

Troubled teens no match for real role-models

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Suspension and outdoor sports are not a cure all for boys with behavioural problems, according to new research.

Dr Tilling, a student behavioural consultant for 10 years and a recent UQ graduate, said having good male and female mentors and spending more time in supportive school environments would help students with behavioural problems.

Dr Tilling, who finished her PhD in UQ's School of Education, said schools should be given more resources to help students with behavioural problems by enhancing their social and emotional intelligence as well as their academic intelligence.

Alternative programs such as boot camps and outdoor education often invited students with behavioural problems to continue with aggression and bad behaviour.

Some of these program instructors who were “macho football types” needed to teach broader psychological and sociological interventions.

“It's also not just about students receiving rehabilitation intervention and consequences for negative behaviours but also about positive reinforcement,” Dr Tilling said.

She said many students were labelled bad kids even after completing alternative education programs and there was little or no reintegration for them back into school.

“Even though the student may change, the school may not have changed its perception of the student or adapted the school curriculum,” she said.

“This may therefore lead the student to find alternative means of education or the students negative behaviours escalate.

“It's about giving students the skills to tap into inner resources and support networks.”

Dr Tilling, of Ashgrove, spent a year analysing how 90 boys aged between 13 and 15 years old who had been suspended from school formed their identities and bounced back from adversity after a suspension program.

She found that most of these boys valued gangs, drugs, big cars, “chicks”, violence and aggressive behaviour to gain a sense of power, but did not value formal education.

“Most of the boys were from dysfunctional backgrounds and witnessed a lot of violence and gang behaviours which accentuated only one way to be a powerful male.

“Rehabilitation isn't just about looking at a person individually.

“It's also about where they are placed sociologically; both these influences have an overall impact on how individuals construct their identity.”

Source: UQ

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