Education policies: Potential impacts and implications in Australia and beyond

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ABSTRACT
Australian education is delivered through government and independent systems. This article discusses how education policies on gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer students in these different sectors have affected school climates. It describes how previously published policy analysis and survey data on Australian gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer students was used to identify the best policies currently in use in Australia. Significant correlations between policies and a variety of well-being and psycho-social outcomes for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer students were uncovered. Ideal policy visions were promoted collaboratively in interstate and international contexts. However, the article cautions against a simplistic view of transnational best-practice adoption.

KEYWORDS
Activism; bullying; education; policy; school

The politics of policy in Australian education

Australia has courted an international reputation as being supportive of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (GLBTIQ) people. For example, the Sydney 2000 Olympic opening ceremony presenting Australian culture on an international platform featured floats evocative of the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras and elaborately decorated drag queens, several of the country’s films that had big international audiences have gay themes (e.g., Priscilla, Queen of the Desert), and the local version of the X Factor famously supported an out transgender man. However, in policy and in practice, different parts of the country have historically had conflicting approaches to GLBTIQ issues, especially in the field of education. This article explores Australian education policies, previously published research on their differences and how they potentially affect GLBTIQ students, and how this research has been used collaboratively in Australia and beyond for advocacy.

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Isolated and diverse

As both the largest island in the world and the smallest continent (Australian Government, 2008), Australia’s geographic isolation is emphasized in its national anthem, which calls it a land “girt by sea.” This isolation has some implications for how GLBTIQ issues are treated in Australian education. While Australian education may be informed by policies at the international level from global education leadership such as UNESCO and it is technically part of the British Commonwealth, the emphasis in Australian schools is definitely on local policies. Australian education is subject to the leadership of the Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, a council composed of state, territory, the Australian federal government, and New Zealand education ministers. It can also be subject to legislation issued by federal parliament and specific state and territory parliaments.

However, the nation’s federal government has not so much run Australian education as it had influenced it, issuing national policies that can be attached to funding distributions that can impact education sectors and a more recent national curriculum in attempts to increase its power. In the public education system, government schools are often termed state schools because they are essentially run, funded, and regulated by education departments within the eight states and territories:

- Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training,
- Tasmanian Department of Education,
- New South Wales Department of Education and Training,
- Queensland Department of Education and Training,
- Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development,
- Western Australian Department of Education and Training, and
- South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services.

These departments also regulate and fund schools in the private system, but their jurisdiction is mitigated by sector-specific independent leadership bodies, mainly in Catholic education and other forms of Christian education. There are other religious systems reflecting what has been termed Australia’s multicultural context, and other less common secular private schools (such as Steiner and Montessori systems run on their own education philosophies, community schools, and home schooling). Among these nonpublic schools, there are also independent and religious bodies at the national level that issue their own national education policies or policy templates. These bodies are also often subject to larger-level authorities within global religious or independent education systems. Of the 3.5 million Australian students, 66% attended government schools, 20% attended Catholic schools, and 13.7% attended other independent schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).
Autonomy of states and territories

Australian states and territories have historically maintained their legal or governmental autonomy around issues pertaining to GLBTIQ people in general, legalizing homosexuality at different points and maintaining various ages of consent (Angelides, 2008). Thus, given that GLBTIQ rights and educational oversight is largely directed by the states and territories in Australia, it is not surprising that GLBTIQ issues in education also vary widely by region of the country. In addition, individual schools can also have their own policies that echo or conflict with broader policy contexts. This great variability across Australian education policy approaches to GLBTIQ issues has, however, provided an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast different policy approaches to GLBTIQ students.

Exploring GLBTIQ policies in Australian education

In this article, I aimed to (a) summarize the different approaches to GLBTIQ students in Australian education policies and (b) explore the effect of these different approaches on the experiences and wellbeing of GLBTIQ students. To explain the basis of the research-based collaborations toward policy-development that arose from project work on matters of policy recently led by Jones and colleagues (Jones, 2015; Jones & Hillier, 2012, 2014). The article briefly outlines the project and its findings here. However, it is important to note that from the beginning, this project benefitted from collaboration with a range of other academics and community advocates, some who were very experienced (including those academics who served as mentors such as Lynne Hillier and Anne Mitchell) right through to young people engaged in internships on the study.

Method

The details of the project’s framework and methods have been published in detail in various journal articles and books (Hillier et al., 2010; Jones, 2011a, 2011b, 2013c, 2015). However, in broad terms, the research can be understood as adopting a mixed-methods approach in a poststructuralist paradigm. The study draws on Foucault’s and Fairclough’s contributions to the theorization of discourse to theorize policy as discourse (for the full details on this theoretical framework, see Jones, 2013c). Fairclough (1989) built on (and more cleanly organized) Foucault’s erratic work on discourse to create a distinct understanding focused on the links between language and power. He suggested that any instance where discourse (or “discursive events”) takes place has three aspects (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4). First, text that can be "read“ including all spoken and written language, visual images and nonverbal communication embodied in actions (Fairclough, 1995, p. 54). Second, discursive processes through which the text is developed and interpreted. (This is Foucault’s [1972] view of discourse as an "individualizable group of statements," or the identification of different discourses through text analysis.) Third, social
practice or what Foucault (1972) terms regulated practice that takes place within particularized sociohistoric contexts. Therefore, the organizations and institutions within any setting shape discourses and vice versa. Fairclough’s work thus centers Foucault’s ideas around texts, such that his model lends itself more to textually oriented systematic critical discourse analysis (CDA) with a primarily contemporary focus (where Foucault used historical methodologies). Fairclough (1989) thus offered the threefold model of policy as discourse (p. 25) as manifesting in text, interaction and context that is central to the three mixed methods (looking at policy documents, development and implementation, and contextualized outcomes) adopted in the poststructural policy analysis used.

In line with the aforementioned framing of policy as involving the three areas of text, interaction, and context, this project specifically drew on three data sources and reflected on the relations among them. This included the following:

- Analysis of more than 80 Australian policy documents (texts) that related directly or indirectly to GLBTIQ students in schools (mainly from national, state-specific, and independent education provider websites). These documents were searched and read “for changes” in what was both the first, and most continually repeated, step of data collection throughout the research process (policies are not static documents but continually updated). The texts were downloaded in PDF and Word document formats from relevant government and independent education service provider websites (and, as necessary, redownloaded, from 2010). Nonrestrictive notions of what constitute discursively rich data in texts (Aarseth, 1997; Fairclough, 1989; Jewitt & van Leeuwen, 2001; MacDonald, 2003) were followed (not just words but images, layout, colors, hypertextual web links), and discursive analysis techniques outlined particularly by Fairclough were applied. Leximancer computer analysis software was used to a minor extent to identify the key themes and related vocabularies based on their statistical occurrences within the documents.

- Confidential interviews with 10 relevant policy informants from key state-level and independent education departments, policy committees, and advocacy agencies (about the interactive elements of policies). These in-person and phone interviews were roughly 1–2 hr each and were mainly focused on the contexts of the policies’ development and implementation, and how key policies were developed and implemented.

- Data from a national 2010 online survey of 3,134 Australian GLBTIQ young people ages 14–21 years (serving to show how the policies affected their various contexts). The survey was advertised on Facebook and through GLBTIQ and education networks. The questionnaire was hosted through an interface called Demographix and accessible through a direct URL (www.wti3.org.au). It took approximately 20 min to complete and featured 13 webpages (154 qualitative and quantitative items). This article focuses on the data related to
the young people’s school experiences and the kinds of available supports and protections at school. Simple chi-square analysis of education-themed data with other relevant survey data was used (background demographics, homophobic abuse, suicide attempts, and so on).

Key findings

Policy landscape in 2010

The formal landscape of Australian education for GLBTIQ students comprised varied terrain. There was little protection for such students under federal law. However, the first goal of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) outlined a commitment from all governments to ensure an education service free from discrimination based on gender (although notably not gender identity or gender expression) and sexual orientation, among other traits (p. 7). Yet, its 4-year plan of actions omitted that focus (Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2009), so that the Declaration’s reference to orientation was widely undiscovered and surprised most policy informants interviewed (from policy officers to activists). Reference to GLBTIQ youth was found to be invisible in national independent sector policies. However, all eight Australian states and territories prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and most also for gender identity, except for Northern Territory and Tasmania. In the Northern Territory, the policy prohibited discrimination on sexuality, and in Tasmania, the prohibition was for and homosexuality, bisexuality, or transsexuality. Thus, in Tasmania, general protections on gender were not included. Only two states had direct education policy documents wholly devoted to GLBTIQ student issues:

- Victoria featured the most explicit prodiversity policies in the public sector, principally the eight-page Supporting Sexual Diversity in Schools (Victoria Government, 2008) and large sections on gender identity and sexuality in other policies (Victoria Government, 2007, 2010). This policy stipulates the need for Victorian schools to follow a “safe and supportive schools” approach that had been long advocated for by local activists and academics, through supplying GLBTIQ-inclusive sexuality education, antihomophobia education, displays on billboards, and availability of counseling referrals. In addition, the policy provisions for gender identity cover the need for schools to be inclusive for both transgender and intersex students, and to do so with respect for their privacy and by including them directly in the managements’ planning for how they could best be included in specific schools. Yet, Victoria also had the most blatantly conservative Catholic policy (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2001) that prohibited teaching around premarital sex, safe sex, body functions, and individualism (pp. 7–8).
New South Wales featured a direct one-page memo-style policy against homophobia in schools (Boston, 1997). This policy required an antidiscrimination approach in line with legal protections in the state for same-sex attracted students, in response to legal action taken against the state by a student who had been repeatedly beaten by large groups of children shortly before its release. It mandated that sex education discuss and address homophobia and that data should be collected on the incidence of homophobic violence in schools (Board of Studies New South Wales, 2003; Catholic Education Commission New South Wales, 2004), and required formal democratic teaching approaches around “controversial issues” (New South Wales Government, 1983, p. 1).

Other states had more general education policy documents with little or no mention of GLBTIQ student issues or homophobia:

- Australian Capital Territory had general antibullying and equity policies (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).
- Queensland had a general inclusion policy (Queensland Government, 2005), pertaining to students with disabilities. The Brisbane Catholic Education Office had no relevant policy.
- Tasmania had general antidiscrimination and equity policies (Tasmania Government, 2008a, 2008b).
- The Northern Territory had no relevant policy.
- Western Australia had no relevant policy.
- South Australia had a cross-sector policy on problematic sexual behaviors that overemphasized homosexual deviance (South Australia Department of Education and Children’s Services, Catholic Education South Australia, & Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, 2010).

**State policy affects school-level policy**

I examined the presence of a state-level policy and GLBTIQ student’s perceptions of their school having such a policy in three states/territories for which I had a robust sample size in the student data: Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland. Overall, school policy-based protection of GLBTIQ students in official policy documents was related to students” reporting of school-level policy in the survey. GLBTIQ students were more likely ($p < 0.001, \chi^2[4] = 36.510$) to report policy-based protection if they attended government schools (26.46%), and less likely to report they were not protected (28.99%).

The type of school (public vs. private) was also a factor in whether or not policy protections were available. I examined the responses from students from government, Catholic, and other Christian schools (the three largest groups) and found lower percentages of GLBTIQ students who attended religious schools reported policy protections, including those who attended Catholic schools (19.30%). Thus, the religious schools represented were more likely to be perceived by students to not have protective policy, reflecting legal and policy contexts.
State was a highly significant factor influencing perceived policy protection when Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland were compared (\(p < 0.001, \chi^2[4] = 25.290\)). Although across all states, more GLBTIQ students “didn’t know” about their school policy, Victoria had the highest percentage of GLBTIQ students who perceived themselves as protected by policies (29.79%), followed by New South Wales (26.53%). This may reflect how both states had direct policy-based protections in place, and Victoria particularly had the most extensive policies. These states also had lower percentages of students who perceived themselves as not protected by school policy (Victoria: 29.36%, New South Wales: 31.16%).

When considering state and type of school, I found that more Victorian GLBTIQ students attending government schools reported there were policy protections than did not (yes: 31.93%, no: 26.01%), while smaller percentages attending Catholic schools reported there were policy protections than did not (yes: 20.69%, no: 36.78%). In New South Wales, it was also notable that students attending the other Christian independent schools were much more likely to report their school had no protection than in other sectors (yes: 12.66%, no: 54.43%). A smaller proportion of GLBTIQ students perceived themselves as protected by policy in Queensland (19.45%), which had the highest percentage of students who perceived themselves as not protected (38.73%). These findings underline the argument that students’ sense of being protected at school is related to direct (not interpretive) state-level policy-based protections mentioning GLBTIQ students explicitly. General inclusive education policy did not have a big effect, as it was often interpreted as related to students with disabilities (by staff, students, and policy informants), and not to GLBTIQ students.

**Policy impact on sexuality education**

To understand any possible relation between state policies and sex education, I examined differences in student reports on their sexuality education in school by state. Specifically, students were asked to identify the sexuality education messages they were exposed to from a list deduced from wider analysis of the 28 main sexuality education approaches available. Overall, it appears that the messages that GLBTIQ students in each sector reported receiving through sexuality education in school, whether affirming or prejudicial for GLBTIQ youth, reflected broader state policies—the most significant findings are reported on here. New South Wales government schools generally upheld practices in keeping with New South Wales Department of Education and Training policy; particularly a liberal comprehensive approach to sexuality and the negation of homophobic discrimination.

Whether a school was public or religious was also a factor. In contrast, GLBTIQ students from New South Wales other Christian schools were most likely to be taught to convert to heterosexuality (32.50%), reflecting antidiscrimination law exemptions. GLBTIQ students in Victorian government schools were least likely to be taught to convert to heterosexuality (2.56%) or that sex before marriage was
wrong (2.56%), in keeping with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s policy on supporting sexual diversity. They had increased exposure to messages about making their own sexual decisions (63.37%), that experimentation is okay (35.26%) and not needing to be “manly” or “girly” (28.28%)—all pronounced in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s policies. The lowest percentage of GLBTIQ students learned “homophobia is wrong” in Victorian Catholic schools (12.21%), and there were comparably lower percentages of GLBTIQ students taught a range of other messages. Therefore, both New South Wales and Victorian government schools were more likely than were schools broadly in other sectors to have promoted useful messages around GLBTIQ issues. This contrasted the relative silence on sexuality issues in Queensland Catholic schools, the increased promotion of abstinence and heterosexual conversion in New South Wales other Christian schools, and the more limited challenge to homophobia in Victorian Catholic schools.

This fits the way Sexual Morality and Nonapproach Discourses—a combination of messages privileging either a conservative religious construction of sexuality as ideally confined to heterosexual marriage and reproduction, or else actively censored (Jones, 2011b)—functioned within Catholic Education Office Melbourne’s policy to challenge, mar, or negate the discourses these messages stem from. GLBTIQ students in Queensland’s Catholic system were most likely to receive no sexuality education messages (22.55%) and least likely to be taught many messages including that “sexual experimentation is okay” (3.92%), showing the grasp of non-approach discourse in this system (not challenged in any Queensland policies). These findings are consistent with our previous research on GLBTIQ students who had reported that their school had protective policies in place were more likely to receive useful information from that school on homophobia and discrimination, gay relationships, lesbian relationships, safe gay sexual intercourse, and safe lesbian sexual intercourse (Jones & Hillier, 2012).

**Policy impact on LGBT school supports**

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development explicitly recommended schools displayed posters and information on noticeboards (Victoria Government, 2008, p. 5; 2010, p. 29); used external referrals to experts regarding gender identity and sexual diversity issues (Victoria Government, 2007, 2008, p. 5); and developed a relevant “library of resources” (Victoria Government, 2008, p. 10). Regarding social supports, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s policies recommended a resource focused on creating “same-sex attracted friendly environments” (Victoria Government, 2008, pp. 2-8) and drew on discourses aimed at promoting friendly relations akin to the “caring community” of Safe and Supportive Spaces and “celebrating community” of Diversity Education social formulations. All other systems lacked recommendations around support features. Thus, I wanted to examine how state
Policies may affect school-based supports for GLBTIQ students. The student survey tool ask students to identify which support features were present at their school from a list of elements such as posters and library resources about sexual diversity (see Table 1).

Most significant is the fact that a strong majority of GLBTIQ students from the Victorian government sector reported at least one support feature (73.02%). In contrast, most GLBTIQ students from New South Wales Catholic (60.28%), Queensland Catholic (54.90%) and New South Wales Other Christian (54.67%) sectors reported no support features. The dearth of policy on GLBTIQ students in religious systems likely further enabled conservative default positions (where no supports were provided). Thus, explicit recommendations in Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development policies appeared useful in contributing towards a context where schools featured specific supports for GLBTIQ students.

Policy impact on safety and well-being

Given that policy protection might be seen as both a sign of institutional and social support for GLBTIQ students, and might influence approaches taken to GLBTIQ students generally by the school community which could affect their mental health.

Thus, I investigated whether there were correlations with policy and issues of safety for the students, and also for their well-being. Several strong associations suggested particular types of policy-based protection made a positive difference to GLBTIQ students (see Table 2).

Perceived school policy-based protection had a highly significant relation with GLBTIQ students’ increased feelings of safety at school. Overall, 75.07% of GLBTIQ students who had policy-based protection against homophobia at school felt safe there (compared with 46.11% who said their school had no policy). In total, only 6.04% of students who reported school policy protection felt unsafe

### Table 1. Relations between support features at school and state (N = 2,341).

| Support feature                                                                 | Pearson chi-square | New South Wales school students (n = 809) | Victoria school students (n = 946) | Queensland school students (n = 586) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Posters about sexual diversity                                                 | 71.965***         | 13.84                                    | 24.74                             | 9.04                                 |
| Students who speak up against homophobia                                       | 18.166***         | 23.11                                    | 28.75                             | 19.45                                |
| Friendliness towards same-sex attracted people                                 | 14.551**          | 34.73                                    | 38.90                             | 29.35                                |
| Equal treatment of same-sex partners at events (parents/kids/staff)            | 11.460**          | 19.53                                    | 24.31                             | 17.58                                |
| Links with sexual diversity support groups/services                            | 61.450***         | 10.38                                    | 20.93                             | 8.36                                 |
| Library resources/books about sexual diversity                                 | 23.343***         | 26.33                                    | 32.88                             | 21.84                                |
| None of the aforementioned supports                                            | 34.658***         | 39.68                                    | 31.92                             | 46.76                                |

Note. For each chi-square, df = 2.  
**p < .001; ***p < .001.
there (compared with 21.83% of students who reported no policy protection). Therefore, it seems perceived policy protection contributed to a context in which students felt safe, and decreased their sense of danger.

Perceived policy protection also had a highly significant relation with students feeling good about their sexuality. Overall, 84.53% of GLBTIQ students who had policy-based protection against homophobia at school felt good about their sexuality, compared with 77.66% who said their school had no policy. In addition, only 2.56% of GLBTIQ students reporting policy protection felt bad about their sexuality, whereas 4.67% reporting no policy felt bad about it. Thus, perceived policy protection appears to contribute to a context where students feel safer, and their sense of endangerment decreases.

Perceived policy protection had the most highly significant relation of all correlations shown in Table 2 with the students’ overall rating of their school as supportive. The majority (55.70%) of students who classified their school as supportive knew that there was an antihomophobia policy at their school (only 10.40% reported that there was no policy). The majority (51.80%) of students who classified their school as homophobic reported that there was no antihomophobia policy at their school (only 12.60% reported that there was a policy).

Given these relations between perceived policy and students’ feelings about their school experience and their sexuality, it is not surprising that I also found that perceived policy-based protection had highly significant relationships with reduced likelihood of thinking about self-harm, actual self-harm, suicidal ideation, and attempted suicide. Only 31.55% of GLBTIQ students who had policy-based protection against homophobia at school had thought about self-harm, compared with 46.55% who said their school had no policy. Similarly, only 25.67% of GLBTIQ students who had policy-based protection against homophobia at school had self-harmed, compared with 38.64% who said their school had no policy. Also, only 34.10% of GLBTIQ students who had policy-based protection against homophobia at school had thought about suicide, compared with 47.16% who said their school had no policy. Only 12.77% of GLBTIQ students who had policy-based protection against homophobia at school had attempted suicide; almost half the 22.21% who said their school had no policy. Thus, well-promoted school policy protection

### Table 2. Relations between gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer students’ perceived school policy protection and psychosocial measures.

| Psychosocial measure                           | n   | Pearson chi-square | df |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|--------------------|----|
| Thought about engaging in self-harm           | 3,101| 57.964***          | 2  |
| Self-harmed                                   | 3,101| 43.000***          | 2  |
| Thought about attempting suicide              | 3,101| 65.493***          | 2  |
| Attempted suicide                             | 3,101| 37.787***          | 2  |
| How safe they feel at school                  | 2,994| 201.966***         | 4  |
| How they feel about their sexuality           | 3,905| 24.679***          | 4  |
| Overall rating of their school as supportive  | 3,003| 595.892***         | 4  |

***p < .001.
against homophobia appeared to contribute to a context that decreases a GLBTIQ student’s suicide and self-harm risks.

Taken together, these findings suggest that policy protection may be useful as a factor in contributing to supportive environments. Protection from homophobic abuse itself, at the ground-level, could perhaps be the key contribution of policy. Schools with known policy protection also featured significantly less verbal, physical, and other types of homophobic abuse (see Table 3). This lessened abuse likely decreased negative effects for students, including their suicide risk.

**Implications**

The research had implications for policy advocacy in Australia and beyond. It clearly showed that the Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training had more useful policy approaches for GLBTIQ students than did other Australian education providers. Specifically, these bodies had at least one or more explicit direct policy documents devoted exclusively to GLBTIQ student issues, taking an antidiscrimination and safe and supportive schools approach. The Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s policies were particularly strong for their specific guidelines on structural and social supports (including around providing educational access for transgender and intersex students), whilst the New South Wales Department of Education and Training’s policies were particularly strong in mandating antihomophobia messages and inclusive comprehensive sexuality education. These approaches were superior in providing protection that appeared not only to affect the reproduction of key messages in school-level policies, sexuality education, and provision of support features, but also to have significant effects on safety and even suicide risk for GLBTIQ students. Alongside the push for academics to share research findings and to engage in more substantial ways in community issues generally (Weertz & Sanderman, 2010), there was a strong ethical responsibility to promote the development of such policies beyond these sectors through collaborative work, so that GLBTIQ students in other educational contexts could also experience these benefits.

**Table 3.** Relations between gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer students’ perceived school policy protection and homophobic abuse.

| Abuse type                        | n    | Pearson chi-square | Students abused at school whose school had policy | Students abused at school unsure of policy context | Students abused at school whose school had no policy |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Verbal homophobic abuse           | 1,876| 35.253***          | 25.18                                            | 36.62                                            | 38.20                                            |
| Physical homophobic abuse         | 561  | 18.283***          | 23.20                                            | 29.40                                            | 47.40                                            |
| Other types of homophobic abuse   | 2,143| 26.842***          | 25.12                                            | 37.25                                            | 37.63                                            |

*Note. For each chi-square, df = 2.***p < .001.
The importance of collaboration

This Australian research did not exist in a vacuum but was built on the groundwork laid by previous studies in the field that had explored GLBTIQ youth identities broadly for example (e.g., Dyson et al., 2003; Hillier et al., 1998). In addition to contributing to the literature on education and youth policy, these research findings can influence policy change to promote better life experiences for this population of youth. Promoting the best-practice models of education policy around GLBTIQ student issues to education sector leadership relies on collaboration between and among academics and activists. Collaborations usually focused around a targeted report, targeted event, or direct inquiry.

In the Australian context, there were opportunities to collaborate with existing GLBTIQ advocacy or rights bodies that had previously established links to leadership in various education sectors through which targeted reports could be channeled. Some formal links had been established on the basis on specific pre-existing equity projects, as with the Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission’s Steering Committee and Working Group Project called Challenging Sexuality-Based Discrimination and Bullying in Schools; formed with representatives from the government and independent education sectors. Others were the result of years of informal liaison, as with advocates from Tasmania Gay and Lesbian Rights Group who had a long-term informal relation with the Tasmanian Department of Education. In these cases, a targeted report was generated on the best-practice policy research that examined the situation in the relevant inter-state education sector context/s (Jones, 2012a, 2012b, 2013b). The local advocacy groups then presented the reports to the education sector leadership representatives at a formal meeting. We would concomitantly launch the report to the state’s local media (newspapers, online media, television news, and radio programs) to create public pressure on the education sector to act on the report’s recommendations, facilitating interviews with passionate GLBTIQ students in local schools to add meaning to the data. In some cases passionate politicians also chaired reports and specific statistics at State Parliament sittings, and reports were passed on to other educational leaders. The public’s responses to the (more than 50) media articles and television spots generated on the reports (e.g., Alexander, 2013; Chilcott, 2013; Hiatt, 2012) increased the pressure on sectors to act. For example, in Western Australia in 2012, three fact sheets (for staff, students, and parents) were sent to all Western Australia schools to help them deal with sexuality and gender-based bullying (Western Australia Equal Opportunity Commission, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). The Tasmanian Department of Education launched its first direct policy explicitly on GLBTIQ issues based on the research—Guidelines for Supporting Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools and Colleges (Tasmanian Department of Education, 2012). In 2013, the Queensland Department of Education and Training confirmed that they were updating their “Bullying No Way” website with specific material about the effects of
homo/transphobic bullying and consulting with a Working Group, chaired by Queensland PFLAG, that included the Queensland Teachers Union, Independent Education Union of Australia—Queensland & Northern Territory Branch, Parents and Citizens Queensland, Family Planning Queensland, Queensland Police and Open Doors Youth Service. In the Australian Capital Territory, the Education Minister also cited the findings as inspiration for “ramping up efforts to stamp out homophobia in [Australian Capital Territory] schools” (Barr, 2011, p. 1).

With this research, there were also opportunities to participate in newly established collaborations, such as the Foundation of Young Australians and Safe Schools Coalition Victoria’s National Safe Schools Symposium (Melbourne, October 19–20, 2012). Other events were more strongly focused on building capacity through exposing educators directly to research on homophobic bullying, as with the New South Wales Multidisciplinary Health Organising Committee’s Videoed Youth Health Forum on Sexuality (Sydney, September 12, 2012) or the various events run by the South Australia Australian Education Union (2011–2013). At the Australian Education Union and Safe Schools Coalition Victoria events, partnerships were formed for research projects that extended the research to investigate GLBTIQ teachers in policy (Jones, Gray, & Harris, 2014).

In contexts where there were no pre-existing links between advocacy groups and relevant leadership bodies, collaborations occurred directly with leadership bodies through formal and informal liaison structures. Some informal structures allowed for progress toward best-practice policies over time. For example, in 2011, members of the Safe Schools Coalition Victoria and Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria were contacted by the South Australia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, inquiring about their guidelines around homophobia in schools. There has been ongoing informal liaison with the Australian Human Rights Commission in regards to its informal inquiries around GLBTIQ rights issues since 2012, and with the Brisbane Catholic Education Office regarding its informal inquiries around the development of its sexuality education approaches since 2013. This liaison mainly involves commenting on plans, giving advice, and sharing relevant resources wherever possible. More formal liaison structures allowed for direct consultation on specific documents. There were invitations, for example, to create direct formal submissions to the Australian Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee about GLBTIQ education issues in proposed national legislation drafts (Jones, 2012c, 2013a). These inquiries had allowed best-practice models to be passed on directly to organizations. In South Australia for example, with the Safe Schools Coalition Victoria’s advice and permission, the South Australia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was able to successfully rebrand and reprint a best-practice resource used in Victorian schools, Challenging Homophobia in Schools: A Guide for School Staff (South Australia Department for Education and Child Development, 2011), on its own website. In work with the Brisbane Catholic Education Office, publications about
different sexuality education approaches were passed on for project officers to consider incorporating in their policy and resources. The Senate Committee’s recommendations on the Australian Government’s proposed bills directly drew on specific definitions and best-practice models outlined in the submissions based on this research (The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, 2013a, 2013b). The inquiries also allowed liaison links to be made that could become activated again when other progress opportunities arose.

In some international contexts, there were opportunities to collaborate with GLBTIQ advocacy or rights bodies that were in the process of establishing new collaborative links to leadership through targeted events. Some new links were being established through formal convening which allowed participants to both be exposed to research and strategize together towards the promotion of best-practice, as with UNESCO’s First International Consultation on Homophobic Bullying in Educational Institutions (Rio de Janeiro, December 6–9, 2011), which drew together researchers, advocates, and educational leadership from around the world. Many of these bodies had produced their own research contributing to the need for greater leadership—the United States’ GLSEN had pioneered studies on the effects of victimization (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010), the United Kingdom’s Stonewall had described different kinds of victimization (Hunt & Jensen, 2009), and there was a history of other work from Israel, Ireland and Canada. GALA, a LGBT organization in South Africa, help the Colloquium on Challenging Homophobia and Transphobia in South African Schools (Johannesburg, September 6–7, 2012). In all cases, the Australian research contribution included panel or keynote speeches on best-practice policy research, examining its generalizability to other sector context/s. The events facilitated further liaison connections, through which key approaches could be promoted and new adaptations could be generated. The events also gave further authority to the work presented—for example, UNESCO’s invitation to present the work was seen by education sector leaders in some countries as the highest of research endorsements, which allowed the researchers further legitimacy in discussing homophobic bullying back in Australia and also allowed the Australian research to contribute to specific guiding statements used by UNESCO. There were varying actions taken as a result. At the UNESCO event, participants co-constructed the Rio Statement on Homophobic Bullying and Education for All (UNESCO, 2011) and contributed to the Review of Homophobic Bullying in Educational Institutions (UNESCO, 2012b), and later a practice guidance document Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying (UNESCO, 2012a) disseminated around the world. At the Gay And Lesbian memory in Action (commonly called GALA) event participants created plans for future activism in South Africa and neighboring countries that would make use of unique social and cultural structures, and dramatic/dance traditions. This work with international “others” further stimulated and authorized participants to engage in local collaborations, as the figure of the “active other” is a stimulant in policy adoption and external
recognition is likewise a catalyst for the validation of local policy research (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

**Limitations in research and application**

There were some limitations to the research discussed in this article. Whilst it provides strong evidence that suggests policies make a difference for GLBTIQ students, there may be additional factors at play, and in addition students’ own knowledge of their schools’ policies may not be the best indicator of policies being available (it is possible that some policies existed where students were not aware of them, for example). The research included 100 gender-diverse and intersex students but initially did not strongly focus on the issues of transphobia and bias against intersex people in schools that emerged in the project data. I ultimately examined and reported on these students as a comparative group to same sex students from the study (Jones & Hillier, 2013); our analysis uncovered that the gender diverse and intersex student group was particularly more likely to experience greater physical abuse in Australian schools and were more likely to leave these schools at a younger age than the same sex attracted student population, however they were also more likely to engage in activism to improve their schooling experience. This work was further supported by findings of follow-up studies focusing exclusively on gender-diverse and transgender students, where it was uncovered that the activism favored ranged from social media work such as liking Facebook pages or starting online petitions to giving speeches at the school or directly advocating for more inclusive uniform policies (Jones, del Pozo de Bolger, Dunne, Lykins, & Hawkes, 2015; Smith et al., 2014). Research is now being conducted to specifically understand the needs of intersex Australians in (and beyond) schooling contexts in more detail by a research team led by Dr. Tiffany Jones, in collaboration with Organisation Intersex International, the Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group, the National LGBTI Health Alliance, and other bodies representing a broad range of intersex people.

The findings of the research discussed in this article relied on contextual (Australian) conditions of democracy, widespread access to education and relative freedom for GLBTIQ people. This was also true of the means through which it was promoted—Australian universities provide structural reports for the dissemination of targeted reports, support academic networking and encourage the use of the media—which is (here) relatively easy to arrange and does not put those involved in any danger. Thus, an overly simplistic view of transnational best-practice policy adoption must be cautioned against. At both UNESCO’s and GALA’s targeted events, a few representatives noted that some education contexts (e.g., in Iran, Russia, and some African nations such as Uganda and Nigeria) were so dangerous for GLBTIQ people generally that broader decriminalization efforts and antiviolence measures were more immediately urgent that advocating for particular protective school policies. In such contexts tensions around GLBTIQ issues can make the
data collection on homophobic bullying that is so important for policy promotion potentially dangerous to researchers, discussion of homophobia potentially dangerous for sympathetic education leadership, and media coverage antagonistic to antidiscrimination purposes. There can also be other priorities in international and interstate contexts that lessen the urgency of antihomophobia education policies compared with more immediate humanitarian concerns such as poverty, war, or a lack of educational access. In Australia, it has been particularly difficult to make connections with educational leadership in the Northern Territory, because the territory has had other education policy priorities around catering for Indigenous students. It was only in 2015 that collaborative links were made to the Northern Territory Independent Education Union of Australia through Queensland PFLAG’s Working Group.

Furthermore, the idea that researchers from one country or state can save other contexts from their homophobia can be based on imperialist models. Homophobic legislation in places such as Uganda has actually been promoted, for example, by US church groups (Phoon, 2010). Also, although many academics recognize the value of “examples from elsewhere” in helping one context overcome a stalled policy promotion campaign with the work of another, there is recognition that wide-held or global consensus on these matters is often imagined, and fear that educational “borrowing” might serve colonizing purposes (Connell, 2007, p. 78; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p. 41). Also, some nations have different GLBTIQ identities that do not fit neatly into Western or Northern notions of identity as well as corresponding social contexts that do not fit neatly into concepts of supportive or homo/ transphobia—such as Samoa and Thailand. For any such contexts, it is extremely important to make links with local advocates, although it is difficult to balance the need for partnerships with the kind of bodies that satisfy a grant committee, with the need for partnerships that would allow insight into local community networks. When particularly well-networked GLBTIQ rights advocates or academics are lacking in a context, relations with educational leadership are difficult to nurture. Similarly, a lack of sympathetic journalists in local media for the state can also prevent broader dissemination of research findings around policy.

**Conclusion**

This article provided a variety of data that showed the potential importance of protective education policies for GLBTIQ students in terms of their safety and well-being at school. Several Australian states are now being influenced by the Victorian and New South Wales models that appeared to be linked to the most promising outcomes for these students, and these models are also having an influence in some overseas contexts. Various collaborations between academics, activists, nongovernment organizations, international rights bodies, education sector leadership, and politicians have been crucial in facilitating the promotion of these policy types and related liaisons on action guidance. However, the
research’s contextual conditions of democracy, widespread education access, and freedom for GLBTIQs broadly certainly affected the results and applicability of the policies in question. The research has been and will likely continue to be very useful and relevant for contexts where such conditions exist (and where education policies on GLBTIQ issues are lacking). However, its relevance to contexts where such conditions do not exist, or where different conceptualizations of GLBTIQ identities are at work, needs to be treated more carefully. In such contexts, the push for the education policy models discussed here would likely have less relevance (and effect) compared with other more locally nuanced activisms and efforts.

Notes on contributor

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