Curtin University

Engaging external providers to deliver respectful relationships and consent education in schools: A scoping review of best practice principles

Hendriks J[1,2,3], Saltis H[1,2,3], Burns S[1,2,3]

1 Curtin School of Population Health, Curtin University, Australia. 2 Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact in Public Health, Curtin University, Australia.
3 The RSE Project, Curtin University, Australia.

Background

It is common practice for schools to engage external providers to deliver respectful relationships and consent education (RRCE). However, evidence-based quality assurance parameters to guide this practice are not readily available. Such engagement may fail to consider an integrated whole-school approach to RRCE, and other core competencies or frameworks may be missed. Furthermore, schools often engage external providers in response to an incident or event, as opposed to proactively and purposefully utilising them as a teaching and learning, or wellbeing opportunity. As part of a broader scoping review, focused on best-practice RRCE delivery within schools, this sub-analysis sought to identify key quality assurance parameters to assist schools when engaging external providers.

Methods

A formalised six-stage scoping review process identified and synthesised current criteria (actual or aspirational) related to the engagement of external providers. Peer-review publications (n = 3,879) and grey literature (n = 167) were identified. After screening, 228 articles were included in the broader review; and 24 articles addressed the use of external providers.

Results

Findings were collated and recurrent themes were identified. Both schools and providers have a reciprocal duty-of-care and should work in partnership. Key considerations for all parties have been summarised in Figure 1.

Conclusion and recommendations

Whilst external providers of RRCE can enhance current school programs, particular quality assurance parameters should be considered prior to engaging their services. Critically, external parties should not be the sole providers of this content in a school context, as evidence-based guidelines indicate the importance of an entire school community (e.g., leadership, teaching staff, pastoral care, families, community groups, etc.) to deliver and reinforce key messages for young people.

Figure 1. A collation of key criteria that can be applied when engaging external providers to deliver RRCE (n=24 articles)

- **Clear program purpose**
  - External provider and school have clarity about purpose of the program, and the scope of content that will be covered.
  - The school briefs external providers on how their program fits into the broader school context.
  - External program provides students with an experience that cannot be met by the school or other department programs.
  - Student body has expressed interest in, or a need for the program content.

- **Alignment**
  - External program complies with relevant school, sector, and government policies, strategic plans, frameworks, laws, etc.

- **Ongoing improvement and capacity building**
  - External provider develops workforce capacity of school staff, and is available to provide ongoing support. This may occur at an individual level (e.g., improving knowledge, attitudes, and/or facilitation skills) and/or an organisational level (e.g., undertake a school climate assessment or audit, develop or refine school policies or action plans).
  - External provider models teaching and learning content for classroom educators.
  - External programs provides relevant pre- and post-program activities for school staff to implement.
  - Schools consider which staff will be present during delivery of an external program and what their role(s) will be during this time.
  - Program cost is reasonable, of good value, and clearly outlined.

- **Affirm diversity and responsive to local context**
  - Program should affirm diversity and be inclusive of different cultures, religions, values, abilities, identities, and sexualities.
  - Program should be sensitive and responsive to young people who may have had experienced unwanted or abusive experiences.

- **Partnerships**
  - The school provides families with sufficient information to make an informed decision regarding their child's participation in the external program.
  - Formal links with community organisations and other agencies that protect the welfare of children and families are established, developed, strengthened, reviewed and evaluated.

- **Format, sequence and/or dosage**
  - Students should have adequate prior knowledge before engaging in an external program.
  - External program should be comprehensive and of sufficient duration, breadth and depth to meet the learning needs of all students.
  - External program should be delivered in a manner that is developmentally, contextually, and culturally appropriate.
  - A variety of effective teaching and learning strategies are utilised, in line with evidence-based guidelines regarding pedagogical practice that is experiential and participatory.

- **Expertise**
  - External providers hold relevant qualifications to the area of teaching, and demonstrate comfort and competence with the subject matter.
  - External program has a strong evidence base.
  - External providers present a positive and strengths-based perspective regarding relationships and sexuality.

- **Evaluation**
  - Evaluation and assessment activities are clear, rigorous, and readily available.
  - Data is collected from all relevant stakeholders (e.g., providers, school staff, students, families).
  - Data related to knowledge, attitudes and skills are collected.
  - Evaluation and assessment activities consider ethical principles related to data collection, identification/de-identification, storage and reporting.

THE RSE PROJECT
The Relationships and Sexuality Education Project

Want more information?
Email: **RSEProject@curtin.edu.au**

healthsciences.curtin.edu.au