

Evidence of Learning: E-Portfolio

Identifying an issue and investigating the problem

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Introduction

This portfolio outlines my proposed solution to address a social problem using techniques relevant to my field of study, Applied Drama. I will summarise the problem that I have identified - the quality of sex education available to primary school children; present my ideas on how I think this might be best tackled; and conclude with a summary of the findings from the feedback I received on my proposed solution.

Summary of the problem

For this assignment I chose to investigate the quality of sex education available to UK Primary school aged children. The idea stemmed from a piece of research I read by Bramhagen and Lundstrom (2022) which suggested that some professionals feel insecure about teaching sex education to primary school pupils, even when taking a multi-professional approach (i.e., collaborative teaching by teachers and nurses). The study also identified that the quality of the education was also dependent on the level of enthusiasm it perceived to inspire in the students on the receiving end.

Organisations such as *Fumble* (2022) and *Young Minds* (2022) acknowledge that issues relating to sex, intimacy and sexuality can affect mental health and that it is, therefore, important that young people have access to reliable information and resources to help them to navigate potential issues relating to these subject matters, as well as helping them to be better prepared for adult life (Ezaydi, 2021). However, recent studies, such as the report by Wood et al (2021), found that the quality and extent of school-led sexual health education varied considerably from school to school, and moreover, the levels of attention given to improving this specific area of adolescent wellbeing is seemingly low (Ezaydi, 2021) despite being 'fundamental to the overall health and well-being of individuals' (WHO, 2022).

It would appear that good sexual health education, or relationship education, which has been mandatory in primary schools since 2020 (Department for Education, 2020), is vitally important in helping to promote healthy attitudes about sex and relationships but can also be a useful tool in supporting the mental health agenda; however, this is only possible if there is better and more positive engagement by school educators and students alike; and also buy-in from the parents of these primary school children.

In order to investigate this issue further and prior to identifying a possible solution, I conducted a small-scale focus group, consisting of four parents (one male and three females) who all had children of primary school age (between 4-11 years old). One of the parents was also a Primary school teacher. During the focus group the parents discussed the limited sex education content in the curriculum and each expressed concern about the lack of training and resources available to teachers to support competent teaching of the subject to young children. The parents acknowledged that there were other sources of information for their children outside of School, such as online resources, sex education books and health clinics, but they felt that these resources were largely geared towards older children (teenagers) and they were also concerned about the reliability of some information (particularly from online sources). One of the parents also outlined that one of their children favoured talking to a particular teacher in their school because they were known to have had experience of teaching sexual health education and were easier to talk to.

In addition to my focus group with the parents, I also looked into whether there were any other external sources or organisations that were currently available to teachers and parents. I found that there were companies like the Theatre Centre that offered virtual gatherings for teachers to discuss methods for teaching Relationship and Sex Education (RSE). The organisation also did a *Birds and Bees* touring play to schools to help them to develop RSE content for their curriculum. However, the

parents in my focus group were not aware of these types of activities in their schools but they did feel that creating more stimulating and interactive sessions on the subject would be welcomed, particularly for children in primary schools.

Proposed Solution

As an Applied Drama student, I am interested in how drama techniques can be applied in social and educational settings to help identify, explore, and address social issues effecting young people's mental health and wellbeing. Therefore, my proposed solution to improve engagement in sexual health education at primary school age would be to build on the Theatre Centre's model of teaching RSE as a creative subject by creating a workshop for the stakeholders, i.e., parents and teaching staff. The aim would be to make them feel more confident about discussing sexual health with primary school children and engaging them in a more interesting and meaningful way.

In Bramhagen and Lundstrom's (2022) study their research findings outlined that trust was a key part of teaching sex education, therefore the workshops would centre on activities that help build and develop the trust between teachers and their pupils, and between parents and their children, using drama techniques designed to promote freedom of expression and trust-building.

As I had a peer (Aimee) who was also interested in using drama techniques to address a similar problem about sex education in schools, we worked together to do an elevator pitch on the idea of the workshop to two members of university staff in order to assess the scale of our intended project. Once the project was given the green light, I presented our ideas to my original focus group of parents to establish whether they considered a workshop to be a useful tool for engagement and if they felt this would be of interest to them.

My colleague, Aimee and I then carried out a survey using Google Forms, targeting primary school parents (see Appendix 1), with a blend of questions that addressed both of the problems we were seeking to address. The survey sought to find out more about parents' attitudes to existing sex education in schools; identify what content was currently being taught; and see whether parents believed that more creative methods of sex education would encourage students to engage in the subject more, as well as make it more comfortable for them to discuss these types of issues with their children.

We received a total of 13 responses from our survey. The sample of participants was opportunistic from friends and family members that we knew with children of Primary school age.

Findings of the feedback

The results of the survey provided lots of interesting data on various aspects of primary level sex education from a parent's perspective. It indicated that many parents (76.9%) were not sure whether their children's sexual health education was satisfactory and almost 92% had no idea what was being taught to their children in schools.

Question 3 - If sex education/sexual health is taught at your child/children's school, do you know what type of content is covered in classes?

13 responses

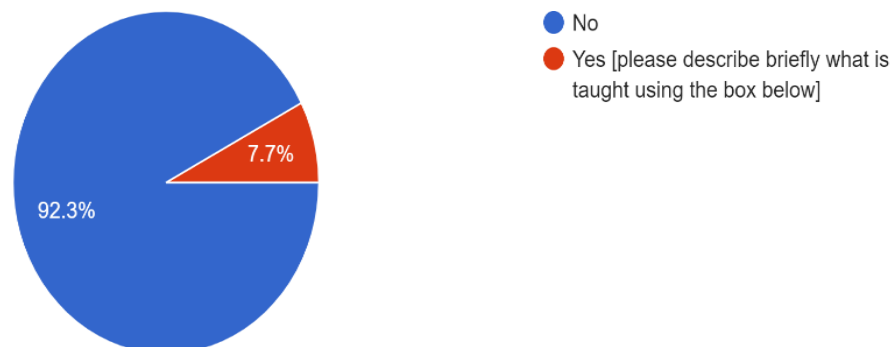


Image: Pie chart displaying Parent response to knowing what content is covered in their child's sex education class

A likert scale was used to ask parents how likely they felt their children would discuss sex education or sexual health with them (1 being very unlikely and 10 being very likely). The results showed that most parents felt their children would be reasonably likely to discuss these matters with their parents:

Question 4 - Using the scale below, how likely do you believe that your child/children would discuss sexual health/education with you?

13 responses

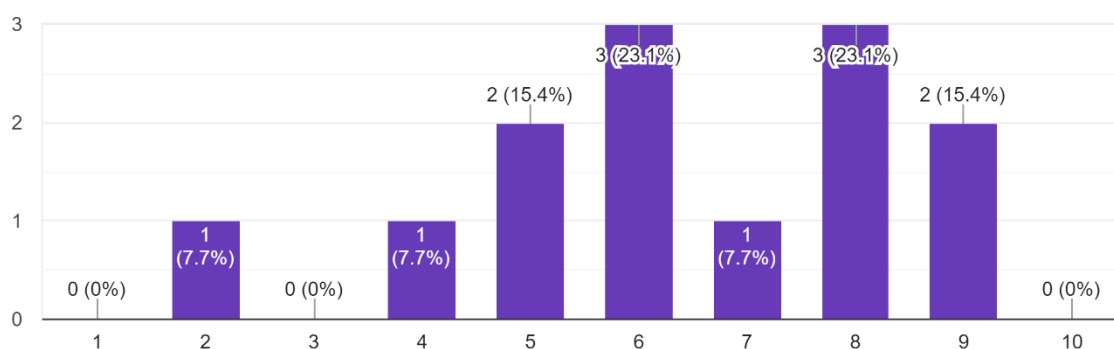


Image: Likert Scale (Question 4 survey results)

Although, we would have also liked to have had the time and opportunity to gather some feedback from teachers on the prospect of using creative methods to teach sex education, a fairly large proportion of the parents from our survey (38.5%) felt that it was the parent or guardian's responsibility to educate their children on sexual health.

Question 7 - From the list below, who do you think should be responsible for sexual health education

13 responses

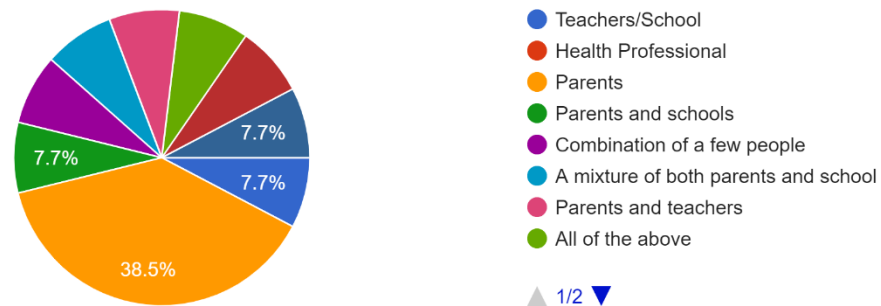


Image: Responses to who parent's think should be responsible for sex education (Question 7 survey results)

However, one survey participant did see the benefit of a collaborative effort between parents and schools, the following is an extract from their survey response:

"I think both School and parents have a role to play. However, I don't believe that it should be left entirely to parents as this means some children may not get the education they need."

Using the feedback that was gathered from our survey participants, my research colleague, Aimee and I were able to determine that there was a high level of interest from parents in their children receiving sex education, taught in a more creative way. Here are a selection of comments from our survey responses about using creative methods in sex education:

"For children with special needs drama might be another form of communication that can be used to teach sex education."

"I believe it could break down barriers of embarrassment or shyness about the subject. Role play around the subject of consent would be very helpful."

"A more interactive approach to learning may help children to understand and absorb information given to them especially if the children are young"

I created a wordcloud to show some of the examples parents outlined to us in their survey responses about delivery of sex education to Primary school aged students more creatively. These responses were useful in determining what content could be included in a sex education workshop:



Image: Wordcloud of responses to Question 8 of survey (using worditout.com)

So, what now? Outcomes following the feedback:

The findings show that the problem I identified about the quality of sex education at Primary school age was a legitimate issue to address and that the proposed solution to improving sex education for Primary aged- children through a workshop for parents (and potentially teachers) could work well as it would give them the confidence to approach the subject with their young children.

Ideally, my research colleague and I would have liked to have had the opportunity to run our own workshops with the participants of our survey to further test our theory that creative arts could be the key to delivering better sex education; however due to our limited time and financial resources, this was not possible to do in the timeframe we had for the project.

However, an alternative solution that we were able to create, using the feedback from our survey participants, was the development of a workshop plan that could be used as a guide for other facilitators to run their own workshops.

Aimee and I jointly co-authored the content of “A facilitator's Guide To A Better Sex Education”, which we jointly present as a solution to the problems we have outlined in our individual projects. The guide includes a detailed plan for an experienced facilitator to carry out activities to support and build parents’ confidence to engage with their children on this sensitive and often difficult topic. We envisaged that the workshop would run with three separate sessions and include intended outcomes for each session; a list of suggested activities; and an explanation of the role the facilitator and co-facilitator has in the delivery of the sessions.

It is hoped that the sessions would expand upon the experiences of parents/teachers' own sex education in school and compare it to the differences in sex education taught to their children as well as explore alternative ways to address the subject away from the standard format of traditional teaching methods used in schools. The idea is that by the third workshop the participants would have a new found confidence and skillset to help them discuss sex education, health and relationships with their children.

The workshop guide has been produced in a blog format and is available to view at the following links:

Blog post for workshop 1: <https://collingwoodblogger.wordpress.com/2023/01/16/a-facilitators-guide-to-a-better-sex-education-workshop-one/>

Blog post for workshop 2: <https://collingwoodblogger.wordpress.com/2023/01/16/a-facilitators-guide-to-a-better-sex-education-workshop-two/>

Blog post for workshop 3: <https://collingwoodblogger.wordpress.com/2023/01/16/a-facilitators-guide-to-a-better-sex-education-workshop-three/>

As we were constrained on time to share and receive feedback on our workshop guide from the parents we originally surveyed, we asked two academics within the field of applied drama, who had a multitude of practical experiences as facilitators, to see if the workshop guide could be a useful tool. We received positive feedback that this workshop could work well for the intended target audience.

The screenshot shows a blog post titled "Workshop One" with a subtitle "Facilitator: Kyle. Co-facilitator: Aimee". Below this is a yellow box containing the "AIMS OF THIS WORKSHOP:" section, which lists four bullet points: "Help parents/teachers to gain confidence talking about sex education with their children.", "Start to think about ways in which to approach children about sex education.", "Intended outcome of the session: Consider how sex education and sexual health might have changed/ expanded since they were in school.", and "Prepare participants for the second workshop." It also includes a note: "NB: Ideal group size is 10 participants". Below the yellow box, the post is divided into two columns. The left column has the heading "Introduction:" followed by the text "Introduce yourself to the group and state the intended outcomes of the first workshop." and then "Intro Activity: Scale of 1-10:". The right column has the heading "Activity 2: Creating a character." followed by the text "Allow 20-25 minutes for this activity." and a note in brackets: "[Items or set-up required for this activity – item of clothing/costume piece for the character; chairs in circle formation; A3/ flipchart paper]".

Workshop One

Facilitator: Kyle. Co-facilitator: Aimee

AIMS OF THIS WORKSHOP:

- Help parents/teachers to gain confidence talking about sex education with their children.
- Start to think about ways in which to approach children about sex education.
- Intended outcome of the session: Consider how sex education and sexual health might have changed/ expanded since they were in school.
- Prepare participants for the second workshop.

NB: Ideal group size is 10 participants

Introduction:

Introduce yourself to the group and state the intended outcomes of the first workshop.

Intro Activity: Scale of 1-10:

Activity 2: Creating a character.

Allow 20-25 minutes for this activity.

[Items or set-up required for this activity – item of clothing/costume piece for the character; chairs in circle formation; A3/ flipchart paper]

Image: Screenshot from the Workshop Blog

Word count: 1987

Appendix 1 – Copy of Sex Education Survey

Sex Education - Survey for parents

Your responses are strictly confidential and will only be used for the purposes of providing data for my research project.

1. Question 1 - Do you think there is any controversy in teaching the topic of sex education at Primary school?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

2. Question 2 - Do you believe your children/child's education in sexual health is satisfactory?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

3. Question 3 - If sex education/sexual health is taught at your child/children's school, do you know what type of content is covered in classes?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ No
☐ Yes [please describe briefly what is taught using the box below]

4. Question 3 - if you answered yes, above, please add details here

5. Question 4 - Using the scale below, how likely do you believe that your child/children would discuss sexual health/education with you?

Mark only one oval.

Very unlikely

- 1 ☐
2 ☐
3 ☐
4 ☐
5 ☐
6 ☐
7 ☐
8 ☐
9 ☐
10 ☐

Very likely

6. Question 5 - would you feel comfortable talking to your child/children about sex education or sexual health?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe (depends on their age or other factors)

7. Question 6 - Are you aware of any external resources outside of school that aim to provide further information on sex education and sexual health for young people?

Mark only one oval.

☐ No

☐ Yes [please describe briefly what other information sources you are aware of using the box below]

8. Question 6 - if you answered yes, above, please add details here

9. Question 7 - From the list below, who do you think should be responsible for sexual health education

Mark only one oval.

☐ Teachers/School

☐ Health Professional

☐ Parents

☐ Other: _____

10. Question 8 - Do you believe sex education and sexual health could be taught through creative methods, such as drama or other forms of art? If yes, please provide any examples you may have. if no, please state why.

Reference List

Bramhagen, A. and Lundström, M. (2022) 'Teachers' and nurses' perspective regarding sex education in primary school and influencing factors', *Scandinavian journal of educational research*, 41 (1), p. 1–11. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2022.2116484>.

Department for Education (2020), '*Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education*' (online) available from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1090195/Relationships_Education_RSE_and_Health_Education.pdf (accessed on 17th January 2023)

Ezaydi, S. (2021), 'Sex education in schools is contributing to a culture of misogyny and letting down our young women – its time that changed' (online) available from: <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/sex-education-uk-schools> (accessed on 1st January 2023)

Fumble.org (2022), 'About Us' (online), available from <https://fumble.org.uk/about-us/> (accessed on 1st January 2023)

Theatre Centre (2019) 'Relationships and sex education resources' (online) available from: <https://www.theatre-centre.co.uk/projects/relationships-and-sex-education-resources/> (accessed on 2nd January 2023)

Wood, J., McKay, A., Wentland, J. and Byers, S.E. (2022) 'Attitudes towards sexual health education in schools: A national survey of parents in Canada', *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 30 (1), p. 39–55. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2020-0049>

World Health Organization (2022), 'sexual health' (online) available from https://www.who.int/health-topics/sexual-health#tab=tab_1 (accessed on 1st January 2023)

Youngminds (2022) 'Impact Report 2022' (online) available from <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-impact/impact-report-2022/> (accessed on 1st January 2023)