than ever, stepping over the bodies of teen junkies. When discussing anti-depressants and suicide he states "we are better than ever at saving the near dead", going on to claim the "death rate from

opiate overdoses has shot up six fold in the last 20 years, and we now have triple the druggies swallowing free methadone than a decade ago" (p. 67). This is not only inaccurate information, as the overdose rate in Australia has decreased dramatically since 2000 (due to a range of supply, demand and harm reduction measures) but our national policy is to promote treatment and reduce harm. These inaccurate and inflammatory statements not only promote intolerance, but also reduce a young person's likelihood of accessing help if they experience substance use problems. Young people experiencing these difficulties should be supported and should never be viewed as "godless near dead druggies".

This final volume, which bombards young people with scare tactics and inaccurate information, is distinctively out of place with an otherwise well-informed series of work that promotes and empowers young people to take control of their decisions and think through the implications of their actions in relation to sexual health and substance use. The sexual health and potential futures of young people in our society is dependant upon information and empowerment, change cannot be achieved through ignorance and fear. The only "absolute truth" I have witnessed in my line of work is that providing young people with information and empowerment leads to healthy confident young adults, and bombarding them with fear and limiting information leads to confused young people with devastating and sometimes deadly consequences. I therefore applaud McAllister's work with its honesty and promotion of responsibility, information and empowerment and only hope that young people who are offered this series do not complete the accompanying *Values for your life* workbook.

