

Engaging young working class men in the delivery of sex and relationships education.

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ABSTRACT

Despite a substantial body of research on young people's wishes about the content and delivery of sex and relationships education (SRE), studies still indicate dissatisfaction with the way lessons are provided. This discussion takes place in a public health context where young people's sexual activity is viewed negatively and as a risk to health, and advice focusses on the need to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. This focus on risk clashes with cultural representations of sexuality, and particularly male sexuality, which focus on pleasure and risk taking. In this paper, we present insights from workshops provided by a local charity to boys aged 14-15 in a school in one of the most deprived areas in Edinburgh, Scotland. We held four focus groups with a total of 20 boys and interviewed the workshop providers and the school guidance teacher. The boys valued having men from outside school talking to them about sex and relationships in ways that made them feel respected. They were keen to learn more about relationships, highlighting the need to focus on how SRE is delivered to young working class men.

Keywords: Sex and relationships education; young men; gender; masculinity; Scotland; class

Introduction

There is a substantial body of research on young people's views about the content and delivery of sex and relationships education (SRE) in schools, including schools in Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA. While it appears that young people appreciate some aspects of school based SRE, (Buston and Wight 2006; Byers, Sears and Foster 2013), much of the research in the above countries suggests that young people are dissatisfied with a perceived over-emphasis on biology at the expense of relationship issues (Di Censo et al 2001; Measor 2004). They want teachers to answer their questions (Blake 2008) and they want to know about how to deal with love, intimacy, jealousy and infidelity (Forrest et al 2004). Buston, Wight and Hart (2002) suggest that many young people feel uncomfortable in sex education lessons and found gender dynamics in the classroom to be a problem. They argue that boys in particular need an atmosphere in which 'they can take the lesson seriously without losing face.' (2002:332).

Boys and young men are often perceived as acting immaturely, laughing and joking in class, and making girls feel uncomfortable, although they often feel uncomfortable and embarrassed themselves. Sex education can be particularly challenging as 'young men may be reluctant to seek help of any kind because it conflicts with their ideas of how men should act' (Forrest 2007:6). If masculinities are understood as constantly reworked and always in the process of 'becoming' (Hall, 1992) then being exposed as weak or vulnerable within the classroom is highly threatening. Some young men may therefore be unwilling to ask questions or display anything that may be perceived by their peers as vulnerability or weakness (Aggleton and Campbell 2000). While this will not be the case for all young men, previous research suggests that boys need specific support to recognise 'bad behaviour' and humour which can be used to hide vulnerability (Wood, 1998). More recent research has suggested that the focus on biology at the expense of feelings also makes it difficult for boys and young men to address concerns they have about relationships and emotions (Allen 2004; Forrest 2010).

Haywood and Mac an Ghail (1996) stress the importance of recognising how multiple masculinities exist within gender relations, but also how different forms of masculinity relate to class and ethnicity. Young people's participation and resistance to education must be understood within the context of identity and inequality (Ball, et. al., 2000). Media discourse of a 'crisis of masculinity' often describes young men as deviant and rebellious, failing to achieve at school and therefore problematic (Tarrant et al, 2015). On closer inspection however the 'problem of boys' (encompassing both the problems they cause and those they experience) specifically refers to working-class young men living in stigmatised places (McDowell 2007:2012).

Forrest (1998) and Davidson (1996) suggest that boys are often left out of sex education classes as they are uninterested and often seen as hopeless causes, refusing to take it seriously (Hilton, 2001). Haste (2013a) suggests that this behaviour can arise from young men's needs to perform masculinity and their awareness that a very restricted form of masculinity is seen as acceptable by their peers. Pyke (1996) suggests that the authority-led nature of sex education in schools leads boys to reject SRE as they prefer to display anti-authority attitudes. It can be argued that the risk focused emphasis in SRE in the UK which characterises sexual behaviour as inherently negative and needing to be 'managed' directly contradicts cultural discourse around male sexual behaviour which focuses on pleasure, and where risk taking is seen as part of establishing a masculine identity. If young men are perceived to be problematic (Hilton, 2001) then it is useful to unpick the contradictions between the values attached to male sexuality within SRE and the wider culture, and to examine how this conflict can be reduced within the classroom so as to improve engagement with young men.

Biddulph (2007) suggests that the disengagement of young men may result from lessons which focus on topics such as contraception and pregnancy, a perceived emphasis on women's sexual health which young men see as irrelevant to them (Buston and Wight 2006). In addition, Limmer (2010) argues that young men who are not engaged at school as a whole are the group most likely to miss out on SRE lessons whilst also being the group most likely to undertake risky sexual behaviours. In addition, parenthood education in schools has been lacking, and where it does take place, the focus tends to be on girls and young women (Swann et al 2003). Lessons were often seen as boring and too reliant on worksheets and conventional classroom settings (Limmer 2010, Haste 2013b).

Buston, Wight and Hart found that delivery of SRE by outsiders was beneficial, although it was not possible for the authors to distinguish between 'their status as outsiders, their delivery to small friendship groups, or their contrasting style to that of the school's teachers' (2002:331) as the reason for this. The young men in Hilton's (2003) study felt that a mix of teachers and outsiders would be beneficial, and also that a mixture of male and female teachers was desirable, partly because they felt more comfortable talking about 'man sort of stuff' (2003:39) to a male teacher while also believing that women were better at teaching SRE. Allen (2009) suggests that the key issue is not so much about *who* teaches, (thus moving away from issues of identity such as gender) but about the qualities the educator possesses. Young people wanted their educators to be knowledgeable, to have some training or to be a specialist, to have some personal experience ('been there, done that') and to be able to relate to young people. Allen found that the latter requirement did not necessarily mean the educator should be close in age to the students.

The SRE debate

How, and indeed whether, children and young people should be educated about sex and relationships has long been a topic for debate in many Western nations. As Bay-Cheng (2003) argues, schools-based sex education in the USA is risk-based, emphasising negative outcomes and the dangers of sex, while reinforcing the idea that heterosexual, coital sex is the only 'normal' sex. Since her paper was written, the USA has moved further towards abstinence-based and abstinence-only approaches to sex and relationships education (SRE), despite evidence that this approach has limited impact on reducing teenage pregnancy rates (Santelli et al 2007).

Sex and relationships education is provided for most children and young people in most British schools, and whilst it is broadly accepted, debates continue about form and content as well as whether it should be made compulsory, and occasionally whether it should be provided at all. Although abstinence approaches are not commonly taught in UK schools (apart from in some schools with a religious ethos), SRE in the UK, as in the USA, tends to take a risk-based approach.

In Scotland, education related to relationships, sexual health and parenthood (referred to as RSHP) is delivered as part of PSE (personal and social education) in high schools along with topics including planning for choices, substance misuse and physical activity and health (Education Scotland 2018). There is no requirement for specific RSHP content to be delivered nor can the Scottish Government or Education Scotland prescribe materials for schools and other educational settings to use (Scottish Government, 2014). However there is a commitment from the Scottish Government to ensure schools are delivering high quality RSHP provision and a new national online resource is currently being developed to be available in summer 2019¹. Some state schools in Scotland are denominational, mainly Roman Catholic, and these schools can determine whether and how RSHP is taught; in addition, parents at any school can withdraw their child from RSHP lessons, so while it is expected that children and young people will have some form of SRE, it is not compulsory or

¹ Available at: <https://rshp.scot/>

standardised, and not all will receive it. Evidence suggests that the nature of RSHP education provided varies from school to school and that teachers can regard it as a difficult area to teach (Education Scotland, 2018).

Boys are much less likely than girls to have discussions about sex and relationships with their parents or in a family setting (Measor 2004, Limmer 2010), meaning that they are more likely to get information from peers or the Internet; as this information may well be unreliable or incomplete, it increases the need to provide SRE to boys and young men in schools in a way that engages them. Therefore, it is important that SRE is developed and delivered in a way that young people feel is valuable and is appropriate for them in terms of their age and gender.

Workers from a charity based in Edinburgh, Scotland, developed a programme of workshops aimed at male students aged between 14-18 designed to provide education which enables boys and young men to discuss issues around sexual health such as relationships, consent, body image, porn and mental wellbeing, as well as gender roles and fatherhood. The intention was to supplement school-based PSHE, not replace it. The first iteration of this programme was delivered at a secondary school in part of Edinburgh located in the second most deprived decile in Scotland (Scottish Government 2016b). This paper draws on findings from focus groups with male students and interviews with the workshop providers and a teacher to consider the influence of gender, social class and age on the delivery and acceptance of sex and relationships education.

Study design and methods

This study originated in discussions between the workshop providers (a small charity local to the university where we are based), and ourselves as researchers about whether we could support the development of the charity's programmes.

The providers had designed a programme to be delivered by male presenters/facilitators for young men, and a local school had invited them to pilot it with male students in S4 (the secondary school year in Scotland where pupils are 14-15 years old). The programme was designed to supplement usual SRE provision, not to replace it; the students had already taken part in SRE lessons earlier in S4 and in previous years at school. The providers asked us to evaluate the pilot work. The evaluation study was funded by an internal research grant from the university where we are based, and received ethical approval from Edinburgh Napier University Research Integrity Committee. Approval was also granted from the Education Department at Edinburgh City Council.

The aim of the study was to understand young men's views of SRE provision in the context of having participated in the workshops held at their school, and to provide feedback about the workshops for the charity which would enable them to make an evidence-based decision about whether to offer them to other schools.

The workshop programme

The programme of four workshops was delivered over a period of four weeks at school; 28 young men participated in the sessions. Workshop content had been designed following discussion with the school guidance teachers² and the head teacher about their perceptions of the young men's needs in terms of building on what they had already received in SRE lessons.

² School guidance teachers provide pastoral care and personal support for students at secondary school. Each guidance teacher will have responsibility for a group of students; they usually also retain a subject teaching role.

The first workshop focussed on the idea of 'being a Dad', with the facilitators talking about their relationships with their fathers, themselves as fathers and what fatherhood might involve. This incorporated discussion with the young men about roles within families, such as their thoughts about who was responsible for various tasks: for example, cooking and childcare. This was delivered with a traditional classroom layout and teacher/pupil format, with PowerPoint slides. Following this first session, the facilitators felt that the format had hampered what they were trying to do, and that having a conventional classroom layout in particular had not worked well. This was partly because it positioned them in a teacher-like role, with a need to enforce discipline which they were not accustomed to doing, and also because they felt they had been unable to promote discussion amongst the participants. Therefore, when they returned for the second workshop, they moved the furniture so that all the participants were seated in a circle. They also split up the larger group, so instead of both facilitators working with all 28 participants, they each had a smaller group of 14. The remaining workshop topics focused on relationships, baby development and childcare, and mental health. Vignettes were used to prompt discussion; examples are given below:

Male and female are living together and have been for 5 years. They have just found out that they are having their first baby. They can't afford to get a childminder or place the baby into childcare. Who has to give up their job and become full time carer, or is there another option?

You want to have sex with your girlfriend/boyfriend, but they don't want to, as they are not ready. What do you do?

You have just found out that someone you slept with is pregnant. She wants to keep the baby. What do you do?

The facilitators also provided information, for example on where to go for help with issues such as sexual health, relationships and mental health, but the focus of workshops 2 – 4 was on promoting discussion and enabling all the participants to join in.

Study participants and data collection

Two weeks after the final workshop, we held two focus groups with workshop participants who had indicated their willingness to take part in the evaluation study; another two focus groups were held the following week.

Focus groups were used for this study as they are an appropriate method for exploring views of individuals who share a social network (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999), allowing discussion of those views and justification and reasoning for holding them. However, a potential disadvantage is that individual views may be obscured because participants may choose to only express opinions that are seen as acceptable within the social group. This did seem to be the case in one focus group, where one participant seemed to be very influential in whether or not others chose to speak, at times shutting down discussion with no more than a look. In addition, some of the focus groups began with the participants being reticent, or shy, and with a great deal of giggling. We began the focus groups by asking what the participants had thought of the workshops, and had follow up questions which were used to prompt discussion. Although at times our questions might be perceived as leading (and we include some of our questions in the data extracts which follow), it can be argued that leading questions may be valuable when investigating sensitive topics or when there is a need to encourage participants to go beyond surface responses (Stewart et al 2007), which was the case for us in trying to encourage the young men to get through their giggling. Kvale (1994, 2007)

suggests that leading questions can enhance the reliability of interviews by verifying the interviewer's interpretations, and we would argue that this applies equally to focus groups.

A further factor could have been that we are older (FM in her 30s, SB 50s) and female, which may have influenced the participants in terms of how freely they felt they could speak. We emphasised our independence from the school and assured the participants that we would not be reporting what any individuals had said to their teachers, although we would be producing a report which used anonymised quotes. In total, 20 young men took part in the focus groups, which ranged in size from 4 to 6 participants. Of the eight young men who did not join the focus groups but had taken part in the workshops, two were no longer on the school roll and six were absent on the days the focus groups took place. Given the purpose and design of the study, we were not attempting to recruit a representative sample of the population, but rather to enable as many of the young men who had completed the programme to express their views about it.

We did not observe the workshops; as the approach of the workshops was based around older men talking to younger ones with a very clear focus on male roles, and both researchers were female, it was felt that our presence as observers would disturb the dynamics within the workshops.

The two workshop facilitators were interviewed, in a dyadic interview, to obtain their perspectives on the programme, and the teacher with overall responsibility for SRE and guidance at the school was also interviewed. The facilitators were male, the teacher was female, and all were Scottish and local to Edinburgh.

All participants completed an informed consent form; focus groups and interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and were fully transcribed by a university-approved transcriber.

In the findings section below, participants in the focus groups have been identified by pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality as far as possible. The two male workers are referred to as Andy and Peter, again for the purposes of anonymity. At some points in the group discussions, many of the participants spoke over each other and talked at the same time, so some of the excerpts have been edited slightly to produce a clearer sense of what some individuals were saying, although data has not been altered such that it detracts from its original sense. In addition, we use '-' to indicate interruptions in speech. All the young men were 15 years old at the time of the focus groups. All but one were White British; one was Black British. This broadly reflects the population of the school, which has a small non-white intake, reflective of the population of the locality.

Analysis

We analysed the data using the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2014; Clarke and Braun 2013), taking an inductive approach whereby the themes are strongly linked to the data, and the analysis was data-driven. Initially, each author read the transcripts independently to identify patterns and generate initial codes across the data. Our initial codes comprised being able to speak, being listened to, safe space, future self, boys only, atmosphere, being funny, being a man, learning, humour, credibility and open-ness.

We then re-read the transcripts together, discussing the codes and grouping them into higher order themes, again looking for patterns and for consistency or variation within themes. The coded data was then reviewed and refined with some themes merging. Ultimately, we had two core themes, 'maleness' and 'atmosphere'. Maleness incorporated codes relating to the boys, such as 'boys only' and 'learning', and codes relating to the workshop providers being men, such as 'credibility' and

'open-ness'. Atmosphere incorporated codes relating to being able to speak and being listened to, as well as aspects of the workshop which the boys identified as important, such as the layout of the classroom. In this paper, we focus on the young men's views on how and by whom SRE is delivered, and what was important to them in their learning.

Findings

Initial responses to being asked about the workshops were overwhelmingly positive, with many participants saying that the sessions had been fun and that they had enjoyed them. When we asked them to describe what they had enjoyed and why, the following exchange was a typical response:

Rory: It was good, it was funny.

Calum: Like the guy that was doing it was fun.

Lewis: He was good.

Ethan: You could say whatever you wanted to say.
(Focus group 1)

Some of the young men explained that in their usual lessons, they were expected to sit still and be quiet, put their hands up when they had an answer to a question, and only speak when invited to by the teacher. This was a stark contrast to the workshops where they felt that they could voice opinions without feeling at risk of being told off. The guidance teacher, who knew the students well from her day-to-day interaction with them, felt that the informal atmosphere benefitted them:

When I went in to take registers the boys were engaged and they were listening and it seemed really quite informal and relaxed, which is probably one of the better ways to get information to young men. (Guidance teacher)

One of the reasons the atmosphere was relaxed was because Peter and Andy had altered the arrangement of the furniture for the second week onwards. As discussed earlier, they felt that the classroom layout had not worked well, so when they returned for the second set of workshops, they moved the desks away and arranged the chairs so that everyone was seated in a circle:

Us standing with them sitting at the desk was very much a .. a teacher and pupil feeling ... So we changed even the, the layout a' the classroom. And we felt that, that helped to relax the guys. And asking them to take part in sorting the desks out. So again allowing them to feel a bit ownership a' the group. (Peter)

Being seated in a circle meant everyone felt they had the chance to take part, with participants saying that they had felt free to speak, particularly that 'you cannae³ give like a wrong answer' (Euan, FG4). Feeling that they would be listened to was a critical factor in the participants' valuing of the workshops, making the workshops different to the usual SRE lessons:

Euan: We've just never really like had that before.

Niall: Yeah like –

Liam: - It was different.

³ Cannot

Niall: Aye, different to just like the usual like stuff we get in SE.

Euan: Like cause everyone was involved in the conversation and stuff. And you were just like free tae⁴ speak, to say what you wanted.

Niall: Cause like he just said, 'when you think a' something just say it' instead a' like having to put your hand up and stuff.

Ross: You could actually just be like people.
(Focus group 4)

As suggested by Hilton (2003) and Allen (2009), young people often prefer to talk about potentially embarrassing topics, like sex, with someone they do not see regularly; the young men were telling us how much they had enjoyed the workshops, and saying that they thought they were interesting, so we asked whether they thought it made a difference having someone from outside school coming in to run the workshops. They did, and although they talk about having fun in the excerpt below, that was not the only factor that made the workshops stand out; as well as being 'more happy' than a teacher, Andy was someone they would not be seeing every day.

Ethan: Yeah. ... You can have like more of a laugh 'cause like you'll never see them again. And like the teacher, you're gonna like see them every day.

Rory: Aye he was like more happy than a teacher.

Lewis: Yeah [all laugh]. Yeah the teacher would never say like some a' the things he said.

Finn: Yeah! You can have a laugh wi' him but wi' teachers you can't.

Rory: Aye. It would be better that it was a guy as well.

FM: Yeah? That's really interesting. Tell me why?

Calum: I dunno just, just cause half the teachers are women, well most a' them.

FM: So, do you think that he understood you better?

All: Mmhmm, aye, yeah.
(Focus group 1)

Participants liked having men coming in to work with them for a number of reasons; firstly that the facilitators were outsiders, and therefore not like teachers, but also because the young men wanted this kind of information to be provided at school as some of them felt that it was difficult to talk to their fathers, and that it would be awkward to discuss this kind of subject at home. In addition, not all of them had a dad or father figure at home. Peter and Andy described the typical responses when asking the young men about their relationships with their fathers, and their topics of conversation:

Peter: Dad takes me to the fitba⁵.

⁴ To

⁵ Football

Andy: Takes them tae the fitba. And just, 'okay when you're at football do you have much a' a conversation?' 'Eh, nuh'. 'Okay what about, you know, on the bus going to the football or whatever?' 'Nuh, maybe talk about stuff like the fitba'.

Being taken seriously, and not being spoken down to by the workshop leaders was important:

Like a normal person speaking to us. Not like we were like lower than him or that.' (Ross, FG4)

In addition, Peter and Andy's status as Dads meant that they were worth listening to because they were viewed as people with experience of the topics they were discussing:

FM: What do you think about the fact that it was men delivering it? Did that make a difference?

Ian: I think it did, 'cause like they kinda came in and said about dads and that, and they were both like dads so I think it kinda helped coming from a father like that. They've been through that situation so they know what it's like and sort of how to deal with it.

Kevin: Yeah like they could relate it. ... If they've done it, like, they could tell us like a story about how they dealt with it and stuff like that.
(Focus group 2)

The workshop facilitators had used the vignettes mentioned earlier to prompt discussion about a range of relationship-based scenarios and had also shared their own experiences, which all four focus groups agreed had been valuable. As a result, one of the most powerful messages we got from the young men was that they very much appreciated having men to talk to, who listened to them, took them seriously and shared real life experiences with them.

The guidance teacher agreed that it was important for young men to hear a male perspective:

I think that that is so important for our young men, they need to be working with other males who can help deliver these sorts of topics. There's only so much, you know, we can give, as, you know, the female perspective, you don't mean to give the female perspective but it's hard when you know you do. (Guidance teacher)

Participants had differing views about whether or not SRE classes should be single sex; some of them said they did not mind having mixed sex classes, but there was a strong feeling across all the focus groups that it would be sometimes good to have single sex groups. This would provide an opportunity to say things that participants might not feel comfortable saying in front of girls:

Liam: You'd obviously hold back a bit if it was a girl 'cause –

Niall: - Aye, you wouldn't, like what you could say and what you couldn't if it was a girl.

Liam: - 'cause a boy understands –

Euan: Aye.

Liam: - like what another boy's thinking and that.

(Focus group 4)

However, the guidance teacher explained that the school aimed to be supportive and inclusive of all students and 'it's not just if you're a boy you go into that group, if you're a girl you go into that one', because:

We have young people who don't associate with a gender, or transgender, we've had young people who are transgender and obviously we have young people who are, who come under the umbrella of our Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual Team. So, it's making sure that they all feel inclusive, they're all getting the same Sexual Health regardless and that they're all listening to how they respect each other and things.

This highlights a challenge for SRE in meeting the needs of different groups within schools; by addressing the needs and wishes of heterosexual young men, other groups may be made to feel vulnerable. Having said that, one participant was comfortable enough in the focus groups to say that he wanted more attention to be paid to LGBT interests and needs.

The teenage birth rate in Edinburgh has a steep social gradient; in 2016, women aged under 20 years old living in the most economically and socially disadvantaged areas had five times the pregnancy rate as those living in the most affluent one fifth of areas (58.9/1000 compared to 11.8 /1000), although the gap is narrowing as rates are falling more quickly in the most deprived areas (ISD 2018) . The school in which this study took place is located in one of the tenth most disadvantaged areas of Edinburgh, so when Finn may well be correct when he says most of them are going to be dads soon.

Finn: I liked learning how to be a dad.

FM: Yeah?

Ethan: Aye.

FM: Do you think it's important?

Lewis: Yeah.

FM: Why? Why do you think it's important to learn how to be a dad?

Finn: Cause probably most of us are gonnae be dads soon so we need to know what to do.
(Focus group 1)

However, having said that they might be dads soon, many of the participants had a clear idea of when it would be a good time to become a father:

SB So what, what age do you think is a good age to be a dad, if you could choose?

Liam Thirty.

Niall Twenty seven or something like that.

Euan Aye.

Ross Aye late, late twenties, early thirties.
(Focus group 4)

The workshop facilitators saw this as a positive response:

Int: They really enjoyed talking about what's it going to be like to be a dad. And we asked 'so, you've had these sessions with Andy and Peter and you've talked about being a dad and the implications and things, you know, what do you think's a nice age to be a dad?'. And they all went '27'.

Peter: Twenty seven, that's interesting!

Andy: Our work here is done! (laughs).

Peter: I know!

Although there may not be an 'ideal' age to become a father, policies on teenage pregnancy see delaying parenthood as a positive outcome. In addition, the discourse around teenage parenthood that positions it as resulting in damaged life chances and a life on benefits is one with which young people are well versed; as Wenham's work with young mothers demonstrated, her informants were well aware of the negative discourse within which they operated (Wenham 2016). Discussions of what fatherhood may entail enabled the participants to consider the impact of their choices around birth control and how fatherhood would directly impact their lives, particularly as many of them expressed the strong desire to be a good dad.

The vignettes outlined above had also been well received by the young men. What worked was being able to express themselves freely about a scenario which might be quite challenging, such as discussing whether or not to have sex, or what to do about an unplanned pregnancy, with workshop facilitators who participants trusted because of their understanding (of what it is like to be a boy) and their experiences. Exercises where participants considered how they would react to scenarios of fatherhood made them feel more confident in knowing what issues may arise and how they could approach these. The workshop sessions provided an increase in both practical knowledge (such as how to hold a baby) and an increase in confidence in understanding their future roles as fathers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand young men's views of a series of workshops provided for them in one high school in an economically and socially disadvantaged area of Edinburgh, and to provide feedback about the workshops for the charity providing them. We found that the young men valued the workshops as an addition to their usual SRE lessons. Gender and age were important factors in their appreciation of the workshop providers – they valued having older men in school – but this was not as a replacement for their usual teachers, as they expressed appreciation towards their female guidance teachers as well. Similarly to the respondents in Hilton's (2003) study, our participants liked having a male for 'man stuff' but also thought female teachers were good at teaching SRE.

In particular young men valued being taken seriously and wanted to feel as though they had been heard. Central to success in achieving this goal was the relaxed classroom atmosphere in which playfulness and 'mucking about', often perceived in schools as 'bad behaviour', was allowed. Peter

and Andy's jokes and humour encouraged the young men to feel comfortable, enabling them to engage in an environment that was more akin to dynamics outside of school, away from the constraints of educational expectations. Other aspects of their work with the charity mean that Peter and Andy are experienced performers, using play, drama and music as part of their work with fathers and young children. They were skilled entertainers, and this combined with their position of 'not a teacher' could also have enhanced their approachability and helped the young men to feel comfortable enough to joke and be silly with them, which they could then use to open up discussions.

In her research on sex education providers, Allen (2009) found that young people did not necessarily wish for their educators to be a similar age to them, and in this study we found that having older men leading the workshops was seen as beneficial by the young men; because the age of the leaders gave them experiences that they could talk about, particularly in terms of relationships and fatherhood. As a result, the facilitators had a great deal of credibility in the eyes of the young men. They were also credible because they were local, and had a similar background to the young men; one of the facilitators had attended a nearby school just along the road from the school where the study took place, and he had told the participants about going to school there, so they were aware that this was, as he put it, 'my patch'. In addition, the focus on topics that could be perceived as more relevant to young men (e.g. experiences of fatherhood, experiences of establishing relationships) meant that the drawbacks to lessons being too feminised, as identified by Biddulph (2007) and Buston and Wight (2006), were avoided.

Young men told us that they looked forward to the workshops, and wished they had gone on for longer; we suggest that a major contributor to this enjoyment was the decision by the facilitators to get rid of the desks and seat everyone in a circle. By changing the physical layout of the classroom the facilitators also altered the expectations of behaviour indicating that the space was not like usual SRE lessons. Moving away from a conventional classroom setting and focussing on discussion rather than worksheets reduced the risk of lessons being boring (Limmer 2010, Haste 2013b) and reframed the use of humour and playfulness as not being disruptive behaviour. These new configurations of masculine practice were made possible by the alignment between the facilitators and young men that highlighted a shared cultural position in regards to gender, but also crucially to social class. While this alignment contributed to a strong rapport between facilitators and pupils, it could be argued that skilled youth workers from any gender or social class background could achieve something akin to this in the right circumstances.

However, the current context for many schools is one of constrained resources, meaning that bringing in credible adults from external agencies can be challenging, unless those external providers provide input for free. Charities who may be able to do that are themselves often facing uncertain futures as far as funding is concerned, making it harder for schools to access suitable credible outsiders.

Conclusions

This study is important in highlighting young working class men's views of SRE, their concerns and their feelings about what they need. The study highlights young men's desire to discuss issues such as relationships and fatherhood with people they feel have experience of those issues, an understanding of the contexts of their lives and in an environment in which they are treated like 'a mate or something'.

However, our findings are derived from a relatively small sample, and this, combined with the fact that the study was carried out in one school, means that we cannot claim to have reached

theoretical saturation or that our findings are generalisable. However, they are consistent with those of other studies within and beyond the UK. While our findings are relevant to a specific policy context, i.e. the ongoing development of SRE policy in Scotland, and its focus on 'respect and responsibility', they have wider applicability in terms of contributing to discussion about how to engage young men in SRE, particularly from more disadvantaged backgrounds where a risk based approach may seem less relevant to men in understanding their developing sexuality

The Scottish Government's Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Framework 2015-2020 acknowledges that young people want more comprehensive forms of sex and relationships education, particularly about relationships, in schools. Findings from our study suggest that young working class men have specific needs not only in terms of content – they are very keen to learn about relationships, how to be a dad – but specifically in terms of delivery. Feeling listened to, being able to share jokes and to discuss SRE without an emphasis on risk enabled a high level of engagement that would be hard to achieve in a traditional classroom setting.

In the light of this, we suggest that

- where possible, both men and women should deliver SRE in schools, if necessary by bringing in support from outside schools;
- a workshop approach which enables a more open style of discussion and exchange meets the needs of young people better than conventional classroom approaches;
- an environment in which young men can use humour and 'mucking about' to process their feelings about SRE is beneficial;
- avoiding a risk-based approach to SRE can promote engagement by young working class men to minimise the cultural clash between this approach and wider cultural norms of working class sexuality; and
- young men are keen to learn about 'real life' from people with experience, that they can then translate into useful information for their own lives, again meaning that bringing in outside support may be beneficial.

As Buston and Wight (2006) argue, young men may not wish to talk about emotional issues with friends, may lack access to advice of the sort accessed by young women, and may not be in a position to discuss these issues with a parent. Given the enthusiasm expressed by the young men in this study to have other men to talk to and to be taken seriously by them, we would argue that having workshops of this nature run by people from outside school would be of great benefit to many young men.

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