

■ Special Issue: MindMatters Plus and Some Mental Health Initiatives in Schools

THIS is the second special issue of the Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling with a focus on mental health issues and schools. The Australian Guidance and Counselling Association is collaborating in the MindMatters Plus initiative with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, the Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council and the Australian Divisions of General Practice. This initiative is funded under the National Mental Health Strategy and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. One outcome of the partnership is this special edition of the AGCA journal, which not only focuses on some recent research and issues around mental health concerns for children and youth but also presents an overview of the MindMatters Plus initiative with its focus on students in our secondary schools with high-support mental health needs.

The first paper, *Making Sense of Resilience: A Useful Step on the Road to Creating and Maintaining Resilient Students and School Communities* by Judith Murray, clarifies some of the confusion around the term “resilience” itself, highlights the key role schools play in building resilience in their students, and identifies ways in which school personnel, students, and communities can work towards the enhancement of resilience in students. Given the number of schools that have implemented programs to build resilience in their students, the notion of an integrated, whole-school approach to this effort is one that should be considered if benefits are to be maintained over time.

The second paper by Rhonda Craven and Herbert Marsh presents some valuable research on understanding and addressing Indigenous secondary students’ aspirations, self-concepts, and the barriers that exist to achieving their aspirations. The study found that significantly more Indigenous students than their non-Indigenous peers aspire to leaving school early and attending Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions, and they are less likely to know what career options they could pursue. These findings have important implications for developing effective strategies to optimise student resilience, academic self-concept, and the determination to succeed in Indigenous students if they are to achieve their aspirations.

Paul Burnett looks at the impact of programs and teacher feedback on enhancing students’ self-esteem and academic self-concept. If schools strive to enhance students’ positive perceptions of themselves and, in turn, their resilience to face the demands placed on them, then the important role teachers play through their communications with their students is not to be underestimated. This paper discusses some of these issues.

The paper by Adrian Ashman which follows it discusses the consistent over-representation of same-sex attracted youth (SSAY) in the statistics related to attempted and completed youth suicide. The paper discusses research that indicates that SSAY

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appear to be six to seven times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers, and that they constitute nearly two-thirds of all suicide attempts. Ashman also discusses research that found links between suicide attempts and victimisation based on sexual orientation, lowered self-esteem, and psychological distress. In effect, the issue of SSAY and suicide is alarming and one that school counsellors need to be cognisant of and able to respond to in their work with youth.

Being able to identify students with a range of issues related to mental health so that they can access prevention and early intervention programs is one of the roles school counsellors are expected to undertake. The paper by Marilyn Campbell reports on the process utilised by two Australian high schools that trialled an identification process for students at risk of anxiety and depression and discusses how school personnel can be used to assist in the identification of these students.

Working with youth with a diverse range of issues or concerns is certainly the role of school counsellors. In the next paper, Nadine Pelling argues that school counsellors and psychologists have those professional skills that are required to create a therapeutic alliance with gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning adolescents. Furthermore, they know the behavioural strategies needed to help these students deal with the issues, some related to same-sex attraction, likely to bring them into contact with counselling or psychological services. The paper also outlines some of the knowledge, awareness, and skills needed to work with these students to help them address their sexual-minority status.

The current initiatives in *MindMatters Plus: A Capacity-building Framework For Working With Secondary School Students With High-support Mental Health Needs* are summarised by Helen Broomhall, Janet Devlin, Sarah Anderson and Martha Doyle. This paper describes the history, development and status of this initiative within the context of MindMatters (MM), a continuing initiative aimed at promoting mental health within Australian secondary schools. The six school reports that follow outline the various ways in which different schools have responded to the current MindMatters Plus initiative and provide insights for other schools to consider in developing their own responses for supporting students with high-support mental health needs.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that all papers in this special issue of the journal have been selected for publication on the basis of their academic merit and/or practical relevance to our readership. All papers submitted to the journal are subject to blind review by at least two reviewers who provide me with feedback on their suitability for publication. For the purposes of this special issue, the report on the MindMatters Plus project and the following school reports were reviewed by the editor only.

Robyn Gillies PhD

Editor