An Evaluation of the *Respect, Protect, Connect* program

2006

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Commissioned by the South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault
Acknowledgements

This evaluation would not have been possible without the contributions of peer educators and program managers at SECASA and WHISE, particularly Carolyn Worth, Christopher Mitchell and Kristine Hill who provided advice, feedback and assistance throughout the project. Steve De Klerk conducted student interviews, and with Chris, Kristine, James Stubbs and Natalie Hendry, provided valuable insights into the program. Nikki Reicheldt assisted with transcription of interviews and data processing, and Maryse Helbert with data analysis. Thanks also go to the students who participated in the evaluation, and the teachers and student welfare coordinators who assisted in the coordination of questionnaires and interviews.
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Executive summary

Introduction

The Respect Protect Connect (RPC) program was developed to provide young people with information about relationship violence, its impact and how to deal with it, as well as encourage the development of healthy and respectful relationships. Developed and run by the South East Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA) and Women’s Health in the South East (WHISE), the program has been run in high schools in the Southern and Eastern Metropolitan Region of Victoria for over a decade. This evaluation was supported and funded by SECASA and undertaken by an independent external researcher, Lara Fergus, over a period of four months, from July to October 2006. The over-arching goal of the evaluation was to increase understanding of what makes RPC successful and why, and what might be hindering the program’s success and why. The evaluation was envisaged on two levels, the first determining the impact or effect of RPC on participating students and the second assessing the organisational and structural factors which might affect this.

Methodology

At the level of the schools-based interventions, the evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which students were affected by the RPC program, against indicators developed from the program’s objectives. A mixed-methods approach was used: pre- and post-test questionnaires aimed to measure quantitatively the impact that the delivery of the program made on individual students, according to specific indicators; and one-to-one interviews aimed to learn student’s perceptions of the program, and their own feelings on how it had affected them.

At the organisational level, individual discussions were carried out with program managers and coordinators, along with focus group interviews with peer-educators, and individual interviews with key teachers and student welfare coordinators at various schools. These discussions both fed into and reflected on aspects of the impact evaluation. To determine the extent to which the RPC program was consistent with international good practice, a literature review was undertaken and a set of criteria for good practice developed under the headings ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘how’. An analysis of RPC documentation was also conducted, and the strengths and weaknesses of the RPC program were assessed in the light of this and the literature review.
Criteria for good practice and RPC

The review of the literature on ‘good practice’ in schools-based prevention programs, the assessment of RPC documentation and other learnings from the evaluation provided much to indicate that the program meets ‘good practice’ on many levels.

Who

With regards to good practice on issues of students and staff, RPC runs single-sex groups and aims to keep students in familiar year groupings, as widely recommended in the literature. Interviews with RPC educators and teachers suggested that the ‘undisrupted’ environment recommended in several studies might be better achieved if expectations of supervising teachers are negotiated with schools prior to workshops. Much importance is attached in the literature to the quality of educators for schools-based prevention programs, and RPC goes a long way towards meeting best practice in this regard. RPC educators are trained in gender, violence and sexual health issues, as well as classroom management, active listening and a variety of other skills essential to creating a dynamic, trusting and interactive workshop environment. Students, teachers and student welfare coordinators interviewed for this evaluation gave positive feedback on the quality of RPC educators, though two teachers thought that further training to build new educators’ confidence would be useful. The RPC program has also struck an effective balance in adopting, as recommended, peer education principles. RPC educators are closer in age to students than most teachers, but are trained in order to have the knowledge and skills to support students in ways that true ‘peers’ might not be able to.

What

In terms of content and materials, the RPC program is clearly at the forefront of good practice. It is based on a pro-feminist philosophy which allows for a structural examination of gender and power, as widely recommended by available research. The program’s long-term focus on skills-building and values clarification rather than simple information provision is another great strength. The young men’s program aims to build skills associated with conflict resolution and healthy sexual and personal relationships in non-blaming and non-shaming way. The young women’s program avoids placing responsibility on young women to ‘prevent’ or ‘manage’ men’s violence and instead adopts a good practice, rights-based approach which enables young women to accurately identify violence and includes the development of assertiveness and support-seeking skills. Finally, care has been taken to ensure that inclusiveness of diversity is ‘built-in’ to the program design, which includes examinations of the links between racism, homophobia and violence, as well as of issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, gay and lesbian young people, and
children of Vietnam veterans. The invitation of speakers from various organisations who work with and for such diverse groups is another way in which the program meets good practice, not just by ensuring inclusiveness, but also in encouraging community input and involvement. Two areas of concern regarding content are, firstly, that the effectiveness of the program for non-English speaking background students may be improved by longer workshops with specially-adapted materials. Secondly, while the program follows good practice in openly challenging homophobic attitudes and making visible same-sex relationships, there is a danger that, if not reinforced elsewhere in the school environment, such messages may be dismissed by students or reacted to negatively. A ‘whole-school’ approach would be the most (and perhaps only) effective solution to this problem.

When

In terms of the timing of schools-based violence-prevention and healthy relationships programs, it is generally recommended that programs begin early, and comprise multiple sessions run over successive years. The RPC program is currently tailored for students as young as Year 7, but could conceivably be expanded and adapted to include primary school students. As for program length, RPC runs workshops of varying lengths, from one-off sessions to ten-week programs. While program coordinators are attentive to good practice in encouraging schools run longer workshops over successive years, the decision-making power lies with schools. Again, the ability of the RPC program to achieve good practice in this regard would be facilitated by a ‘whole-school approach’.

How

Finally, regarding program approach and coordination, the literature is unanimous in recommending a ‘whole-school approach’ as best practice in this field. This means programs should have a clear rationale, be integrated into the curriculum, reinforced in extra-curricula activities, take into account local needs, and involve teachers, parents and student welfare coordinators. The RPC program meets good practice to the extent that it has clearly-articulated educational principles, takes into account local needs and involves community groups (through the invitation of guest speakers) and also key teachers and student welfare coordinators at the schools where it is run. The program therefore contains some elements of a whole-school approach, however what is missing is the essential conditions of curriculum integration and reinforcement of messages throughout the wider school culture. The creation of such conditions would require a much-heightened level of commitment from schools, curriculum developers and policy makers, for which SECASA and WHISE could advocate. The RPC program is nevertheless well-positioned to take a leading role in the development of a whole-school approach (as wider commitment grows), given its sound good practice in all other areas.
Findings and discussion

Young men

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires showed positive improvement following the program on the attitudinal measures (‘Favourable Beliefs Supporting the Use of Violence’ and ‘Gender Stereotyping’ scales). Data for the Conflict Resolution Skills measure was statistically inconclusive due to the small numbers of students involved and relatively large numbers of possible responses (meaning results are ‘dissipated’). The interview data, on the other hand, showed an overwhelmingly positive response to the program from the young men involved. All thought the program had been beneficial in some way, and most nominated positive changes in their knowledge and skills levels as a result of the workshops.

Young women

While results for the young men on the attitudinal measures were clearly positive, the young women’s results were mixed. There is some positive indication the program was effective in reducing young women’s beliefs condoning violence against women, however conclusions could not readily be drawn for the gender stereotyping measure used. There were some additional positive indications that the program had developed young women’s assertiveness and support-seeking skills and their capacity to support friends who might be victims of violence. Finally, the results on the knowledge measure indicated a greater awareness of issues surrounding violence for those young women who participated in the program. As for the young men, the young women’s response to the program was overwhelmingly positive. Again, all thought the program had been beneficial in some way, and most nominated positive changes in their knowledge and skills levels as a result of the workshops.

Peer educators

Throughout the interview, peer educators demonstrated a high degree of commitment to the RPC program and a passionate interest in its future development. Coming from studies linked to social change and community development, these young people also envisaged their participation on the program as part of a career path.

The training they received was considered helpful and informative, but peer educators noted that a great deal of their learning was accomplished on the job. Having new peer educators start by observing workshops with more experienced educators was considered highly useful. More training sessions overall were suggested as ideal, covering both greater content (for example, on violence and mental health), and further skills development. It was also suggested that some form of formal ‘follow up’ training was essential for peer educators
working long-term on the program, in order to keep up with pedagogical and research developments and cover advanced issues such as curriculum development. With regard to wider professional support, though informal ‘debriefing’ with co-facilitators currently existed and was considered useful, regular, paid debriefing sessions with all peer educators were proposed as an effective way to exchange ideas, talk about problems, and discuss possible solutions more extensively.

In terms of classroom practicalities, distraction-free classrooms with movable chairs and tables, and which remained the same throughout a day’s workshop or week-by-week, were considered ideal. It was also agreed that having a trusted teacher (of the same sex as the students) present during sessions was preferred, for classroom management reasons as well as to provide teachers with an opportunity to learn what the program was about and perhaps communicate this to other teachers for follow up in their own classes. It was suggested that a letter be out to schools prior to a session in order to communicate these requests. Meetings with key teachers or student welfare coordinators prior to the sessions have also been found useful in the past, and could be organised systematically.

Peer educators were keen to see the program expanded to take a more ‘whole-school’ approach, bringing in parents, teachers and other school staff. One peer educator noted that the lack of information and resources available to teachers on issues such as violence, sexual diversity and healthy relationships, and considered the RPC program to be uniquely placed to provide such a resource, whether in the form of a practical manual or the provision of an advisory service. Though it was not considered practical for RPC to run parent sessions at present, one idea proposed was that ‘follow up’ letters were sent to parents after the program, letting them know of the issues raised, any problems identified, and what support mechanisms were available. Similarly, formal feedback sessions with key teachers were suggested as a way of involving schools more, responding to teachers’ desire for more communication on the program’s content, and encouraging follow-up of the program’s messages in the formal curriculum. This would require funds being available to pay peer educators, as well as teachers and peer educators having enough time to participate.

Finally, job stability and remuneration was presented as a major concern for all the peer educators. The irregularity of RPC work was considered difficult to manage in conjunction with family or study commitments for some, and for others financial need meant they often prioritised better-paying regular work. One of the program coordinators noted how this could also compromise coordination with schools. An arrangement was suggested by which a ‘core team’, of the coordinator and one or two experienced and committed peer educators, would be employed part-time or on job share. This would ensure peer educator availability and enable further work on communication, curriculum development and program expansion.

**Teachers**

Overall reactions to the RPC program on the part of teachers and student welfare coordinators (SWCs) were positive. Teachers in general appreciated the inclusive atmosphere created in the workshops, the relationships the peer educators developed with students, and
the opportunity the program provided for students to discuss issues and learn skills related to violence and relationships, which were not otherwise covered by the curriculum. The program was generally seen to have had a positive effect on students, and peer educators were appreciated as being skilful listeners and classroom managers, as well as being good role-models for students.

Areas of concern were mostly related to organisational issues. Some teachers felt, for example, that they hadn’t received adequate reporting of what was covered in the workshops, and others noted occasions where the smooth running of workshops (and the school’s wider timetable) had been disrupted because of peer educators not being available, changing week by week, or not arriving on time. Two teachers felt that the peer educators they had observed needed further training and support.

The content covered in the RPC workshops was generally considered well-focussed and appropriate. One teacher felt the workshops could be more directive in their aim to influence or change attitudes. Another SWC thought content on same-sex relationships and homophobia should not be broached in the young men’s workshops because of the potential for homophobic attitudes to be reinforced through verbal negative reactions on the part of students. This was not considered to be as great a problem in the young women’s workshops.

**Conclusion**

The RPC program is largely consistent with international good practice in the field of schools-based violence-prevention programs and sexuality/relationships education. An expansion of the program to include a ‘whole-school approach’ would enable the program to claim best practice, but this would necessitate interventions at the state and school levels which are beyond the control of the agencies running the program.

At the level of the schools-based interventions, the qualitative results from the interviews were overwhelmingly positive for both young men and women. Of the twenty students who participated, all thought the program had been beneficial in some way, and most felt it had changed them ‘for the better’ (on self-identified criteria). Many students identified changes in their behaviour and attitudes corresponding with the program’s objectives. Nearly all had enjoyed the experience, the activities and the atmosphere created. While offering differences of opinion on how often the program should be held, all felt they would like to do the program again, and, if possible, on a regular basis. Quantitative results from the questionnaires were positive on several scales, though inconclusive on others. For the young men, there were positive indications that the RPC program was achieving its objectives with regards to attitudinal change in decreasing favourable attitudes towards violence and gender-stereotyping. The conflict resolution skills measure showed positive results on some questions, though not on all, making the overall result inconclusive. Questionnaire results for young women were more limited than those for the young men. There was some positive indication the program was effective in reducing young women’s beliefs condoning violence against women. The assertiveness and support-seeking skills measures showed promising results on some questions, but again not on all. Finally, the results on the knowledge measure
indicate a greater awareness of issues surrounding violence for those young women who participated in the program.

At the organisational level there are many factors which contribute directly to the success of the program at the intervention level, such as the employment of peer education principles, an effective program design, and various informal procedures for working with schools and teachers. Support structures for peer-educators could be improved by providing more training and professional development opportunities, and regular meetings of peer educators to enable them to share experiences across the two programs would also be valuable. Teachers and student welfare coordinators felt positively about the program, though some reiterated the need for further peer educator training and professional stability in order to ensure the smooth running of the program. They noted, like the peer educators themselves, a need for greater communication with schools on practical issues like the presence of teachers in workshops and classroom setup. There would appear to be scope for expanding the work of current peer educators to create more permanent part-time or job-share positions, which would allow them to develop the program curriculum and provide more support for teachers and schools.

There is a great deal of evidence to indicate that Respect, Protect, Connect has a positive impact on students that is in line with the program’s objectives, and that it is viewed positively by the students and peer educators who participate in it. There is scope and justification for expansion of the program so that more students might benefit from it, and so that it might operate in and contribute to a ‘whole-school’ environment promoting healthy and respectful relationships.
Introduction

The *Respect Protect Connect* (RPC) program was developed to provide young people with information about relationship violence, its impact and how to deal with it, as well as encourage the development of healthy and respectful relationships. Developed and run by the South East Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA) and Women’s Health in the South East (WHISE), the program has been run in high schools in the Southern and Eastern Metropolitan Region of Victoria for over a decade.

This evaluation was supported and funded by SECASA and undertaken by an independent external researcher, Lara Fergus, over a period of four months, from July to October 2006. Key stakeholders include managers, staff and funding bodies at SECASA and WHISE. Other stakeholders include the participants in the program, their teachers, school principals, parents, and indeed the wider community.

The over-arching goal of the evaluation was to increase understanding of what makes RPC successful and why, and what might be hindering the program’s success and why. By assessing the quality and success of the program in reaching its stated goals, it is hoped that the evaluation will provide information to help people make decisions about the RPC program. For this reason, it was important that those most closely associated with RPC, such as SECASA and WHISE program managers and peer educators were involved throughout the evaluation process. They contributed to the evaluation design and methodology, gave feedback on questionnaires, made suggestions as to areas of inquiry and helped in both conducting and participating in interviews. This evaluation report is thus very much a product of a group effort.

The purpose of the evaluation was two-fold. Firstly, we wanted to be able to judge the value of RPC interventions in schools according to a range of indicators (ie – to assess whether RPC had a positive impact on participating students’ understanding of, and attitudes towards, violence, and/or improved their conflict resolution and assertiveness skills). Secondly, we wanted to know the reasons behind the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the program. In order to know this, we needed to think about how the program is structured, and look at the organisational processes involved in the program’s delivery. The evaluation could therefore be said to have two main purposes: 1) to determine the impact or effect of RPC on participating students, and 2) to look at the organisational and structural factors which might affect this, and in doing so generate information useful for decision-making about RPC.

To achieve the first purpose an ‘impact evaluation’ was carried out to assess the program’s outcomes for participating students. It aimed to measure the extent and level of attainment of RPC’s specified objectives (that is, it was ‘objectives-based’). It also attempted to measure changes in participants’ understanding of, attitudes towards, and behaviour regarding, violence and related issues according to specific indicators.
To achieve the second purpose, program coordinators and peer-educators from SECASA and WHISE were consulted in order to determine, for instance, how they see the goals and objectives of RPC, the extent to which they use, and find useful, the program plans and materials, their views on program delivery, and what they feel are the program’s strengths and weaknesses. Key teachers and student welfare coordinators at the school were also be asked to participate in interviews about what they feel are the program’s strengths and weaknesses, and comment on issues such as program delivery and coordination. A literature review of international best practice in schools-based interventions (and the controversies surrounding such assessments) was undertaken, and the extent to which the RPC program met or exceeded such standards was assessed. Possible areas of improvement were then examined, with reference to any apparent program weaknesses illuminated by the ‘impact evaluation’ described above.
Methodology

Early in the evaluation, the goals, implementation, and nature of the program were examined in order to make subsequent decisions on the evaluation’s focus, and how to go about gathering and analysing data. A distinction was drawn between the actual delivery of specific RPC interventions in schools, and the organisational umbrella under which the program was implemented. These two ‘levels’, it was decided, needed to be considered as two separate, though of course interrelated, ‘objects’ of the evaluation, and they each necessitated different evaluative approaches.

As the evaluation was directed primarily at program development and improvement, rather than simply and assessment of the program’s ‘worth’, the most appropriate overarching questions were developmental in nature. They included:

- What kind of effect does the RPC program have on program participants?
- What are the organisational factors which might impact on the above?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the RPC program?
- How might the program be modified to work better?

Well-established or ‘settled’ programs like RPC are commonly evaluated within an ‘impact’ framework, which seeks to measure the program’s effectiveness (or ‘worth’) in achieving its goals. This methodology seemed appropriate for the evaluation at the ‘school-intervention’ level: that is, it would measure the extent to which participating students showed increased awareness of the issues covered, as well as any attitude/behaviour change with regard to violence. While this became a significant part of this evaluation, we realised it would not in itself produce a ‘tool’ capable of being used by key stakeholders to aid in their decision-making about the program.

It was therefore at least equally important for the evaluation to generate information not only on whether or where the program ‘works’, but also on what to do to make it work better. This required a secondary focus on structural arrangements and processes at the ‘organisational level’. It meant evaluating, for example, the extent to which existing program plans for RPC met international good practice standards, and were useful to those delivering program interventions. At this level of the evaluation, the participation and input of program managers and peer-educators was essential, as they were the key source of information on such structures and processes. Teachers and student welfare coordinators at the schools were also uniquely positioned to give input both into the impact of the program on students, and also into factors such as program organisation, delivery and content.

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These parameters for the evaluation are represented below: the ‘impact’ evaluation, aiming to judge the ‘worth’ of RPC at the school intervention level, is shown as part of a broader ‘process’ evaluation, a participatory endeavour designed to assist decision-making:

Of course beyond these two ‘levels’ were further possible objects of study which impact significantly on the ability of the RPC program to meet its objectives, including the broader socio-cultural context, and within it the various ‘cultures’ of school, family and community. These are, generally speaking, beyond the scope of this evaluation, although they are considered in the literature review of this report.

**Organisational Level – ‘Process Evaluation’**

At the organisational level, the key questions were:

- To what extent is the RPC program consistent with international good practice? How could the program be modified to be more in line with international good practice?
- What other factors at the organisational level might contribute to the success of the program at the intervention level?
- What support or monitoring structures and processes exist for peer-educators? What benefits have peer-educators gained from participating in
the program? Could anything else be done to improve their experience and increase their capacity and skills?

Data collection was through two major techniques: interviews and documentary analysis. Individual discussions were carried out with program managers, along with focus group interviews with peer-educators, and individual interviews with key teachers and student welfare coordinators at various schools. These discussions both fed into and reflected on aspects of the impact evaluation. Interviews were conducted in person with the evaluator, Lara Fergus, and the anonymity of those who participated was assured and has been respected in this report.

To determine the extent to which the RPC program was consistent with international good practice, a literature review was undertaken and a set of criteria for good practice developed under the headings ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘how’. An analysis of RPC documentation was also conducted, including program manuals, peer-educator training materials, and previous evaluative material such as post-workshop questionnaires and an existing evaluative study\(^2\) of the one-off interventions targeted at young men. The strengths and weaknesses of the RPC program were assessed in the light of this review.

**School Intervention Level – ‘Impact Evaluation’**

At the level of the schools-based interventions, the impact evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which students were affected by the RPC program, against indicators developed from the program’s objectives. These objectives were determined initially from an article written by the inaugural program coordinators, Russel Pratt and Carol Pyke\(^3\), and then developed in consultation with current program coordinators, Christopher Mitchell and Kristine Hill. For the young women, we wanted to know the extent to which the program had:

- increased their awareness of violence in relationships;
- enabled them to identify violence, and encouraged them to be proactive in gaining help and support;
- provided them with assertiveness skills; and
- enabled them to identify what makes a healthy relationship.

For the young men, we wanted to know the extent to which the program had:

- increased their awareness of gender stereotyping and its effects;
- developed their understanding of respectful ways to interact with women;
- enabled them to develop more effective and non-violent ways of relating to self and others; and

\(^2\) Suzanne Pollard (2004), *Evaluation of Respect, Protect, Connect (RPC): A School-Based Prevention Program for Preventing and Reducing Violence among Adolescent Males*, unpublished research paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Graduate Diploma of Psychology, Swinburne University of Technology.

taught them interaction styles based on non-violent ways of coping with confrontation.

Given the complexity of these questions, we decide to use a mixed-methods approach incorporating both questionnaires and interviews. The strength of this approach was that it would enable us to obtain two very different sets of information: the questionnaires made use of specific indicators to attempt to measure quantitatively the impact that the delivery of the program made on individual students, the interviews instead targeted students’ perceptions of the program, and their own feelings on how it has affected them.

For the questionnaires, a design incorporating pre- and post-tests was used, with the same ten-minute, multiple-choice response questionnaire given to students before RPC classes began and again afterwards. The questionnaire was designed to measure changes in attitudes and skills related to the identified objectives. The ‘attitude’ and ‘skills’ questions were initially based on existing scales, whose reliability had been tested, from relevant studies in the social and community psychology fields. For the young men this included a ‘Beliefs about Aggression and Alternatives’⁴, an ‘Acceptance of Couple Violence’⁵ and a ‘Gender Stereotyping’⁶ scale for attitudes, and a ‘Conflict Resolution Style’ measure for skills. For the young women, there were fewer existing instruments designed to measure change in line with the objectives of the program. The ‘Acceptance of Couple Violence’ and ‘Gender Stereotyping’ scales were used, but a new measure was created to assess the assertiveness and help-seeking skills which the program aimed to increase. All scales and measures, however, were significantly adapted in consultation with program coordinators and peer educators. Several questions were removed, some were added and the US-style language was modified to the Australian context. The attitude questions were measured on a 4-point Likert scale, and the skills questions offered a number of responses to particular situations (where students could choose as many responses as they wanted). As the girls’ program included a larger information-based component than the boys’ (eg, on what constituted violence, or what services were available for victims), a knowledge measure was also created for their questionnaire. This measure was written ‘from scratch’, based on the program’s objectives, and comprised a series of multiple-choice questions with a single correct answer. A copy of the questionnaires is appended to this report.

⁵ Foshee, V., Fothergill, K. & Stuart J. (1992) Results for the Teenage Dating Abuse Study Conducted in Githens Middle School and Southern High Schools: Technical Report, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, U.S.A.
In the week beforehand, students were presented with an information sheet and consent form. This briefly explained the purpose and method of the evaluation, assured students’ confidentiality and anonymity if they chose to participate, and provided contact numbers for any questions or concerns. They were asked to take the form home to their parents, and both parents and students were asked to return the signed form if they didn’t want to (or didn’t want their child to) participate. This form of ‘passive consent’ is consistent with the normal requirements for sex education classes in Victorian high schools. No forms were returned. The students were again informed, before the questionnaires were administered, that the questionnaires would ask what they thought about, and how they would react to, some difficult situations. It was reiterated that they did not have to participate and could stop participating at any time, simply by handing in a blank or partially blank questionnaire. A hundred and seven questionnaires were returned fully completed. Students used ‘code names’ of their own creation to enable us to match pre- and post-tests while maintaining anonymity. Only questionnaires fully completed by students who had been present for both pre- and post-tests were used in the analysis.

Three schools were chosen: School A received an eight-week version of the RPC program; School B received a two-week version; and School C was a ‘control’ and didn’t receive the program. The participating students from School A were in year eight, and received one 90 minute workshop per week for the eight weeks. There were nine boys (in several groups) and one group of seven girls. The pre-test questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the first session, and an identical questionnaire was administered at the end of the last session. At School B, year nine students received one 90-minute workshop per week over two weeks. There were 27 boys and 26 girls. Given School B had a relatively short program, the pre- and post-questionnaires were administered outside workshop time: in the week before the first and the week after the second workshop. At the ‘control’ School C, two classes of year eight students (22 girls and 16 boys) were given the same questionnaire twice, the second eight weeks after the first (corresponding to the pre- and post-test questionnaires at School A), but without receiving the program in between. The purpose of the ‘control’ school was to enable comparison at ‘baseline’, giving us a greater degree of confidence that any observed changes in Schools A or B were indeed the result of the program and not some other factor. Permission was obtained from the principals at the three participating schools, and the schools were offered a free future RPC workshop to thank them for their help.

Ten students (five male and five female) from each ‘treatment’ school, A and B, were interviewed a week after the final class of the program. The interviews were semi-structured and included such topics as what the students remembered most about the program, if and how they thought it had changed them, what they enjoyed most and least, etc. They took about half an hour each, and students who participated were offered a $20 music voucher to thank them for their time and thoughts. The young women were interviewed by Lara Fergus, and the young men by Steve De Klerk, a peer-educator who had not conducted workshops at these particular schools. Both were therefore unknown to the students. Interview results were transcribed and analysed qualitatively, in order to highlight apparent patterns, and evidence of student responsiveness to the program. The interview schedule is attached to this report.
Literature Review

The *Respect, Protect, Connect* program is situated in the domain of prevention initiatives which target certain groups considered to be more ‘at risk’ of violence (whether as perpetrators or victims), or in some way more amenable to programs or interventions designed to prevent it. One reason for focussing on adolescents is that the high rates of sexual assault and other violence both experienced and perpetrated by young people\(^8\) confirm a clear need for prevention initiatives to be developed for this age group. Another rationale for schools-based programs draws on early intervention literature, which has shown that there are certain key transition points in young people’s development, representing ‘windows for influence’. Adolescence is a time when many people become sexually active, with a recent national survey showing the majority of Australian secondary school students to be sexually active in some way by year 10\(^9\). It is also a time when attitudes towards relationships and sexuality are developing, and so would appear ideal for interventions designed to build positive attitudes towards relationships, reduce violence-tolerant and rape-tolerant attitudes\(^10\) and increase knowledge of the service system which could support young people should they be victims of an assault.

However, like many schools-based programs of this kind, RPC has evolved over the years to take a holistic approach, dealing not just with violence but with the broader context in which it takes place. Issues such as relationships, sexuality, constructions of masculinity and femininity, drugs and alcohol, bullying and assertiveness are all covered in the workshops. Such evolution has been in response to what peer-educators have learned ‘on the ground’, and also to a growing body of research which has provided evaluations and critiques of existing programs, and indications as to what might constitute ‘good practice’.

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\(^10\) There is some evidence to suggest that certain attitudes (such as rape-tolerant attitudes) are formed at a younger age, meaning that interventions to influence the development of such attitudes might better begin at primary school: Urbis Keys Young (2004), *National Framework for Sexual Assault Prevention*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra; National Crime Prevention (1999) *Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and Early Intervention Approaches to Crime in Australia*, National Crime Prevention, Attorney General’s Department, Canberra; Friedman, B. & Golding, S. (1997) *Guys Talk Too: Improving Young Men’s Sexual Health*, Family Planning South Australia & South Australia Health Commission, Kensington, South Australia.
Overview of ‘good practice’ in prevention programs

While the research referred to above has tended to be mostly small-scale and on specific programs or projects, there have been some attempts over recent years to collate and review the information generated. The *National Framework for Sexual Assault Prevention*\(^\text{11}\) included a literature review of prevention approaches and noted the important place of school-based prevention ‘as an effective method for shifting the social and cultural norms that support rape-tolerant attitudes’\(^\text{12}\). Looking at the evidence-base provided by the studies they reviewed, the authors identified a number of elements of ‘good practice’ for such programs. They concluded that positive change was more likely to result from programs which:

- utilise trained peers\(^\text{13}\);
- are in single-sex sessions\(^\text{14}\);
- are delivered over multiple sessions and successive years;
- have a focus on personal values and ethics, the construction of gender and particularly male identity;
- are reinforced in extra-curricula environments such as sport; and
- include communication with parents as a component\(^\text{15}\).

The *National Framework* report also noted certain hindrances to good practice, including the fact that, on a national level, ‘there is no systematic approach to delivering in-school prevention, and no efficient method of utilising the existing evidence’\(^\text{16}\). The authors recommended that all schools throughout the country should be required to provide sexual assault prevention programs. To do this, they recommended the creation of national standards or guidelines to ensure that schools-based programs reflect good practice standards and ‘address the level of discretion at individual school sites, which appears to be the key determinate of the nature and extent of the program provided’\(^\text{17}\).

Such an initiative, they note, would necessitate partnerships between by State and Territory departments of education and specialist agencies, and should coordinate with state-wide violence strategies, the national safer schools strategy and gender equity


\(^{12}\) Ibid, 15.


\(^{16}\) Urbis Keys Young (2004), op cit 4: 15.

\(^{17}\) Ibid: 16.
frameworks\textsuperscript{18}. Key elements of the guidelines would include: a ‘whole-of-school approach’; the contextualisation of violence and sexual assault within its broad socio-cultural context, including ‘issues of gender relations and sexual ethics’; and ‘nationwide performance indicators against which schools are required to report’\textsuperscript{19}.

Another important finding in the\textit{ National Framework’s} review of the research was that ‘one-off’ workshops in schools were generally found to have limited or no measurable results in reducing rape-supportive attitudes (unlike longer-term interventions). However, there is an argument to be made as to the sensitivity of instruments designed to measure attitudinal change in complex social domains such as sexuality and interpersonal relationships, as shall be discussed later, and such results should be treated with caution.

In the Australian context there have also been a small number of literature reviews of programs designed to address issues such as healthy relationships, sex education or sexually transmitted diseases, that have concluded with recommendations for good practice. For example, a review of programs designed to promote healthy relationships\textsuperscript{20} included the following recommendations:

- plan strategically to take into account local needs and issues;
- inform and involve parents;
- target specific risk factors;
- have a clear rationale about the educational principles and strategies used;
- have specific strategies to engage with Indigenous, immigrant and refugee, and disadvantaged young people;
- incorporate elements of designed to: inform about violence and support options; challenge attitudes about gender constructions and the use of violence; and develop skills, with opportunities to practice and implement them;
- articulate support mechanisms and inform schools about them;
- commit to programs running over a lengthy period of time, or with follow-up sessions, to maximise behavioural and attitudinal change;
- integrate an evaluation strategy into the program itself.

By far the most comprehensive, and recent, review of the existing research in this area, however, was commissioned by Shine SA, to inform and support the\textit{ Sexual Health and Relationships Education} (Share) project. The literature review was undertaken by researchers from La Trobe University’s Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Dyson, S, Mitchell, A, Dalton, D & Hillier, L (2003),\textit{ Factors for Success in Conducting Effective Sexual Health and Relationships Education with Young People in Schools: A Literature Review}, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne (commissioned by Shine SA).
Society and looked at critical factors for success in conducting effective sexual health education in schools\textsuperscript{22}, identifying the following:

- be positive about sexuality
- move beyond information provision
- address the social and cultural world in which young people make decisions
- address the issue of gender
- refrain from teaching abstinence alone
- promote an understanding that sexuality and sexual behaviours are diverse
- address the issue of risk
- focus on the development of particular skills
- incorporate peer education and peer support
- create a supportive learning environment
- involve the wider community, particularly parents.

There is obviously some overlap between the criteria developed by different researchers, and different issues are prioritised in each study. It is also important to remember that ‘good practice’ is not static: evaluations of programs can generate new information that may add to or change what we have previously considered good practice. It is now worth synthesising the information learned from these reviews, examining in more detail the reasoning behind the criteria, and comparing the RPC program to this assessment.

**Criteria for good practice and RPC**

If we take the criteria identified as meeting good practice above, remove ‘overlaps’ and summarise the concepts, we can examine what constitutes good practice in more detail under the sub-headings of ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘how’. This will enable us to look at issues of students and staff, content, timing and approach in more detail, and examine the extent to which RPC meets the good practice criteria established in the research to date.

**‘Who’**

**Students**

The *National Framework for Sexual Assault Prevention*\textsuperscript{23} found that single-sex sessions are the most effective for school-based sexual assault prevention programs. This was backed up by the findings of the *Secondary Students and Sexual Health* 2002 report, which noted the strongly gendered nature of young people’s beliefs and understandings

\textsuperscript{23} Urbis Keys Young (2004) op cit 4.
of sexuality resulting from social ideas about what is ‘appropriate’ sexual behaviour for men and women\textsuperscript{24}. Young people might therefore be uncomfortable when asked to discuss sexual matters in front of members of the opposite sex, and reluctant to fully participate in a mixed sex environment\textsuperscript{25}.

RPC has been running exclusively single-sex groups since its inception, and therefore meets good practice on this count. Russel Pratt and Carol Pyke’s 2001 article on the RPC program refers to safety issues for young women as being another reason why single sex groups were considered preferable, given the ‘consistent and alarming statistics regarding violence directed toward women’\textsuperscript{26} and the fair assumption that ‘someone in the class is a survivor of violence, or a witness to violence, or sexual abuse’\textsuperscript{27}. Finally, drawing on their own experience conducting workshops, they also note developmental factors and differences in learning styles and use of language, all of which point to young men and women being more open to dealing with sensitive issues in a single sex environment.

Studies of sex education have also suggested that students’ discomfort is reduced if they are in familiar class groupings, and if disruptions are minimised\textsuperscript{28}. As RPC programs are usually run in year groupings, students are likely to be in familiar groups, but this is something that could be recommended to schools if alternative arrangements are being proposed. As for minimising disruptions, the results of interviews with RPC educators suggest that they are highly aware of the benefits of sessions running uninterrupted, but it is not always possible in some school environments where school policy means teachers might come in and out of the classroom. Negotiating such issues with schools beforehand would therefore seem beneficial, and was indeed an issue brought up in the peer educator and teacher interviews (see later sections).

**Educators**

The literature indicates that educators may well be the most important elements of sexuality and relationship-oriented programs\textsuperscript{29}. It is suggested, first of all, that educators should be well-trained in gender, violence and sexual health issues\textsuperscript{30}. Further positive qualities include: an approachable manner; being comfortable talking about ‘taboo’ issues


\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Wight, D (1993), op cit 18.

\textsuperscript{29} Bowden, R G, Lanning, B A, Pippin, G & Tanner, J (2003), ‘Teachers' Attitudes towards Abstinence-only Sex Education Curricula’, *Education* 123.

\textsuperscript{30} Dyson, S, Mitchell, A, Dalton, D & Hillier, L (2003), op cit 15.
such as the physical aspects of sex\textsuperscript{31}; being able to create a climate of trust and being seen by students as ‘protector and friend’\textsuperscript{32}; being assertive enough to eliminate hurtful humour while not being dismissive or judgemental\textsuperscript{33}; and the ability to make the program fun\textsuperscript{34}.

Interviews with RPC program managers suggest that RPC educators are selected on the basis of the above personal qualities (among others and with regard to qualifications, experience, motivation, etc). They also receive content training on the identified issues (such as gender, violence and sexual health issues) as well as skills training in classroom management, active listening and other skills aiming to develop the above qualities. Teachers and student welfare coordinators involved with the program explicitly cited many of these qualities as being apparent in the RPC educators they observed, and students similarly cited the personal qualities of the educators as something they appreciated most about the workshops. Two teachers indicated that further training for the educators, particularly in order to build their confidence, might be necessary. The educators themselves thought that follow-up training or other support mechanisms might be useful. These issues are examined in more detail in the ‘Findings and Discussion’ section.

An element of good practice identified in several studies is the use of peer educators and/or the incorporation of peer support. The \textit{National Framework} report noted the ‘strong influence of peers and the high value placed on peer acceptance by young men. This desire for acceptance can be utilised in violence prevention efforts’\textsuperscript{35}. Another study, on approaches to teaching a broader health-related program, suggested that peer educators should be other students chosen for their ability to provide leadership and influence the behaviour of others\textsuperscript{36}. It was found that the use of such peer educators had a significant effect on how other students responded to the program. A UK-based study on AIDS education also found that the incorporation of peer-led interventions, along with skills training, was the most effective way to go beyond ‘information provision’ and actually affect students’ behaviour\textsuperscript{37}.

At first glance there might seem to be a contradiction between the above good practice criteria. On the one hand it is considered good practice for educators to be highly trained in both content and skills, and on the other, that they be chosen from among other

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Wight, D (1993), op cit 18.
\item Dyson, S, Mitchell, A, Dalton, D & Hillier, L (2003), op cit 15.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
students in the school, who are unlikely to have such training and will be limited in their ability to meet such standards given the time constraints of their school work. The Pratt and Pyke article further notes that while peers are certainly a major source of support and information for adolescents, “the information might not always be correct, or in the adolescents’ best interests”\(^{38}\).

The RPC program has struck an effective balance on this count. The program incorporates peer education principles by using educators who are closer in age to students than most teachers, being in their early twenties, yet who are trained in order to have the knowledge and skills to support students in the ways described above. The interviews with students conducted for this evaluation confirmed the trust and confidence they had in the RPC peer educators, and that they saw them as distinct from teachers, parents and other authority figures (this shall be looked at in more detail later). The RPC program would therefore appear to be meeting good practice in using trained young people as ‘peer’ educators\(^{39}\) and, within the sphere of action of SECASA and WHISE, it would be difficult to go beyond this and involve other students for peer-led interventions. If the program were to be expanded to take a ‘whole school approach’, there might be scope for training students as mentors or educators in similar ways to existing anti-bullying programs\(^{40}\). These students could be trained by, and work in collaboration with, existing educators, and would provide a source of information and support for students outside the workshops. However such a step would likely involve significantly increased support and commitment from schools and at the government policy level, as shall be discussed under the sub-section ‘How’ below.

‘What’

The content of schools-based programs dealing with issues of sexuality, relationships and violence is probably the most controversial area of the literature, but there have emerged over the last decade some generally accepted principles.

Gender and power

The majority of evaluations and reviews of sexuality education and violence-prevention programs stress the continued need to teach students about gender and power. Dyson \textit{et al}\(\footnote{Pratt, R & Pyke, C (2001), op cit 19, 96.}^{38}\) \textit{et al}\(\footnote{Though they are not strictly ‘peers’ of high school students, the term ‘peer educator’ is used to refer to RPC educators in this report, reflecting the terminology commonly employed within the program (as well as their youth relative to most teachers).}^{39}\) \textit{et al}\(\footnote{See, for example, Rigby, K (1996), \textit{Bullying in schools and what to do about it}, Australina Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.; and Sullivan, K (2000), \textit{The Anti-Bullying Handbook}, Oxford University press, Aukland, New Zealand.}^{40}\)

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note that the harmful outcomes of social constructions of sexuality (particularly for young women but also for young men) are being increasingly recognised in the literature on schools-based programs. Surveys of young people’s attitudes have shown that negative social constructions of masculinity and femininity, as well as stereotypical attitudes towards sexuality, remain common amongst young people. Examples of such attitudes include those which cast young women as either ‘good girls’ or ‘bad’ (‘sluts’), or those encouraging young men to act in a sexually-predatory way towards young women in order to avoid being labelled homosexual or weak.

The need, therefore, to work on a ‘systems level’ rather than focusing on individual behaviour is reiterated in several studies. There is some concern, for instance, that the very attitudes which implicitly condone male violence against women are reinforced by prevention initiatives where the responsibility for violence prevention is placed upon individual women (for example, programs aiming to teach women how to ‘avoid rape’). An alternative is to focus on men’s behaviour, through, for example, teaching non-violent conflict resolution skills, encouraging victim empathy, examining the links between the social construction of masculinity and the use of violence, and challenging men’s conformity to such constructions.

This latter approach is considered to generate better outcomes for both young men and young women. McCrone notes that challenging social constructions of masculinity gives young men alternatives to the limited range of behaviours and attitudes which traditionally define a ‘real man’. For example, it can give young men ‘permission’ to express themselves emotionally and improve their capacity to establish healthy intimate relationships. Programs for young women which work on a ‘systems’ level, for example in examining the sexist construction of the ‘good girl’/’slut’ dichotomy, encourage young

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41 Dyson, S, Mitchell, A, Dalton, D & Hillier, L (2003), Factors for Success in Conducting Effective Sexual Health and Relationships Education with Young People in Schools: A Literature Review, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne (commissioned by Shine SA).


47 McGrane, T. (1993) *op cit*
women to feel positive about their own sexuality, as well as to make decisions regarding what they do and don’t want from sexual and personal relationships\textsuperscript{48}.

The RPC program has been at the forefront of good practice in this regard. It was one of the earliest Australian programs to target young men, and to do so through content that aims to ‘discuss healthy and respectful ways for young men to deal with confrontation and interact with young women’\textsuperscript{49}. The program design and materials are based on a pro-feminist model, acknowledging the evidence base which tells us men are the majority of perpetrators of violence (against women and other men) and of sexual violence (mostly against women)\textsuperscript{50}. Given the structural approach of feminist theory, this means working on a ‘systems’, rather than individual level, as recommended by the reviews and evaluations cited above. However care is taken, according to the Pratt and Pyke article and interviews with program managers, to approach issues of gender and power with young men in ‘a safe, non-blaming and non-shaming way’\textsuperscript{51} in order to prevent negative individual reactions, while allowing damaging behaviours to be acknowledged.

The RPC program objectives for young women specifically exclude any possibility of placing responsibility on young women to ‘avoid’ or ‘prevent’ men’s violence. Rather, the program aims to ‘provide a language and framework that empower[s] young women to identify violence, and [to] encourage them to be pro-active in gaining help and support if they were facing a situation involving violence’\textsuperscript{52}. The program materials, like those for the young men’s program, clearly reflect a feminist analysis of gender and power. The content presents information in a non-judgmental, positive and fun way, using humour, games, quizzes, etc to undermine sexist assumptions and provide a space for reflection on issues such as sexuality, relationships and life choices.

There is a risk that, in aiming to teach ‘assertiveness skills’ to young women, some analysts might interpret the young women’s program as falling within a (now largely discredited) ‘rape-avoidance skills’ paradigm. An important distinction is that the RPC program’s focus remains squarely within a rights-based, rather than ‘protection-based’ discourse. That is, young women are not taught to be assertive in order to ‘avoid’ rape or other violence, but rather are made aware of their human right to live free from such violence, identify and name it when they see it, and take action to obtain support if they are victims of violence (or know somebody who is). The program appears to be effective in maintaining this distinction in that, when young women were asked in the interviews what they felt they’d learned from the RPC workshops, none spoke in terms of learning to ‘protect’ themselves from violence, but several spontaneously identified learning about their rights as well as what they could do when faced with, for example, situations involving sexual harassment or bullying (see later section).

\textsuperscript{49} Pratt, R & Pyke, C (2001), op cit 19, 93.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
Diversity and inclusiveness

Analysts of schools-based programs have noted the need for workshop materials and design to be inclusive of diversity, whether ethnic, cultural or on the basis of sexuality or (dis)ability. Attention to inclusiveness should be ensured regardless of the apparent composition of any one group, primarily in the interests of promoting equality and understanding, but also because ‘some groups may be invisible, or prefer not to disclose their presence because of fear of prejudice or discrimination’⁵³.

It was noted in the National Framework for Sexual Assault Prevention that:

careful thought must […] be given to recently arrived migrant and refugee young people who may be older than the average cohort when they enter schooling in Australia and have had no or limited experience of sexual assault prevention programs in their country of origin. These young people may bring a range of both positive and negative experiences and contexts to be considered in the design and delivery of material.⁵⁴

Showing attention to the needs and experiences of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds has also been emphasised by research which shows that such students often feel that program messages are not relevant to them⁵⁵ and are therefore more likely to ‘tune out’.

Another important point made in the National Framework was that school-based programs will ‘miss’ those groups with high school-withdrawal rates, such as young Indigenous people. Also, interventions for young Indigenous people may be more appropriate at an earlier age given the research base showing Indigenous young people ‘are subject to higher levels of community violence, child abuse and family violence’⁵⁶ and are therefore more likely to have been victimised at an earlier age. One of the ten principles devised by the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affair’s Working Party on Family Violence in 1999 stresses the importance of incorporating ‘practices that maintain and sustain children’s safety, protection and rights via education and other methods of intervention’⁵⁷. Though there remains little research

⁵⁴ Urbis Keys Young (2004), op cit 1, 15.
⁵⁷ Cited in Paul Memmott, Catherine Chambers, Carroll Go-Sam & Linda Thomson Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, University of Queensland, ‘Good Practice in Indigenous Family Violence
on what constitutes good practice in schools-based programs for Indigenous adolescents, some indication is given by guidelines on good practice for family violence prevention programs more broadly, such as using models of activities that are determined at the community level, and seeking the support and advice of community leaders. There is also scope for learning from existing programs specifically designed for Aboriginal adolescents.

The high rates of violence and sexual assault experienced by people (especially women) with disabilities means that prevention programs must pay particular attention to the needs of this group. Sue Salthouse and Carolyn Frohmader, from the organisation ‘Women With Disabilities Australia’, note that women with disabilities experience violence similarly to all women (that is, they are most likely be assaulted by a man, who is known to them, and at ‘home’), however the concept of ‘home’, and therefore ‘domestic violence’ needs to be much more widely defined for women with disabilities:

[T]heir place of residence may be a community based group home or residential institution, a boarding house, shelter, hospital, psychiatric ward, or nursing home. Within these varied settings violence may be perpetrated by a number of people who come into contact with the woman in the course of her domestic life. These may include other residents, co-patients, a relative and/or a carer, whether family member or paid service provider.

Young people with intellectual disabilities (especially young women) are at particular risk, with one study suggesting that 68% of young women with an intellectual disability will experience sexual abuse before they reach eighteen. The fact that young people with disabilities are less likely to receive senior secondary education than those without disabilities also means there is a risk that they will be ‘missed’ by mainstream schools-based programs.


58 From the MCATSIA principles, cited in Office of the Status of Women 2001, Working Together Against Violence: The First Three Years of Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, Report prepared by the OSW within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Strategic Partners P/L and Dr A. Kirsner, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, August.

59 For example, ‘Stop it ... before it starts!’ is a healthy-relationships program run in the Northern Territory, which includes a training package of modules which target Indigenous groups; Jacobs, Tanya; McGrath, Mina Stop it ... Before it Start! A Program for Adolescents: Building Positive Relationships and Avoiding Violent Ones, Darwin, NT: Office of Women's Policy, Northern Territory Government, 2004.


Finally it is extremely important, in the interests of young people’s safety and wellbeing as well as of discouraging prejudice and discrimination, that sexuality education programs include discussion of diverse sexualities and are attentive to the experiences and needs of lesbian and gay young people. Dyson et al note that:

in discourse about sex, homosexuality is frequently vilified, demonised or missing […] This represents a serious concern for sex educators, as such silences and omissions contribute to problems of low self esteem, self loathing and vulnerability to self harming behaviours. 63

Content which does not make visible same-sex attraction and actively challenge heterosexism can implicitly condone to homophobic attitudes held by peers, as well as cause gay and lesbian youth to disengage from the material. 64 Hillier’s 1999 research offered the recommendation that educators avoid situating heterosexuality as ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ and instead present sexuality as ‘fluid and multiple’ 65, the product of social constructions as well as individual development and choices.

The RPC program materials indicate that care has been taken to ensure that such inclusiveness is ‘built-in’ to the program design. For example, the Workshop Manual produced for the young men’s program includes the following sections:

- Racism and Violence
- Homophobia and Violence
- Disability and Violence
- Deafness, Blindness, and Vulnerability
- Young Indigenous Men
- Young Male Children of Vietnam Veterans
- Young Men and Homelessness
- Young Men, Mental Health and Violence
- Homophobia and Suicide Prevention

These sections of the manual form part of the content-based training of peer educators, and are also used to generate material for the workshops. Peer educators also receive skills training on how to deal with racist, sexist and homophobic comments made by students. For example:

A skilled facilitator can use a racist comment as an invitation to explore an issue. What may have taken 20 minutes to get to in a workshop has just been presented by one of the participants - use it! For example: name racism as a way that people can be abusive towards others in an attempt to feel powerful and ‘right’ […] 66

Speakers from, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, gay and lesbian organisations, or organisations representing the interests of people with

65 Hillier, L. et al. (1999) op cit
disabilities or from non-English speaking backgrounds are often invited to present during the longer programs.

The RPC program is also regularly run in schools for young people with mild intellectual disabilities, with the content and materials specially adapted. Because of time constraints, such schools did not form part of the present evaluation, and so the effectiveness of these programs cannot be judged. However they indicate a commitment on the part of the schools as well as SECASA and WHISE to manage the difficulties associated with the high rates of abuse and low school-leaving ages of young people with disabilities, identified above.

Interviews conducted for this evaluation with newly-arrived migrant students for whom English was a second language indicated that some may have had difficulty understanding the content presented to them in the RPC workshops, whether for linguistic or cultural reasons, and that more care (and more time) may need to be taken to improve the effectiveness of the program for non-English speaking background students and avoid misunderstanding of the program’s messages.

Both the young men’s and young women’s program prioritise dealing with homophobia and making visible same-sex relationships, as evidenced by the program manuals and workshop plans. One teacher interviewed for this evaluation raised the concern that, as such content was not present throughout the whole school curriculum, presenting it in a ‘special program’ such as RPC might actually have the effect of reinforcing homophobic attitudes. There may therefore be a need to ensure that such issues are properly handled elsewhere in the school environment, both on a welfare level and in terms of curriculum content. This relates to the good practice requirement of a ‘whole-school approach’, discussed below.

**Knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, skills**

The traditional focus of prevention programs on increasing student’s knowledge and awareness of violence and sexual assault has been criticised by some analysts given the lack of evidence that awareness-raising in itself will lead to behavioural or even attitudinal change. Moira Carmody, for instance, notes that ‘[i]t is somewhat naïve to think that a few hours of awareness-raising will transform deeply embedded cultural norms and practices about gender relationships’.

Other researchers add that prevention programs need to do more than simply provide information, and should instead include skills-based training aiming to provide students with the tools to think critically about real-life situations, and assess and adapt their own values and behaviours. Dyson et al note that this approach demands a high level of aptitude from educators themselves, who need to be able to clarify their own values if they are to help young people clarify theirs.

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67 See, for example, Gourlay, P. (1996); Hillier, L. et al. (1999) *op cit*
69 Dyson *et al* (2006), *op cit*
What educators say, as well as their silences, body language and role modelling will invariably impart their values to students, meaning ‘attempts by teachers to adopt a value-neutral stance are doomed to failure’\(^7^0\).

Violence prevention and ‘healthy relationship’ programs share with sex education a distinction from the rest of the school curriculum in that they aim to influence behaviours as well as increase knowledge\(^7^1\). Research shows that the former outcome is more likely if the focus is on skills development and there is a clear ‘behavioural message’\(^7^2\). Skills development should include conflict resolution, negotiation, and interpersonal skills in order to empower students to negotiate sexual and personal relationships and reduce ‘unwanted sexual experiences’\(^7^3\). Imparting assertiveness as well as support-seeking skills to young women is seen as particularly valuable, and again demands specific skills-based training as opposed to information-based sessions\(^7^4\).

One of the great strengths of the RPC program would therefore appear to be its long-term focus on skills-building and values clarification. From its conception the program rejected an information-provision model and created a dynamic and interactive workshop design, whereby students are encouraged to discuss their own experiences, share ideas about how to handle different situations and role-play scenarios, and this in an informative context which also raises awareness of violence and related issues. The results from the student interviews for this evaluation (and, with some limitations, the quantitative component) indicate that the program is broadly successful in achieving the aim of providing students with the behavioural skills to deal with situations of conflict and violence, and establish healthy relationships.

‘**When**’

The reviews and evaluations examined in the previous section (‘Good practice in prevention programs’) have two major recommendations to make with regards to the timing of schools-based prevention program. The first is that violence-prevention and sexuality education should be introduced early. While the content of such education must obviously be adapted to suit the age group and developmental stage of the students receiving the program, there is certainly an argument to be made for including training on

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conflict resolution, healthy relationships and gender issues in the years before curriculum-based sex education classes commence. Research has shown that children can hold rape-supportive attitudes such as victim-blaming before they even reach high school, indicating a need to encourage children think about such attitudes and understand their context as early as primary school. The second recommendation is that programs should run over a lengthy period of time, with multiple sessions and over successive years, if behavioural and attitudinal change is to be achieved. Many evaluations have shown little or no results for behavioural or attitudinal change following one-off workshops, and, though there are limitations to the instruments used to measure such change (see next section: ‘Learning from other evaluations’), more positive results are apparent for longer programs.

The RPC program is tailored for students in years 7-12, though recently SECASA and WHSE have had requests to run adapted versions of the program in primary schools (to Year 6 students). Given this growing interest on the part of schools, and the above-mentioned research on children’s attitudes, there is certainly scope and argument for the RPC program to be expanded to include primary schools. As for program length, RPC runs workshops of varying lengths, from one-off (usually 90-minute) sessions, to ten-week programs with one or more sessions a week. While longer workshops are encouraged, negotiations with schools often centre around the time available within what is considered a crowded curriculum, the value attached to the program by decision-makers within the school, and the perceived ‘need’ for it to be run (considered higher, for instance, when many students in a year group seem to be exhibiting problem behaviours). Again, the ability of the RPC program to achieve good practice by running longer programs over successive years would be facilitated by a ‘whole-school approach’ (examined below).

‘How’

Most evaluations and reviews of violence-prevention and sexuality/relationships education advocate an approach which, firstly, involves teachers, parents and student welfare coordinators; secondly, has clearly-articulated educational principles; thirdly, is integrated into a comprehensive curriculum context; fourthly, is reinforced in extra-

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76 This research is summarised in the National Framework for Sexual Assault Prevention: Urbis Keys Young (2004), Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
78 Ibid.
curricula activities through partnerships with organisations and clubs\textsuperscript{80} and; finally, is strategically planned to take into account local needs and issues\textsuperscript{81}. This is commonly called a ‘whole-school approach’, and has been introduced in various states for other educational initiatives aimed at addressing social issues, such as anti-bullying or mental health programs\textsuperscript{82}.

In order to operate successfully, a whole-school approach requires the involvement of a variety of stakeholders operating at different levels. This includes, for instance, those in the policy domain, those working on curriculum development, and decision-makers at the school level. It also involves a variety of relationships, such as those between staff and students, parents and students, parents and staff, the school and the community, and of course between students\textsuperscript{83}. Dyson et al point out the level of commitment this entails: ‘[A whole-school approach] calls for policy and guidelines to be developed, implemented and reviewed; consultation and working in partnership with parents, elders and the school community; accessing community resources and involving students’. They stress the importance of policy and guidelines being reflected in practice, meaning, for example, that programs must not only be run, but ‘integrated within a formal student welfare support structure so that linking students to community agencies complements education programs’\textsuperscript{84}. Dyson et al cite the ‘Health Promoting Schools’ framework, developed by the World Health Organisation and widely adopted at the policy level among governments in Australia, as an example of a well-developed whole-school approach.

Given the concerns raised by one student welfare coordinator during this evaluation that homophobic attitudes were not challenged, and were possibly reinforced, by ‘special programs’ which appear to ‘float’ separately to the rest of school policy and curriculum, adopting a whole-school approach may be the only truly effective way that prevention programs can engage with this issue at certain schools. Researchers studying how to most effectively address homophobia in schools all point to the need for a school-wide commitment to change ‘actions, statements and thoughts which contribute to victim blaming, offender defending and silencing’\textsuperscript{85}. The importance of seeking students’ opinions and supporting student initiatives has also been stressed, in order for homophobia and heterosexism to be challenged in ways that are meaningful to young people\textsuperscript{86}.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{81} Muroney, J (2003) \textit{op cit.}
\item \textsuperscript{83} Dyson et al (2006) \textit{op cit.}, citing Magill, R. (2000). \textit{Good Practice in Schools}: The Way Forward; Children, young People and Domestic Violence National Forum, Barton ACT, Department of Education and Community Services, ACT.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Dyson et al (2006) \textit{op cit.} \textit{op cit.} 16-17.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid: 20, citing Hinson, S. (1996). \textit{A Practice Focused Approach to Addressing Heterosexist Violence in Australian Schools. Schooling and Sexualities: Teaching for a positive sexuality}. Laskey L. and Beavis, C., Deakin University.
\end{itemize}
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Dyson et al note that the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) has argued that a whole-school approach is necessary to deal with violence against young women in schools and has developed kits for students and parents. A comprehensive framework of what a whole-school approach on gender-based violence could entail was developed by Ollis and Tomaszewski87 following an extensive research review. They advocated that ‘that schools need to develop management practices and organisational structures to promote a culture where any form of violence against women is unacceptable’,88 and outlined strategies through which this could be achieved. There is therefore a growing recognition that a whole-school approach may be the only effective way of changing the damaging behaviours and attitudes associated with violence against women, along with a growing body of material supporting policy makers and schools willing to implement such an initiative.

The RPC program presently involves key teachers and student welfare coordinators at the schools where the program is run, and there exist some reporting procedures designed to enable teachers to prepare students for, or follow up on, the RPC workshops in their own curriculum-based classes. The program also has clearly-articulated educational principles, takes into account local needs (it is designed for specifically for schools in the Southern and Eastern Metropolitan regions of Victoria) and involves other community groups through the invitation of guest speakers. Though the program therefore contains some elements of a whole-school approach, it is missing the essential conditions of curriculum integration and reinforcement of messages throughout the wider school culture. The complete implementation of a whole-school approach in this area would require a much-heightened level of commitment, not least from schools themselves, but also from policy makers at the local and state level. Though the RPC program cannot, therefore, meet good practice in the absence of such commitment, SECASA and WHISE could advocate for such an initiative, create links and partnerships with relevant stakeholders such as parents groups or sporting clubs, and aim to position the RPC program to take a leading role in the development and implementation of a whole-school approach as wider commitment grows.

Summary

The preceding review provides much to indicate that the Respect, Protect, Connect program meets most of the ‘good practice criteria’ identified in the literature for schools-based programs aiming at violence-prevention and/or sexuality and relationships education. The strengths and weaknesses of the RPC relative to such independently-established criteria are summarised below.

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With regards to the ‘who’ of students and staff, RPC runs single-sex groups and aims to keep students in familiar year groupings, as widely recommended in the literature. Interviews with RPC educators and teachers suggested that the ‘undisrupted’ environment recommended in several studies might be better achieved if expectations of supervising teachers are negotiated with schools prior to workshops. Much importance is attached in the literature to the quality of educators for schools-based prevention programs, and RPC goes a long way towards meeting best practice in this regard. RPC educators are trained in gender, violence and sexual health issues, as well as classroom management, active listening and a variety of other skills essential to creating a dynamic, trusting and interactive workshop environment. Students, teachers and student welfare coordinators interviewed for this evaluation gave positive feedback on the quality of RPC educators, though two teachers thought that further training to build new educators’ confidence would be useful. The RPC program has also struck an effective balance in adopting, as recommended, peer education principles. RPC educators are closer in age to students than most teachers, but are trained in order to have the knowledge and skills to support students in ways that true ‘peers’ might not be able to.

In terms of content and materials (‘what’ is being taught), the RPC program is clearly at the forefront of good practice. It is based on a pro-feminist philosophy which allows for a structural examination of gender and power, as widely recommended by available research. The program’s long-term focus on skills-building and values clarification rather than simple information provision is another great strength. The young men’s program aims to build skills associated with conflict resolution and healthy sexual and personal relationships in non-blaming and non-shaming way. The young women’s program avoids placing responsibility on young women to ‘prevent’ or ‘manage’ men’s violence and instead adopts a good practice, rights-based approach which enables young women to accurately identify violence and includes the development of assertiveness and support-seeking skills. Finally, care has been taken to ensure that inclusiveness of diversity is ‘built-in’ to the program design, which includes examinations of the links between racism, homophobia and violence, as well as of issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, gay and lesbian young people, and children of Vietnam veterans. The invitation of speakers from various organisations who work with and for such diverse groups is another way in which the program meets good practice, not just by ensuring inclusiveness, but also in encouraging community input and involvement. Two areas of concern regarding content are, firstly, that the effectiveness of the program for non-English speaking background students may be improved by longer workshops with specially-adapted materials. Secondly, while the program follows good practice in openly challenging homophobic attitudes and making visible same-sex relationships, there is a danger that, if not reinforced elsewhere in the school environment, such messages may be dismissed by students or reacted to negatively. A ‘whole-school’ approach would be the most (and perhaps only) effective solution to this problem.

In terms of the ‘when’ of good practice for schools-based violence-prevention and healthy relationships programs, it is generally recommended that programs begin early, and comprise multiple sessions run over successive years. The RPC program is currently
tailored for students as young as Year 7, but could conceivably be expanded and adapted to include primary school students. As for program length, RPC runs workshops of varying lengths, from one-off sessions to ten-week programs. While program coordinators are attentive to good practice in encouraging schools run longer workshops over successive years, the decision-making power lies with schools. Again, the ability of the RPC program to achieve good practice in this regard would be facilitated by a ‘whole-school approach’.

Regarding the ‘how’ of program approach and coordination, the literature is unanimous in recommending a ‘whole-school approach’ as best practice in this field. This means programs should have a clear rationale, be integrated into the curriculum, reinforced in extra-curricula activities, take into account local needs, and involve teachers, parents and student welfare coordinators. The RPC program meets good practice to the extent that it has clearly-articulated educational principles, takes into account local needs and involves community groups (through the invitation of guest speakers) and also key teachers and student welfare coordinators at the schools where it is run. The program therefore contains some elements of a whole-school approach, however what is missing is the essential conditions of curriculum integration and reinforcement of messages throughout the wider school culture. The creation of such conditions would require a much-heightened level of commitment from schools, curriculum developers and policy makers, for which SECASA and WHISE could advocate. The RPC program is nevertheless well-positioned to take a leading role in the development of a whole-school approach (as wider commitment grows), given its sound good practice in all other areas.
Learning from other evaluations

Given the paucity of research on the impact of Australian schools-based prevention programs of this nature, the timing of the present evaluation has been fortunate to follow the recent release of the report of a three-year evaluation of the Share program\(^9^9\). Though significantly larger in scope than the present evaluation and of a project covering somewhat different content in its interventions than RPC, the report is extremely useful, in that it is one of the first to look at the impact of a schools-based prevention program on Australian students in this age group.

The evaluators, Sue Dyson and Christopher Fox, found small increases in knowledge and understanding about sex and sexual health following the Share intervention, and students expressed slightly more confidence that they could say no to unwanted sex\(^9^0\). There was, however, ‘no change in the small number of students who were “risk-takers”, having casual sex, often under the influence of drugs and alcohol’\(^9^1\). Another key finding was that many of the responses to such questions as ‘what does sex mean to you?’ were strongly gendered ‘and this improved only marginally after the program’\(^9^2\). The researchers concluded that there remains ongoing evidence of the need to teach about ‘gender and power, constructions of masculinity and femininity and […] gender-biased myths’\(^9^3\) in the areas of sexual health and sexuality.

The Share program involved a much greater number of contact hours than even the maximum-length RPC workshop series (fifteen ‘lesson modules’ per year over years eight, nine and ten). It was also integrated into the curriculum (as a collaborative project with the Department of Education) and involved teachers, school counsellors and parents in fifteen ‘pilot’ schools. The Share evaluation results are therefore of particular significance, because if such a comparatively large-scale project has produced only minor observable results, then we should be wary of excessively high expectations on these indicators for the present evaluation.

Dyson and Fox note, however, that ‘[i]ndicators of change in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour are notoriously difficult to measure in the complex, social domain represented by sexuality’\(^9^4\). One such difficulty is that some of the information taught in the program may not yet have had direct relevance to many of the students (such as those who were not sexually active), and is therefore unlikely to be retained in the immediate sense. However, knowledge measures alone do not indicate the extent to which skills have been learned that will be of use to these students in the future. The evaluators point out that the

\(^9^0\) Ibid, 5.
\(^9^1\) Ibid.
\(^9^2\) Ibid, 6.
\(^9^3\) Ibid, 60.
\(^9^4\) Ibid, 5.
ability to ‘know where and how to access the information when it is needed, as well as critical thinking and decision-making skills […] are vital components of any sexual health and relationships program’95.

Goulay’s 1995 review of sex education programs also dealt with this methodological issue, arguing that limiting evaluations to so-called ‘measurable’ outcomes is not a useful way of assessing young people’s perceptions of a program. He notes the diverse range of positive effects young people refer to when interviewed, such as increased self-esteem, body awareness, confidence and understanding, which are ‘missed’ in behavioural and attitudinal assessments alone96.

In conclusion, the relatively small gains observed in the Share evaluation cannot be discounted. Given the limitations of even the most sophisticated indicators, the ‘value’ of a program cannot be judged by such measures alone, and the evaluators note the importance of the qualitative data in ‘filling out’ the picture. Overall, the evaluation showed that, while the long-term benefits of such a program could not be assessed by time-limited evaluations, there were nevertheless ‘strong indicators […] for the need to continue with education in those areas such as safe and respectful sexual behaviour, gender and power and accepting diversity’97.

95 Ibid, 35.
97 Ibid, 6.
Findings and Discussion

A mixed-methods approach was used for this evaluation, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This resulted in a variety of findings necessitating different methods of analysis and presentation. This section outlines and discusses those findings, first from the students, and then from the peer educators working on the program.

For the students, the research culminated in two quite different sets of information. Qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews which aimed to ascertain students’ perceptions of the program, and their own feelings on how it had affected them. The interviews covered such topics as what the students remembered most about the program, what they enjoyed most and least, if and how they thought it had changed them, etc. In addition to this, a variety of quantitative data was obtained through questionnaires administered both before and after the program (to one ‘control’ and two ‘treatment’ schools). The questionnaires used specific indicators to measure the impact that the delivery of the program made on individual students, specifically on changes in attitudes and skills related to the program’s identified objectives.

The qualitative results from the interviews were overwhelmingly positive. Of the twenty students who participated, all thought the program had been beneficial in some way, and most felt it had changed them ‘for the better’ (on self-identified criteria). The questionnaires also returned positive indications that the RPC program was achieving its objectives with regards to attitudinal change, particularly for the young men, in decreasing favourable attitudes towards violence and gender-stereotyping. Results for young women, and for both sexes on the skills measures, were more limited, with only some questions showing evidence of change. Such results should be interpreted carefully, however, as many of the skills which the RPC program is seeking to develop may not yet be of use to students, but will become more useful as they get older and are faced with different situations. As one young man said in the interviews when asked if he thought the program had changed him: ‘give it more time […] it’s only been a week’.

It should also be remembered that the quantitative measures used in the questionnaires refer to highly defined situations, where a limited set of alternatives has been offered, related to a single point in time. Given the RPC program is working in the complex domain of human relationships, sexuality, gender role construction and power, these are ‘blunt instruments’ indeed. The quote from the young man above shows the strength of the interview data and how it can be used to inform the results from questionnaires. The qualitative and quantitative findings of this evaluation should therefore be considered as a whole rather than separately. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity the data sets are presented consecutively here, the quantitative data followed by the qualitative data, first for the young men, then for the young women.
Following the presentation and discussion of the data obtained for students are the results of a focus group interview with the peer educators. This interview was targeted at peer educators’ professional experience working on the program, in response to the RPC program objective of helping peer educators gain leadership opportunities and develop their skills for future employment. It was also considered that professional issues for the peer educators would in many ways overlap with issues affecting the impact the program had on students, such as classroom practicalities, communication with teachers and time available for program development. Such issues were explored in a constructive way in the focus group, with several suggestions being offered for improvement. This was in addition to peer educators expressing their overall positive experience of working on the program, above all the experience and professional satisfaction they gained.

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Young Men

The questionnaires completed by the young men included modified versions of existing attitudes and skills measures from the social and community psychology disciplines. Two main attitudes measures were created from the modifications. The first was called the ‘Favourable Beliefs Supporting the Use of Violence’ scale (‘violence scale’ for short), which was a composite of the existing ‘Beliefs about Aggression and Alternatives’ and the ‘Acceptance of Couple Violence’ scales, adapted in consultation with program coordinators. The second attitudinal measure was adapted from the existing ‘Gender Stereotyping’ scale, with the same name being retained. One skills development measure was created from the existing ‘Conflict Resolution Style’ measure. Questions for this measure offered a number of responses to particular situations (where students could choose as many responses as they wanted). The full questionnaire is appended to this report.

Questions for the two attitudinal measures were presented mixed together in the questionnaires, and students responded on a 4-point Likert scale (‘agree a lot’, ‘agree a little’, ‘disagree a little’ and ‘disagree a lot’). In accordance with the accepted method of analysis for the three original measures, responses were coded on a scale of one (‘agree a lot’) to four (‘disagree a lot’). Certain questions were then reverse coded so that a higher number always indicated more favourable beliefs supporting the use of violence or a greater degree of gender stereotyping. For each school, the coded results from all the students were totalled per question and the resulting scores adjusted for the number of students to produce a score out of a hundred. Totals for the pre-tests could then be compared to totals for the post-tests between schools. For the conflict resolution skills measure, responses in the pre- and post-tests were compared for each question and analysed for evidence of more constructive and fewer physically or verbally aggressive responses to conflict being chosen.

For both attitudinal measures (the violence scale and the gender stereotyping scale), the results were positive. The two schools who received the program, A and B, showed a decrease in favourable beliefs supporting the use of violence and in gender stereotyping.

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100 Foshee, V., Fothergill, K. & Stuart J. (1992) Results for the Teenage Dating Abuse Study Conducted in Githens Middle School and Southern High Schools: Technical Report, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, U.S.A.


103 Reverse-coded questions were 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 24.
in the post-test, whereas the control school C showed no decrease (and in fact showed an increase on both scales). The conflict resolution skills development measure showed more limited results, with most questions providing inconclusive data and others indicating only slight positive development.

**Attitudes – Favourable Beliefs Supporting the Use of Violence Scale**

The questions comprising the violence scale were the following:

2. If someone is angry, they can't help it if they get aggressive.
3. If someone insults you, it’s okay to smash them.
4. It’s okay to hit someone who hits you first.
6. If I’m mad at someone, I just ignore them.
7. Sometimes a person doesn’t have any choice but to fight.
8. When my friends fight, I try to get them to stop.
9. If I back down from a fight, everyone will think I’m a coward.
10. There are better ways to solve problems than fighting.
11. I feel big and tough when I push someone around.
12. When people get really angry, they can’t help being violent.
24. Sometimes violence is the only way to express your feelings.
25. Violence is never the victim’s fault.

Graphs 1, 2 and 3 below show the resulting scores per question on the violence scale, first for School A, which received eight weeks of the RPC program, and then for School B, which received two weeks and finally for School C, which didn’t receive the program. The questionnaires for School A had four fewer questions on this scale than Schools B and C, with questions 11, 12, 24 and 25 not included. This was because there was less time available to administer the questionnaire at this school, so some questions had to be deleted. However the questions are numbered here to correspond across schools (ie – question 2 for School A is the same as question 2 for Schools B and C).
For School A, favourable beliefs supporting the use of violence decreased on every question, and most markedly for questions 2, 3, 4 and 9.

Graph 1 – School A (8-wk program) scores showing changes on the Favourable Beliefs Supporting the Use of Violence scale from pre-test to post-test – Young Men
For School B, favourable beliefs supporting the use of violence decreased on nine out of the twelve questions, and showed only very slight increases on the other three (questions 6, 8 and 11). The results were not as pronounced as for School A, perhaps reflecting the shorter duration of the program.

Graph 2 – School B (2-wk program) scores showing changes on the Favourable Beliefs Supporting the Use of Violence scale from pre-test to post-test – Young Men
The ‘control’ school C, on the other hand, actually showed an increase in favourable beliefs supporting the use of violence when the questionnaire was administered a second time (8 weeks following the first). This was the case for all questions except the last (question 25), where the scores were the same for the pre- and post-tests.

Graph 3 – School C (no program) scores showing changes on the Favourable Beliefs Supporting the Use of Violence scale from pre-test to post-test – Young Men

School C - Violence Scale
Attitudes – Gender Stereotyping

The second attitudinal measure was adapted from the existing ‘Gender Stereotyping’ scale. Results were coded and calculated in a similar way to the violence scale, with a higher score indicating a higher degree of gender stereotyping.

The questions comprising the gender stereotyping scale were:

1. It's important for a man to be strong and tough.
5. A man should always refuse to get into a fight, even if there seems to be no way to avoid it.
13. Nobody respects a man who frequently talks about his worries, fears and problems.
15. It's okay for two guys to hug each other.
16. It's okay to be gay.
17. Getting lots of sex makes you more of a man.
18. When guys yell out sexual comments to women, the women usually like it.
19. If a girl wears a short skirt or low-cut top, it means she wants to have sex.
20. It's okay to have sex with someone if they are drunk or on drugs.
21. Girls shouldn’t sleep around with a lot of guys.
22. It is all right for a girl to ask a boy out on a date.
23. Girls should have the same freedom as boys.

The results are presented in Graphs 4, 5 and 6, and showed similarly positive indications on the efficacy of the program. Again, because of the reduced time available for administering the questionnaire, School A had three fewer questions on this scale than the other two schools (questions 21, 22 and 23 being eliminated).

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For School A, gender-stereotyping attitudes decreased on the post-test for eight out of the ten questions, most significantly for questions 1, 14, 15 and 16. Scores stayed the same for one question (5) and increased slightly for another (question 13).

Graph 4 – School A (8-wk program) scores showing changes on the Gender Stereotyping from pre-test to post-test – Young Men
For School B, the results were similarly positive, with gender stereotyping attitudes decreasing on twelve of the thirteen questions (increasing for question 21). Similarly to the violence scale, the results for School B were not as significant as for School A, which received a longer version of the RPC program.

Graph 5 – School B (2-wk program) scores showing changes on the Gender Stereotyping Scale from pre-test to post-test – Young Men
Finally, for School C, gender stereotyping attitudes appear to have increased over the eight week period between the first and second questionnaires. Scores increased on over half of the questions, stayed the same for one question (21) and decreased for the remaining five (questions 14, 15, 18, 20 and 22).

Graph 6 – School C (no program) scores showing changes on the Gender Stereotyping from pre-test to post-test – Young Men

Though results for a limited sample such as this should always be interpreted conservatively, there is strong evidence here to indicate that the RPC program is successful in achieving its objectives of reducing attitudes which condone violence and gender discrimination.
Skills – Conflict Resolution Measure

An existing ‘Conflict Resolution Style’ measure was used to assess skills development, and modified to better suit the age group and remove US-style language (questions one to three). Three further questions were created in consultation with the program coordinator to better encompass the objectives of the course. These included one question (question five) designed to measure conflict resolutions skills in conjunction with a gender stereotyping issue (of possessiveness regarding a girlfriend), and another question (question six) related to resolving conflict following insults made to family members (identified by the program coordinator as a common form of verbal bullying). A final question was added which was unrelated to conflict resolution, but which fitted one of the program’s teaching areas: this question aimed to measure skills in supporting a friend who comes out as gay (question four). Because of time limitations, the questionnaire for School A included only questions one, three and five.

Questions for this measure offered a number of responses to particular situations (where students could choose as many responses as they wanted). The questions were the following:

1. Imagine that you’re in line for a drink of water. Someone your age comes along and pushes you out of line.  
   What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)  
a. □ Say something nasty to him.  
b. □ Ask him why he pushed you.  
c. □ Nothing, just walk away.  
d. □ Tell him it’s your place in line.  
e. □ Push him out of line.  

2. You’re walking to the shops. Someone your age walks up to you and calls you a name.  
   What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)  
a. □ Call him a name.  
b. □ Ask him what’s going on.  
c. □ Walk away from him.  
d. □ Tell him to cut it out.  
e. □ Hit him.  

3. You see your friend fighting with another guy his age.  
   What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)  
a. □ Cheer for your friend to win.  
b. □ Find out why your friend and the other kid are fighting.  
c. □ Go away and let your friend and the other kid fight it out.

d.  ☐ Try to get both of them to calm down and stop fighting.
e.  ☐ Join your friend fighting against the other kid.

4. A friend tells you that he thinks he’s gay.
   What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)
a.  ☐ Avoid him from then on – you don’t want to be associated with him.
b.  ☐ Tell him that’s fine – it doesn’t change your friendship.
c.  ☐ Feel sorry for him, and try and talk him out of it.
d.  ☐ Tell him he’s disgusting and to stay away from you.

5. You’re at a party and you see another guy who’s talking to your girlfriend – you think he’s trying to pick her up.
   What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)
a.  ☐ Walk up and ask him why he’s messing with your girlfriend.
b.  ☐ Ignore it, it doesn’t matter.
c.  ☐ Walk up and push him away from your girlfriend.
d.  ☐ Go to join in the conversation.

6. Another student says something insulting about someone in your family.
   What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)
a.  ☐ Say something insulting about someone in his family.
b.  ☐ Ask him what’s going on.
c.  ☐ Walk away from him.
d.  ☐ Tell him to cut it out.
e.  ☐ Hit him.

Several questions showed no significant differences from the pre-tests to the post-tests. The low number of students participating in the evaluation from School A made it particularly difficult to discern any significant results for that school. Most questions received fewer than five responses for each answer (a, b, c, d or e), meaning differences between the pre-test and post-test were often increases or decreases of only one or two responses. For example, for question (1), asking students what they would do if someone pushed them out of a line, three students chose answer (a), ‘say something nasty to him’, in the pre-test, and only two chose it in the post-test. We can accurately say that this is a decrease of one third in a verbally-aggressive response to that conflict situation, but it is hardly significant given the small numbers involved. Unfortunately this has meant that the data for the Conflict Resolution Skills scale for School A is largely unusable.
School B had more students participating than School A, but not enough to allow us to nominate changes as significant with any degree of confidence. Three questions included differences in response from pre-test to post-test large enough to warrant discussion. The first was question two, the results of which are presented below.

Graph 7 – School B (2-wk program) Question (2) Conflict Resolution Skills measure, difference pre-test to post-test – Young Men

As can be seen from Graph 7, when asked what they would do in response to someone calling them a name, the assertive but non-aggressive response of ‘ask him what’s going on’ had seven more students choose it in the post-test to the pre-test. In contrast, two fewer students chose the verbally-aggressive response (‘call him a name’) in the post-test, and the less aggressive response ‘tell him to cut it out’, and relatively ‘neutral’ response of ‘walk away’ also had slightly fewer students choosing them. However, the physically aggressive response ‘hit him’ had two more students choosing it at the post-test.
The second question of interest was question four (graph 8). When asked how they would react to a friend telling them he thought he was gay, more supportive responses were apparent in the post-test. Three more students chose the supportive response of telling the friend it was fine and didn’t change their friendship, and fewer chose the unsupportive (and homophobic) responses of trying to talk him out of it or telling him he’s ‘disgusting’. However, an equal (though small) number chose to avoid the friend both before and after the program.

Graph 8 – School B (2-wk program) Question (4) Conflict Resolution Skills measure, difference pre-test to post-test – Young Men

A friend tells you that he thinks he’s gay. Do you

- a. Avoid him from then on - you don’t want to be associated with him
- b. Tell him that’s fine - it doesn’t change your friendship
- c. Feel sorry for him, and try and talk him out of it
- d. Tell him he’s disgusting and to stay away from you

Number of responses
Finally, for question six, where students were asked how they would respond to verbal bullying involving insults to members of their family, four fewer students chose to respond with verbal insults in the post-test, and six more students chose the non-aggressive but assertive response of ‘ask him what’s going on’. However there were no changes for the ‘neutral’ response of ‘walk away’ or the physically aggressive response of ‘hit him’.

Graph 9 – School B (2-wk program) Question (6) Conflict Resolution Skills measure, difference pre-test to post-test – Young Men

School B - Another student says something insulting about someone in your family.
What would you do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. Say something insulting about someone in his family</td>
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<td>b. Ask him what’s going on</td>
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<td>c. Walk away from him</td>
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<td>d. Tell him to cut it out</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Hit him</td>
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While the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires showed positive improvement following the program on the ‘Favourable Beliefs Supporting the Use of Violence’ and ‘Gender Stereotyping’ scales, the data for the Conflict Resolution Skills measure was statistically inconclusive. This may be due to the small numbers of students involved and relatively large numbers of possible responses (meaning results are ‘dissipated’), or may simply indicate that the skills which the program is seeking to develop may not be apparent immediately following the program, and will instead require time for ‘processing’ by the students. The interview data is helpful in this respect, in enabling us to hear in the students’ own words how they felt the program had affected them, and should therefore be examined in conjunction with the quantitative data above.
Interviews

Ten of the young male students who participated in the program were interviewed a week after the final class on issues such as what they remembered most about the program, if and how they thought it had changed them, and what they enjoyed most and least about the workshops. Five were from School A, and had done eight sessions of the program, and five were from School B and had done two. The interviews took about half an hour each, and were semi-structured, with interviewers working from guiding questions on specific topics, but free to ask follow-up or clarification questions at their discretion. The interview schedule is attached to this report.

The response to the program from the young men was overwhelmingly positive. All thought the program had been beneficial in some way, and most nominated positive changes in their knowledge and skills levels as a result of the workshops. Different attributes of the program were identified in positive terms by different students. The significance of the content covered, and how it expanded on their usual curriculum, was often mentioned:

You got to know about other stuff that you wouldn’t be learning in normal class.

The whole time, it felt good to learn about these things.

It taught us heaps and it wasn’t boring and they made it fun for us as well.

When asked to specify what sort of things they remembered most, students nominated content which accurately reflected the program’s objectives, for example, to reduce violence and improve conflict resolution skills. Students said they learned:

… how to avoid getting into fights, that violence is not always the answer. Because I’ve been in a couple of fights and it’s pretty hard to get out of so I want to try to learn how to get out it really easily.

… that there’s ways of avoiding fights, instead of getting into a fight you can work it out, talk about it or just walk away. I used to get in fights all the time.

… that there’s two sides of stories, in the future how you come to an agreement […] how to work things out, how to go in life, work it out, what would you if you were in this situation…

One student nominated support skills, and understanding of others as important:

[It helped] us understand about victims and how people get violent, how to prevent fights happening and help your friends out, don’t egg them on to get into a fight, try to stop them, or stop getting into a fight yourself.

Others talked about issues of sexuality and consent as what they remembered most:

They got people agreeing on […] stuff that you shouldn’t do, like that certain things can be rape which we didn’t know about before hand.
Talking about sex, the right age, why you shouldn’t take advantage of a woman if she’s wearing a short skirt.

[Attitudes] towards girls, the way they dress, if they dress with short skirts it doesn’t mean they want sex.

[I liked] that we got to learn about the sex because I wasn’t really sure about it, I didn’t really know. We talked a lot about harassment towards girls.

Some talked about what they’d learned regarding drug and alcohol abuse, one drawing links with sexual assault:

The drugs – it shouldn’t happen – and sexual abuse. Because in the past, I’ve been through it and I wanted to get through and not to muck out on other people. I’ve got friends that need help and I try to support them and the program gave me some ideas.

Others remembered the program as more generally useful to their future:

How to live a healthy life, aim for a good job instead of having a bad future doing stuff that you shouldn’t do.

Getting to know more about manhood.

When asked to describe what they liked most about the program, several students nominated the inclusive learning environment created:

[I liked] that we were all involved, no one was left out because that way if anyone learned something, they were actually learning instead of some people learning it and some people not participating.

I felt comfortable, that I could talk to the group and not be ashamed of it. [The peer educator] helped us out if we had issues and if we felt uncomfortable he changed it round to make it comfortable for us to speak.

I felt I was part of the group, we talked as a group, no one was left out.

I felt strong and part of the group.

The relaxed and social atmosphere was also mentioned:

Just being social, talking with everyone in a big group because you could get everyone’s point of view on subjects.

[It felt] more relaxed and instead of just being in there with the teacher, we were there with a few mates around.

Some students nominated the opportunity for self-expression which the workshops afforded them as one of the highlights:
I felt relieved because it’s always bundled up inside me and I want to talk about it and I never talk about it or know who to talk to.

I felt like I was being a bit more honest, showing people how I react to stuff.

The approach of obtaining group agreement was something several students found valuable:

[I liked it] when we agreed on different vocabularies: which was right and which was wrong and showing that gays aren’t so bad.

[INTERVIEWER: Do you think it was good because you were able to come to an agreement as a group, so everybody got to participate in coming to that agreement?]

Yes.

Not all activities required group agreement, and some of those nominated as favourites by several students were liked particularly because they were free to give their own opinions without being judged:

I [liked] that agree/disagree type of thing. Because I was able to be open and say what I wanted to say and not be judged. Usually I have to be really careful about what I say otherwise people might judge me really badly and I won’t have as many friends.

[INTERVIEWER: So do you think in that activity people were less judgemental?]

Yes.

We had this thing, how he asked us questions and you have to go whether you like it, dislike it or your opinions… Everyone got out their feelings and didn’t have to be following the crowd so I thought that was good.

Role plays were frequently nominated as a favourite activity, with several students mentioning how it helped them learn:

Reading out the plays, acting out the plays. It was fun being different people [and] I learnt how to treat people.

He made us do plays…like in real situations and we had to find our way out of and see how we did. [I liked it] because I learnt a lot.

The role plays, because we did acting (out) the situations and learned more about it.

The acting. [The peer educator] would reflect on what you would do in that situation [and] point out the highlights, which was positive, which was negative, so you got to know what to do in an actual situation like that.

But one student nominated the role plays as his ‘least favourite activity’:

[Least favourite activity] I think it was the role play one. Because not many people were involved in it, more people were just…there were only 4 or 5 people that got actually involved in it and I don’t think some other people got the point of it. Because while we were doing the role play things, some people were talking.
This last point reflects the issue of classroom organisation and discipline, which several students raised. When asked what they disliked about the program, most students answered ‘nothing’ in the first instance, but when asked what they would change, many nominated the distractions of larger classes as a negative experience. At School A, the young men were originally in a single group, but were put into smaller groups in the third week after it became clear that there were classroom discipline problems. This was reflected in the comments from the students at that school:

When it first started off, it was just a big group and you never really got round to talking much because there was always the show-offs there. Not many people really got their say because people talked too much and questions never really made it to you. It just made me feel left out, made me think I don’t exactly want to be here right now because I’m not really participating much.

We started off in a big group, all the boys put together. […] You’ve got too many people talking and yelling. Divided into smaller groups was better because otherwise you get too many people talking at the same time.

But some students liked the activities that were only possible in a larger group, leading one to suggest:

Maybe if there was a group of about six because first there was a group of about 12 and then we changed into groups of about 3 or 4.

Some students wanted the peer educators to be stricter in maintaining classroom discipline:

There wasn’t any bad things but just people in there who were very loud. Some people didn’t listen because some of the boys got restless. The teacher, he wasn’t as strict with us, we could’ve got a stricter teacher, the teacher didn’t tell us off at all. He was like a friend to us.

People just kept butting in and saying a different story, trying to change the subjects. [Peer educators should] go around the circle, not just let anyone talk whenever they wanted to.

One student found the length of time between lessons a negative factor:

[There] was the big gap in time, it happened every week and usually I don’t remember stuff from last week, maybe every two days. [It’d be better to run workshops] two times a week…the length of it was good but maybe more sessions.

When asked if they could nominate something about the program that had affected them or made them think, there was a wide variety of responses. Some thought about in general terms:

How [the peer educator] said… [where] would you like to aim in life? He was opening up possibilities on how to go in life. Things like…jobs, relationships, working things out,
understanding, working out things if there is a problem or if you’ve got two opportunities, I think you’ve got a bad side or you can do a good side of it.

Now I’m thinking about getting my work done so aim for a better job, that’s what we also did – what you wanted to be in the future.

Others thought of specific statements or scenarios from the activities which had stayed with them, or perhaps shocked them:

What I found was really wrong…it was a survey thing, there was this guy, this step-dad who molested his step-daughter, that’s what I found really wrong.
[INTERVIEWER: Which activity was that, is that the one with the cards?]
Yes. I just reckon he should be loyal to his wife and you shouldn’t do stuff like that to a person that young and it’s just not right. Some people you don’t know really who they are, they might act really nice but deep down they might be somebody who does stuff like that.

I didn’t think guys were such perverts, I didn’t really think they say, ‘Show us your boobs,’ call out that sort of stuff [but they do].

For others it was specific ideas which had affected them:

I guess it was the violence type of thing, how to stop violence from happening also the victim is never the culprit – never responsible. Because I used to think usually the victim might have had it coming to them because they were provoking the person.

The right to have sex, some people say it’s alright to have sex but in my religion you have to be married first, so it’s just different. [And that it’s OK to] just have a girlfriend and sex could wait (if we’re) too young.

When asked if there was anything that they thought they’d now do differently because of the program, most talked about how they’d manage their anger and solve conflict without violence:

A couple of days a go, a friend pissed me off really badly, before I would’ve told him to stop and kind of jumped him but now I just tell him to stop calmly instead of getting defensive. […] sometimes in situations like that I get like… I think about the workshops and I stop.

There was one time this kid went and took my project and was trying to wreck it and I got really, really angry and left him on the ground cold and because I ‘accidentally’ tripped over [onto] him and my knee actually broke his ribs […] [Now] I would’ve just asked him not to touch it. I wouldn’t get as angry… I wouldn’t resort to violence.

For example: there could be a fight, I’ve got two options: either go home with a fight (or) say, ‘No, sorry,’ and act responsible and just walk away, and I choose to walk away.
[INTERVIEWER: You think in the past you might not have made that decision and you now you reckon you would?]
Yes.

A little bit of the program would change stuff in my life, actions. The verbal abuse, name calling, what you should do and shouldn’t do.
Other students talked about how it had increased their understanding of others, and how that would affect their actions:

I used to bully some people in primary school. It taught me that it’s not right and people feel bad and what it could do to their lives.

I’ll try not judge people so quickly, if someone’s a victim I’ll try not to put it on them or anything, I’ll try to be more open.

These people were picking on this little kid, and I went, ‘I should’ve helped him’ but I just walked away.  
[INTERVIEWER: Would you do anything differently now?]  
I’d try and stop the other kids from picking on the little kid, the thing is all my friends are [the people who were picking on the kid]. Back then I thought it was the little kid’s fault, he was really getting my friends really angry but I guess it wasn’t the victim’s fault.

[It made me think about] how to deal with situations, how to deal with other people if they’re different. [Like we discussed what would happen to you if you saw a gay couple on a train, what would you do? To know what to do if you did see someone (like that), how not to tease...

When asked if they’d noticed any more general changes in themselves or their behaviour, only one gave a flat ‘no’:

It [my behaviour] would be the same.

Others didn’t think they needed to change:

I knew most of the stuff beforehand.

The stuff that they were talking [about], I mainly agreed.

Nothing really, it was all pretty relaxed and I was fine through the whole thing and answering all the questions really easily. I’m pretty easy going, I got all the answers pretty much straight up. I don’t know even why they picked me for this because I’m going easy.

I already knew that stuff all along.

At other points in the interview, however, most talked about how they thought the program had affected the way they feel and act towards others:

Normally I’d be like very rough but lately I haven’t been as rough towards other people.

[I’m] probably more calmer, usually if someone [would say] ‘you dickhead’ I’d start picking up a fight with them.

During classes I’ve been better, sit down and do my work, just get it done and it’s gone, the work is finished straight away.

Before me and my friends used to muck around and doing that [harassment?] but now after hearing that stuff because we know how they feel, we talked about if we say it to them...because you know
how girls go to the toilets in packs, it’s because they’re scared of getting raped, we didn’t think about it until we went to the workshop and now we think about it.

One student didn’t expect to notice changes straight away, but thought they might come in the future:

Not yet, just give it more time.
[INTERVIEWER: What do you think might change for you?]
The way I judge people because if someone’s getting really angry I should try to not get really angry anymore, be more considerate. It’s just time, it’s only been a week.

Students gave similar responses when asked about any observed changes in others. Some said they hadn’t noticed any:

I haven’t seen any changes.

However, again the majority thought they had seen differences in their friends’ behaviour:

A few of [the others] changed because afterwards we’d be outside and then they’d say something like, ‘Are you deaf or something, can’t you remember what we’ve talking about in the program?’

[The program was] trying to get us to act better, be more responsible, kinder. It did because we didn’t do a lot of talking and at first everyone was, ‘So we’d walk up to the guy and punch him in the head (and) whistle to the chick,’ and now all their answers have changed to almost the opposite.

Some of the others learned to let others speak and not to start fights with every person that walks in.

People in the school grounds have changed and that’s since we did this program, it’s a good thing because I can get along with them without having fights with them and saying stuff. They’re less trying to make fights and more trying to make friends.

[Have any of your mates in school changed their opinions on stuff?]
Yes, talking about the way you should respect women and why not to get into a fight if someone’s chatting up your girlfriend.

They’re just like me, they don’t get very violent anymore…usually some of them just push people out of the way now they just try to dodge them, they’ve got more manners.

Some of my friends they’ve become, like, same as me, because we used to hang out and be rough but there’s a big difference now.

Finally, when asked how often they thought it’d be good to have the program run at their school, nearly all were keen to see it happen on a regular basis, though there was a range of opinion on frequency:

Two times a week.

One period per week.

Once every two weeks, a period every two weeks.
I’d like to keep going...every month, every two weeks.

Every year, once every year, with different topics [and] to refresh our memories.

One student opened up the possibility of today’s students becoming tomorrow’s peer educators:

I wouldn’t mind it if I was doing it next year because [it was] pretty good. I wouldn’t even mind if we got Year 12’s and got them to talk to us or Year 9’s and getting them to talk to Year 8’s and doing that each year because I think it’s pretty good because it’s like teaching kids.

[INTERVIEWER: Would you be in the program next or you’d teach it to Year 8s?]
I’d teach it.

[INTERVIEWER: Do you think that it would be good to do the program every year or every term…to actually participate in the program?]
I reckon about every year or every two years to see if your answers have changed, so you’d be able to see if you’ve matured or not.

Finally, one young man noted the program’s usefulness in a problem-solving capacity. He thought it should be run ‘Whenever the teacher sees something big going downhill’.
Young Women

Like the questionnaires completed by the young men, those for the young women included existing attitudes measures from the social and community psychology disciplines. A limited number of questions were drawn on from the ‘Acceptance of Couple Violence’\textsuperscript{106} and ‘Gender Stereotyping’\textsuperscript{107} scales, aiming to measure attitudinal change in line with the program’s objective of challenging socially-constructed attitudes that condone, or blame women for, violence and sexual assault. Given the selective limiting of the questions chosen from the first scale, the resulting measure was termed ‘Beliefs Condoning Violence against Women’ scale. As for the young men’s questionnaire, the questions were adapted to suit the context and measured on a 4-point Likert scale. A new skills measure was created to assess the assertiveness and help-seeking skills which the program aimed to develop. Questions for this measure offered a number of responses to particular situations (where students could choose as many responses as they wanted). A knowledge measure was also created to reflect the program’s objective of raising young women’s awareness about different types of violence, to enable them to more readily identify violence in their own or their friend’s relationships and seek support. It comprised a series of multiple-choice questions with a single correct answer. Again, the full questionnaire is appended to this report.

Questions for the two attitudinal measures (‘Beliefs Condoning Violence against Women’ and ‘Gender Stereotyping’) were presented mixed together in the questionnaires, and students responded either ‘agree a lot’, ‘agree a little’, ‘disagree a little’ or ‘disagree a lot’. In accordance with the accepted method of analysis for the two original measures, responses were coded on a scale of one (‘agree a lot’) to four (‘disagree a lot’). Some questions were then reverse coded so that a higher number always indicated more favourable beliefs condoning violence against women or a greater degree of gender stereotyping\textsuperscript{108}. For each school, the coded results from all the students were totalled per question and the resulting scores adjusted for the number of students to produce a score out of a hundred. Totals for the pre-tests could then be compared to totals for the post-tests between schools. For the assertiveness and help-seeking skills measure, responses in the pre- and post-tests were compared for each question and analysed for evidence of assertive and proactive support-seeking responses being chosen. For the knowledge measure, the numbers of correct responses were presented for the pre- and post-test and compared between schools.

\textsuperscript{106} Foshee, V., Fothergill, K. & Stuart J. (1992) \textit{Results for the Teenage Dating Abuse Study Conducted in Githens Middle School and Southern High Schools: Technical Report}, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, U.S.A.


\textsuperscript{108} Questions 2-8 were reverse-coded.
Attitudes – Beliefs Condoning Violence against Women scale

While results for the young men on the attitudinal measures were clearly positive, the young women’s results were mixed. For the ‘Beliefs Condoning Violence against Women’ scale, the results for School A (which received an eight-week version of the program) were positive, showing an overall decrease in such beliefs. However, unlike the results for the young men, this was not consistent across the questions (some showed an increase in such attitudes). School B (which received a two-week version of the program) actually showed a slight overall increase in beliefs condoning violence against women following the program, though again different questions produced both increases and decreases. The control School C showed a more significant overall increase in such beliefs than School B, and this across all questions.

The questions comprising the ‘Beliefs Condoning Violence against Women’ scale were the following:
2. It’s okay for a guy to grab or restrain his girlfriend.
3. It’s okay for a guy to try and convince his girlfriend to do other sexual things she doesn’t want to do.
4. It’s okay for a guy to physically force his girlfriend to do sexual things she doesn’t want to do.
5. A girl who makes her boyfriend jealous on purpose deserves to be hit.
6. Sometimes violence is the only way to express your feelings.
7. Some couples must use violence to solve their problems.
As can be seen from Graph 10 below, beliefs condoning violence against women decreased on four of the six questions, and most markedly for questions six. However, they increased for questions two and five.

Graph 1 – School A (8-wk program) scores showing changes on the Beliefs Condoning Violence against Women scale from pre-test to post-test – Young Women

School A - Violence Scale
For School B, favourable beliefs condoning violence against women decreased on only two out of the six questions (questions four and seven), and increased slightly on the other four (graph 11). These relatively disappointing results might reflect the shorter duration of the program compared to School A.

Graph 11 – School B (2-wk program) scores showing changes on the Beliefs Condoning Violence against Women scale from pre-test to post-test – Young Women
The ‘control’ School C showed a more significant increase in beliefs condoning violence against women when the questionnaire was administered a second time, both overall and on the majority of questions.

Graph 12 – School C (no program) scores showing changes on the Beliefs Condoning Violence against Women scale from pre-test to post-test – Young Women

There is therefore some positive indication that the longer-term version of the program was effective in reducing young women’s beliefs condoning violence against women. School A, which received the longer version of the program, showed an overall decrease in such beliefs, while the control school showed an increase. School B, which received a short version of the program, showed results predictably between the two, though with no overall decrease in such attitudes found.
Attitudes – Gender Stereotyping

The second attitudinal measure was adapted from the existing ‘Gender Stereotyping’ scale, but limited due to time constraints to two questions:

1. Its ok for a girl to ask a guy out on a date
8. Girls shouldn’t sleep around with a lot of guys

On reflection it becomes obvious that there is a possible ambiguity in the interpretation of the latter question. Some young women might interpret it as it was intended: to assess whether respondents felt it was incumbent upon girls to ‘control’ their sexuality (a belief linked to victim blaming attitudes with regard to sexual assault). Alternatively, some young women might have interpreted the question as being the opposite of ‘girls should sleep around with a lot of guys’, that is, their answers might have reflected a (positive) sense of young women’s right to say no to sex. For this reason, results for question eight should be interpreted with extreme caution, and are presented here in the interests of transparency, rather than to infer that such results tell us something about how the program affects gender stereotyping attitudes.

Results were coded and calculated in a similar way to the violence scale, with a higher score (for question one at least) indicating a higher degree of gender stereotyping. The results are presented in Graphs 13, 14 and 15.

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For School A, gender-stereotyping attitudes decreased on the post-test for question one, but the results stayed the same for question eight (perhaps due to the ambiguity mentioned above).

Graph 13 – School A (8-wk program) scores showing changes on Gender Stereotyping scale from pre-test to post-test – Young Women
The results for School B showed a very slight increase in gender stereotyping attitudes for question one, and a very slight decrease for question eight.

**Graph 14 – School B (2-wk program) scores showing changes on Gender Stereotyping from pre-test to post-test – Young Women**
Finally, for School C, gender stereotyping attitudes decreased on question one in the post-test, though to a lesser extent than School A. There was also a slight decrease on question eight.

Graph 15 – School C (no program) scores showing changes on Gender Stereotyping from pre-test to post-test – Young Women

The results from the gender stereotyping measure are mixed, and difficult to interpret. Only two questions were included in the first place, and one of these was later recognised as containing significant ambiguity. Therefore to speak of a ‘scale’ would be misleading – it seems reasonable to examine only the results from the non-ambiguous question and not infer anything as to what this might say about gender stereotyping attitudes among these groups in general.

The question asked young women whether they thought it was okay for a girl to ask a guy out on a date, and we can see from the relatively low scores at schools A and C that such an action was generally considered unproblematic among the young women at those schools. The fact that the score decreased significantly at School A following the program indicates that fewer young women thought girls shouldn’t ask guys out after the program than before. A decrease, though less significant, was also apparent at the control school, however, meaning we should hesitate to attribute such a change to the program.
Looking at School B, we see that, from the start, the score was much higher than the other two schools, and increased following the program. This might indicate more conservative attitudes towards gender roles (regarding who should ask who out) at this school, and on this measure the program has not been shown to be effective in countering such attitudes.
Skills – Assertiveness and Support-Seeking Measure

An ‘Assertiveness and Support-Seeking Skills’ measure was developed drawing on a similar format to that used for the young men’s ‘Conflict Resolution Skills’ measure. Questions one and five were the same as questions used in the young men’s measure, and the others were created in line with the objectives of the program, which included improving young women’s assertiveness skills, providing them with information on where to seek help should they become victims of violence, and how to support friends in such situations. Questions for this measure offered a number of responses to particular situations (where students could choose as many responses as they wanted). The questions were the following:

1. You’re in line at the canteen, and a guy your age comes along and pushes in front of you. Do you:
   a) Say something nasty to him.
   b) Ask him why he pushed in.
   c) Do nothing, just walk away.
   d) Tell him it’s your place in line.
   e) Push him out of line.

2. One of your friends starts acting differently from normal. She’s started getting argumentative and aggressive with you, she swears at the teachers and dresses more ‘provocatively’. Do you:
   a) Tell her to get a grip.
   b) Think ‘it’s not worth it’ and stop hanging around with her.
   c) Start criticising her behaviour with your other friends.
   d) Try and find out what’s going on - maybe something’s happened to make her act this way.

3. A friend tells you that her boyfriend keeps putting her down and making her feel bad about herself. You’ve met her boyfriend and he seems like a really nice guy to you. Do you:
   a) Think she might be making it up for attention.
   b) Give her information about where she might get help and support.
   c) Ignore it – it’s her problem to sort out, not yours.
   d) Talk to another friend about it to see what she thinks.

4. A group of guys yell out sexual comments and whistle at you when you walk by. Do you:
   a) Ignore them and stare straight ahead.
   b) Shout abuse at them.
c) Stop and ask them what the hell’s the matter with them.
d) Wink at them and blow them a kiss.

5. You’re in line at the canteen, and a girl your age comes along and pushes in front of you. Do you:
a) Say something nasty to her.
b) Ask her why she pushed in.
c) Nothing, just walk away.
d) Tell her it’s your place in line.
e) Push her out of line.

6. You are on a crowded train and you become aware that the man behind you is standing much closer than he needs to. Do you:
a) Get off at the next stop,
b) Move away.
c) Say loudly ‘Back off’.
d) Do nothing.

7. You are on a train and you notice that another young woman about your age is being hassled and touched up by a man in the carriage. Do you:
a) Shout out ‘Leave her alone’.
b) Ignore it and face the other way.
c) Go up to the girl and pretend she’s your friend.
d) Glare at him and give him dirty looks.
e) Get off at the next stop.

8. A friend tells you that her boyfriend gets jealous when she talks to other guys, shouts at her and holds onto her arm so she can’t get away. Do you:
a) Tell her that’s violence and offer her support.
b) Say ‘He must really love you’.
c) Do nothing – it’s her business.
d) Confront the boyfriend about it.

As for the young men, the limited number of students completing the questionnaires combined with the fact that responses were spread out over four or five options, meant that it was difficult to ascertain any significant changes on this measure, particularly for School A (where only seven young women were involved in the program). For School B, where there were 26 young women participating, the results for five of the eight questions seem worth discussing.
Question three (graph 16) related to young women’s skills in supporting a friend who discloses verbal abuse. Eight more young women said they would offer her information about help and support at the post-test compared to the pre-test. Three fewer said they would ignore the problem, however one more said she would think the friend might be making it up. Also interesting is the apparent increased awareness of issues of confidentiality, with seven fewer women nominating that they’d talk about their friend’s problem to someone else.

Graph 16 – School B (2-wk program) Assertiveness and Support-seeking Skills measure, question three, pre-test to post-test – Young Women

A friend tells you that her boyfriend keeps putting her down and making her feel bad about herself. You’ve met her boyfriend and he seems like a really nice guy. Do you

- Think she might be making it up for attention
- Give her information about where she might get help and support
- Ignore it - it’s her problem to sort out, not yours
- Talk to another friend about it to see what she thinks

Number of responses
Question six (graph 17) looked at responses to sexual harassment on a train, and results showed a number of young women choosing the assertive response of telling the harasser to ‘back off’ over simply moving away.

Graph 17 – School B (2-wk program) Assertiveness and Support-seeking Skills measure, question six, pre-test to post-test – Young Women

You are on a crowded train and you become aware that the man behind you is standing much closer than he needs to. Do you

- a. Get off at the next stop
- b. Move away
- c. Say loudly ‘Back off’
- d. Do nothing

Number of responses

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<th>Response</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
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<td>a. Get off</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Move away</td>
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<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Say loudly</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Do nothing</td>
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Question seven (graph 18) explored a similar situation, but this time involved supporting another young woman who was being harassed. Fewer young women chose to either ignore the situation or simply glare at the harasser, and more chose the supportive response of going up to the young woman and pretending they were friends.

Graph 18 – School B (2-wk program) Assertiveness and Support-seeking Skills measure, question seven, pre-test to post-test – Young Women
Finally, question eight (graph 19), asking young women what they would do if a friend disclosed psychological and physical abuse from a boyfriend, more young women were willing to identify the behaviour as violence and offer support, and fewer would conflate the behaviour with ‘real love’.

Graph 19 – School B (2-wk program) Assertiveness and Support-seeking Skills measure, question eight, pre-test to post-test – Young Women

For similar reasons as those given for the young men, the results for the skills measurements presented here are statistically inconclusive, though there are certainly some positive indications that the program has developed assertiveness and support-seeking skills for young women based on the above analysis.
Knowledge Measure

A knowledge measure was created to reflect the program’s objective of raising young women’s awareness about different types of violence, to enable them to more readily identify violence in their own or their friend’s relationships and to seek support. It comprised a series of multiple-choice questions with a single correct answer. The questions were as follows:

1. Women are most at risk of violence:
   a. on the street
   b. in the home
   c. anywhere in bad suburbs or cities

2. In most cases, violence is committed by:
   a. someone the victim knows
   b. strangers
   c. people with psychiatric illnesses

3. What percentage of people who commit violent crimes are men:
   a. 50%
   b. 82%
   c. 98%

4. What is violence:
   a. physical abuse, like hitting, kicking, slapping
   b. emotional abuse, like humiliation, trying to control or manipulate someone, spreading rumours about them
   c. sexual abuse, like rape, incest, sexual put downs and insults
   d. all of the above

5. Men who were abused when they were children:
   a. sometimes can’t help being violent because their parents taught them to be violent
   b. can control their aggressive behaviour
   c. will always be violent

6. Violence:
   a. is never the victim’s fault
   b. is sometimes the victim’s fault
   c. not sure

7. If a man has sex with a woman while she’s drunk or drugged, that’s ‘rape’:
   a. true
   b. false
   c. don’t know
8. Women in violent relationships:
   a. can leave easily
   b. should try and make it work
   c. can find it very difficult to leave

The numbers of correct responses were totalled and calculated as a score per school out of a hundred, so that pre- and post-test results could be compared between schools (graph 20).

**Graph 20 – Three school Knowledge measure, pre-test to post-test – Young Women**

As can be seen from the graph, the results were positive, with Schools A and B returning higher scores following the program than in the pre-test. The increase was greater for School B. We could speculate that the length of the program was not so much a factor for the information-driven objectives of the program as it was for those aiming to develop attitudes or skills. The control School C also showed an increase on this measure, but of a lesser degree than the other two schools.
To conclude, the quantitative data showed mixed results for the young women’s program, and cannot be interpreted as positively as that for the young men. However, there is some positive indication the program was effective in reducing young women’s beliefs condoning violence against women. The results from the gender stereotyping measure are difficult to interpret and conclusions cannot readily be drawn on what these results might say about the effect of the program on young women’s attitudes in this regard. There were, however, some positive indications that the program had developed young women’s assertiveness and support-seeking skills and their capacity to support friends who might be victims of violence. Finally, the results on the knowledge measure indicate a greater awareness of issues surrounding violence for those young women who participated in the program. The interview data which follows will enable us to expand this analysis, incorporating as it does the students’ own opinions on how they felt the program had affected them.
Interviews

Ten young women who participated in the program were interviewed a week after their final class. The interviews were semi-structured and took about half an hour each. Like the interviews with the young men, they covered topics such as what students remembered most about the program, if and how they thought it had changed them, and what they enjoyed most and least about the workshops. Five young women were from School A, and had done eight sessions of the program, and five were from School B and had done two. The interview schedule is attached to this report.

As for the young men, the young women’s response to the program was overwhelmingly positive. Again, all thought the program had been beneficial in some way, and most nominated positive changes in their knowledge and skills levels as a result of the workshops.

When students were asked to identify what they had learned, and what they thought the program was about, many nominated issues in line with the program’s objectives of raising awareness about violence, women’s right to live free from it, and where to seek help and support:

[We learned about] violence against women and how women have their own rights and how we can stand up for ourselves.

[It was about] women’s rights, violence against them, men abusing them and what they can and cannot do. Good and bad relationships, we had cards telling us for example, if this person was close to you, is it a bad situation or good situation…we have to see it from different points of view.

[It was to] teach girls […] that violence towards them is not okay.

We had a lot of information of where we could seek for help. Pamphlets on different sort of violence and where to go.

[The peer educator] gave us hotline numbers for if we’re in trouble. If a friend is in trouble, I could give it to them.

Others more readily remembered broader issues of healthy relationships:

Learning about relationships and how we deal with them. Because I didn’t really know much about it and I was pretty interested to learn about different scenarios and things.

… or issues of consent to sex:

When she [the peer educator] explained about sex […] this is making sense to me now. […] She asked the questions [and we would answer] not sure/yes/no, and for me I said no, I can’t do sex with my boyfriend now at this age. We made the decision.

… or how to deal with life transitions and decisions:
[We learned] about the sorts of things that happen in everyday life and how to either prevent them or try and understand them a bit more. Stuff about changes of life (i.e. going from a child to an adolescent to an adult), lifestyles, STIs, and choices that you make during life. I think it really hit the nail on the head.

[The best thing was] just thinking about stuff way before I do it, the outcomes. After each program I thought about everything that happened in that program and I think it improved my own school work just thinking about, if I make one choice what the outcomes are going to be about it, it makes me think about what I want to do more because I just used to do stuff.

In a way it inspired me to help because, when it comes to a job, I want to do something that will help people and I never thought of that before, I just wanted to do something that I wanted to do.

Several young women nominated learning assertiveness skills for dealing with bullying and sexual harassment as important:

[We learned that] bullying is wrong and you shouldn’t do it because it hurts other people’s feelings. […] You could go, ‘Excuse me, you’re hurting my feelings, please stop’, tell them what’s going on, it’s the same with like somebody’s standing next to somebody on the train and someone’s really cuddling up to you and you either move or you tell them how you feel or you make a comment like, ‘I didn’t know you were my boyfriend,’ some smart comment to try and get rid of them.

Others mentioned learning more about drugs and alcohol:

[How] to deal with stuff like you shouldn’t drink that much because that could kill you, alcohol and drugs are bad things but a little bit of alcohol is okay.

For one young woman, the program had helped her deal with a specific incident and its consequences:

I had really a bad incident, I got a bit drunk and […] I got to share my story with everyone. You used to hear about them bragging about alcohol but now it’s made them go ‘ooh’ [think about it]. But it’s mostly helped me because they told me what I could do to try to do to get back on track with my parents, and they were talking about trust issues, how to build trust back up. I sort of ran over a heap of people and that affected them a lot, so I got my trust back with them as well but still it’s a bit hard with my mum but I am getting there. […] It made me feel there was hope inside, with people that I was friends with at the time but who saw me [during the alcohol incident?] and didn’t want to be friends with me, and it got my hopes up thinking, yes if I try hard enough I can get their trust back.

Another student noted the program’s importance in supporting, and teaching support for, survivors of abuse:

I reckon it was trying to help girls that have gone through stuff, telling them that they’ve got somewhere to go, people to talk to and then teaching us what we can put up with, like don’t put up with getting hit by people. It was really good, especially with the violence and relationships.

When asked what they liked most about the program, many young women nominated how the workshops made them feel, and the atmosphere created:

Everybody laughed, it was happy.

I felt that it was really good and make me learn many things.
[The program] make you feel stronger and more safe and secure.

Many students nominated the peer educators themselves as the best thing about the program:

[The peer educator] was really, really good, we respect her. She’s a bit older than us in age and she’s understanding us.

[The peer educator] she’s funny and she tell everything the truth.

I think the [best thing was the] connection that the [peer educators] had with the students. They really connected, they weren’t like teachers, they were just friends that were talking about stuff. Usually when programs like this happen they bring in old people that no one ever listens to and [this time] they brought some young people.

Having peer educators close to student’s age group was therefore considered important by some, as was having topics directly relevant to this period in their lives:

All the subjects [were] about our age [group] and I want learn many things in my age, I want do something in my life. It [wasn’t] boring, it’s interesting.

Similarly to the young men, many young women appreciated the opportunity the program offered for self-expression, particularly because of the atmosphere of trust established:

[I liked] when we got a lot things out about how we felt. The teachers were really cool and the other students were really, really good about it. [I felt] a little nervous but in the end I felt really confident. I felt really safe because of the group agreement. Without that I wouldn’t feel quite as good about talking.

Everyone being able to express how they actually felt and some of the things they’d gone through in the past that no one knows, even their parents didn’t know, but they’d had it all in them and just had to tell someone and they all trusted us. Most people keep it all to themselves, but that’s exactly what the program was about, helping us and letting it out. Even best friends don’t trust each other all the time with stuff like that. I know I had to let things out as well but if there inside and you’ve not told anyone then it just starts hurting.

[The best thing was] that we talked to each other and I thought that we would’ve been really shy but everybody was open.

[The best thing was] talking things through, group discussions, having our own opinion. [The peer educators] made sure that everyone had their own opinion and then we would talk about just this one thing that someone said, that one problem for about ten minutes and go on to the next one. That really helped us understand it.

Several students remarked on the value of having a sexual assault counsellor come in to talk to them in person, as well as the sense of security it gave them:

[I felt good] when someone came in and started talking about sexual assault and gave us a card so we had a number to call if it happens. Now I’ve got information about if that ever happens to me and I was glad to get the information and phone numbers so I know I can call someone if it happens, if I didn’t want to tell mum.
[The best thing was] the sexual assault bits, the way we talked about that and they had someone come in that actually worked with that, so it made it easier.

But one student felt uncomfortable with the counsellor because they hadn’t had time to establish trust:

That was good except they asked a few questions and I didn’t really feel comfortable telling them because I hadn’t really been there with them for the whole lesson but it was good to hear what they had to say and that there was actually someone that you could go to and talk to about it that would listen and not take sides or anything and I thought that was good.

INTERVIEWER: Did you think it was good with some of the other issues to bring in somebody from the outside?]

It was good because you could get a different side of things other than the people that you’ve been talking to for the whole thing but it was bad as well because they don’t know anything about you, they don’t know past issues or anything else you’ve talked about, just the things that you tell them.

Trust was also an issue for some students in regards to the peer educators changing during the course of the program:

It was confusing because people i.e. the teachers kept changing, one week we would have three ones then one would go and a new one would come in and it just got a bit confusing at times. [And] you would have to get to know them.

The teachers were really good it was just that whole trust thing because they kept bringing new ones in and then one week they wouldn’t be there.

When asked about their favourite activities, responses were as varied as the young women’s personalities and learning styles. Some preferred the ‘hands on’ activities dealing with specific situations:

The scenario cards. Because when I do something fun, I remember it more than if I do something boring.

[The] different sorts of scenarios. It made me look at things differently to what I used to: school, different situations at home, different choices that I make about either school, home or everyday life, probably school subject selections for next year – it made me look at it differently, instead of just looking at it for fun it made me look ahead in life, what I could do if doing those subjects, looking ahead and what would happen, thinking long term rather than short term. I think everything was good but that really stood out.

The role plays, what you do if in a tough situation. She would give us a situation and you’d have to play it out and what you would do and there are different types of ways you can express yourself. [It felt] comfortable.

[I liked] when we had different scenarios and we had to react to them.

INTERVIEWER: Is that where one of the teachers would give you a situation and you would work out in a group how you would act?]

Yes. [Now] if it actually does happen in real life, I will know what to do.

When we played games: they’d say an issue and we could either go ‘unsure’ or its ‘consent’ or its ‘not consent’, and then (we’d) say why we thought that. I thought that was a bit more hands on than just discussing or saying what we think.

Others enjoyed the ‘safety’ of writing rather than speaking:
When we traced around a person and we wrote around her the issues that she could have in her life and then we’d discuss the big ones. [I liked that] because we didn’t have to really say anything, if we thought of something we just wrote it down.

Probably [the best thing was] the writing down on the paper. Sometimes I felt a bit uncomfortable saying stuff because I thought people might’ve had a totally different perspective and I felt stupid saying it but with the writing on the paper they didn’t have to know who wrote it – so that was good. They have paper on different tables and you just take it in turns and grabbing the pen and just writing down your thoughts.

Using pictures to express feelings was preferred by one young woman:

[I liked when] the bear cards, like different feelings that you had. Because I got to express how I felt through the cards instead of having to talk about it because I felt really nervous about talking so I could express myself through the cards.

For some students a highlight was hearing other people’s opinions and learning how they felt about things:

We wrote all different opinions about one thing – about what you should do in situations – and then we sat down in a circle and held them up. Then we talked about it, and because we did that every lesson you understood, and if you were ever in that situation or you knew someone in that situation you could try your best to help and it made you understand what other people are going through and how other people feel.

We had sheets laid around the room like what’s a good relationship, what’s a bad relationship. You just write down what you think and heaps of stuff came out of it, which was good and heaps of the girls opened up. It brought different things out of us and you can see what’s wrong and what’s not and other people’s opinions.

The ‘least favourite activities’ nominated reflected a similar diversity. While some had enjoyed the writing elements, others found it boring:

[The worst thing was] the writing and reading it out, it was really boring.

[The worst thing was] that we had to go around writing things on pieces of paper. It was a bit boring.

Several students wanted more ‘active’ elements:

[My least favourite thing was] sitting around doing nothing…I’m a very active person. […] but then they’ve got to have people sit down so that people can actually listen.

Sometimes they [the peer educators] seemed to just keep talking and I reckon everyone basically got bored and so I would try to make it a bit more fun and energetic.

More interactive games.

We didn’t do enough activities - in the whole thing there should have been more games. It was sometimes it was a bit boring, we used to just put papers around the room and go write on them. I’d like some more games, actually talking more about it than writing and then reading it out.

I think that we need even amounts of both activities and talking about it. I think it was more talking than activities.
When asked about what they didn’t like about the program more broadly, some students spoke of issues which made them uncomfortable, whether because of their perceived lack of knowledge, or because of past experiences. However these students also mentioned the value of dealing with such issues:

Maybe talking about STIs and stuff because I don’t really feel comfortable talking about it. They presented it and then got us to tell them what we knew about it.

[Interviewer: So were you fine with the presentation, but you didn’t like so much talking about it?]

Yes, I just felt uncomfortable because it’s not something that really comes up that often. [But] I thought that I was the only one that didn’t know much about it but it seems that everyone else knew the same as me. By the end I felt a lot more comfortable about it.

[I felt uncomfortable] talking about domestic violence because I’ve been through something like that. I’ve seen it and [...] I didn’t want to really talk about it (and) bring back the memories.

[Interviewer: Even though you felt it brought back bad memories and you didn’t really want to be talking about it at the time, do you find the RPC workshops help you deal with it in the long run?]

Yes, it really helps, telling us [...] you should be doing this and don’t hide it. It really helps, I just hate the memories coming back, that’s all.

[Interviewer: That’s something that’s really important, because you don’t know me and you told me that you’ve been through something like this, which takes a lot of courage. Do you think before the program you would have said it to a stranger?] No.

Others however felt ‘put on the spot’ when asked to speak about themselves before they felt a trusting atmosphere had been created:

[I didn’t like] at the start where we introduced ourselves and talked about things that happened. I felt a little nervous about that. I think I jumped in a little bit too fast but…it’s a bit confusing but I felt…it’s really hard to describe. I jumped in a little fast but not too fast if you know what I mean.

[My least favourite activity was] at the start of the lesson when you introduced yourself and you talked about things that happened in the week and the things you felt. It made me feel a little nervous. I felt that I didn’t know what to say, I felt like everyone was looking at me and [thinking] ‘Oh my gosh she said this or oh my gosh she said that’, I was a little nervous about that. [...] at the end of the lesson I felt really confident, I could talk to people, but at the start of nearly every week I felt like they were going to judge me all the time because that’s happened to me before so I was a little wary about it.

[Interviewer: So would it make it easier if you didn’t have to say too much in front of the group early on in the class but save it for later?] Yes, I would say that.

Some young women felt that the limited time available, and the pace of the lessons, meant that there were issues which had not been adequately covered. This was particularly the case for students for whom English was a second language:

[The worst thing was that there was] not more time, too short time.

[Needed to] explain the help lines more and explain more about abuse.

Probably trying to just discuss more things more clearly because some things they were explaining it a little differently and I felt a little confused about some things but overall, that’s about it.
[INTERVIEWER: So you think that maybe things weren’t explained enough or you needed to do more activities around it to clarify it?]
Yes.

The need for extra time and/or greater clarity with students for whom English is a second language was apparent in the words of one young woman. It seemed she had not understood a discussion around issues of consent, power, age difference and relationships, and took the discussion as a directive on who to love and not love:

I felt sad because the lady [peer educator] said you can’t love someone older than you and I was thinking I don’t understand why someone’s not going to love someone older than [them].
[INTERVIEWER: You’re saying that the teacher was saying you maybe need to be careful about having a relationship with someone who’s a lot older than you and you felt sad about?] Yes.
[INTERVIEWER: Do you remember why the teacher thought it was a good idea to be careful?] I don’t remember.

Finally, some students nominated practical issues of program length and location as their ‘least favourite things’:

I wanted it to be longer.

[The worst thing was] being in a hot, stuffy room.

Similarly, when asked how often they’d like to do the program, nearly everyone wanted it on a regular basis. However, as for the young men, there was considerable difference of opinion on how regularly that should be:

On a regular basis, probably once every week like the program did, probably for a term (9-10 weeks) once a year, basically like a subject.

I’d love to do it every week, but just with more games and more on health, food and diet: what are the right foods to eat.

Two whole days worth, every term for a few periods.

Once every month just in case something new pops up in your life and comes back.

I would like more than two classes but not double, they did double. For 4 weeks, one month, and every term.

Three classes, every term.

Some students noted how different issues would be appropriate/necessary for different age groups:

Everyday, it would be useful for all year levels because as you get older different topics come up, different things pop up and different worries.

I reckon there should be more groups because there was so many people who missed out that probably could’ve needed that information. I reckon for one year even if its third term and they put Year 8’s and they talk about a certain topic, I reckon they need to do stuff on pregnancy because
there’s so many people being pregnant early so in Year 8 they should start that kind of stuff and lead into other things for older years. I was thinking my mum got pregnant with me at fifteen.

When asked what, if anything, about the program had affected them most, some students spoke generally:

All of it really stuck with me especially the relationships and friendship sort of stuff - that really stuck in my head. [Now I’ll] listen to them and see what they have to say and also talk about how I feel and how I want them to react, probably compromise with each other.

For one young woman, the program had helped her come to terms with a past experience:

Something happened to me a while back and we were talking about it and sort of confessing in a way and I told them [the peer educators] about it and they were really understanding and they told me that I was right. They told me about different things about it and it just makes me feel really good about it.

For others it was the realisation that violence is something could happen in the lives of young women around her:

A student said something that I reckon would’ve been hard for her to say as well but it actually happened. Sometimes you sit there and go no it doesn’t happen to anyone I know. [INTERVIEWER: It was important you think because it just made you realise that it was a real situation?] Yes, that it actually happens, it’s not just on TV.

Two students were affected by different realisations about violence and the right to safety:

On a piece of paper [it was written], ‘when is it right for a man to hit a woman?’ and someone wrote that it’s never okay to hit a woman. Like I always thought that sometimes it’d be alright to hit a woman, but it’s never okay.

How women have their own rights. We can speak up for ourselves.

When asked if there was anything they’d now do differently because of the program, the young women gave a great number and variety of examples. Some had to do with relationships:

We did a few things on relationships because we had to write down what bad relationships are and what good ones are and if it’s important to trust your partner or your best friend, whoever it is. When it came to doing the bad relationship, I was the one who said everything so I kind of realised that the kind of relationship that’s all I’d had. [Now] I’ll look out for it and don’t go for the same mistakes again.

Yes, like all the stuff with guys and some of my friends we get into a massive fight, don’t talk, but then I go back to them and it just keeps going over and over again...like I think I should just stay away especially guys, I keep going to the same one twenty times before I realise that I keep getting hurt, better to move on.

Several students noted that they’d learned skills for dealing with violence and sexual harassment:
It gives me some ideas about how to deal with it [violence, sexual abuse] if it happened because they told us how they deal with it.

It gave me a lot of information about different topics. If it was my friend being hit by a boy I would stand up for her. If a friend needs a number then I’ll have it.

I’ve seen that [violence, sexual harassment/assault] happen to friends of mine and I’ve had a totally different view on it and now that I have talked about with them I can see how I feel about it. [I’ll be able to] help more with it and give advice and it if happens again I’ll know exactly what to do in that situation.

I used to have sexual harassment issues, that used to happen to me a lot and now that I’ve done the program I know exactly how to deal with it and I would definitely deal with it in a different way. I think it helped a lot.

Now I’ll [recognise] different types of violence. It’s going to affect me, to see types of violence in my life, emotional or physical and who to seek [for help].

Others thought they’d make use of the skills they’d learned in dealing with conflict:

[Learning how to see] the other person’s perspective, when you call them names or something, how they actually feel. I don’t think I really looked at it from that way before and now I can see that.

I’ll probably handle my mum and dad’s separation a little differently now than back then because I didn’t know much about that sort of thing. I’d think about it differently and talk to them because at first I thought that it was my fault but now I thought well it’s not my fault, it’s the way they want to live.

If I ever had one of those problems, I would know how to get out of it and solve it without getting hurt or hurting other people, like the partying/drinking stuff, boyfriend stuff.

Others had learned skills for dealing with peer pressure and bullying:

At one stage some of my friends were smoking and then I started to but then I stopped and then I came to the program and it helped me a little with that. After I’d tried a couple of times, I thought of it and then I just stopped and I found a new group of friends.

I used to get bullied a lot in primary school and I never stuck up for myself and after the program some of the people who teased me in class, everybody teases everybody, and I would just sit there and ignore it because if you ignore it, it actually goes away. I used to get really upset really easy but now I’ve changed a little.

When asked to identify any more general changes they’d noticed in themselves or others who did the program, ‘more confidence’ was the most common response:

I feel more confident and I feel that I don’t have to keep secrets about what’s happened and can talk to people about it.

It gave me a bit more self confidence and changed the way I’ve treated others and making me feel better because me doing that, has made me feel happy with the people, conversations and that, so it has improved my school work, making my mind focus on it properly.

I feel more stronger and more independent.
Definitely, if anything like that [sexual harassment] happens I would be so much more confident because I would know exactly what to do.

The bullying bit made me feel more confident with things.

My friend she’s normally shy, she never opens up to anything and now she’s getting out there.

Some students I’ve noticed that they’re not so shy, they’re more out there and outgoing.

Others spoke of the program’s effect on their relationships and their understanding of others:

There’s a few things: my attitude towards some people that were in the group, that I found out why they are the way they are and I’ve changed towards them because sometimes I used to be really mean to them but now I realise why they’re how they are and start to feel sorry for them for stuff they’ve gone through and so it’s like changed everything.

I think I’ve benefited from it, and I think I look at a lot of things in a totally different way. It’s changed me for the better, I think. I get along with people a lot more now because I can just see where they’re coming from and I don’t dismiss their ideas straight away. I can think about how they feel about things a lot more.

It mainly gave me confidence and respect for myself because before that I showed some respect for others but I used to hit people if they said something mean to me, I used to be a real bitch…when I’ve been in a bullying situation at primary school I used to put someone else in that position without realising it and it made me step back and make everyone else stop and then try and to make them feel better so it gave me confidence in myself to be able to say stuff like that and self respect.

I see people in different ways now, instead of looking at them and going, ‘I don’t like that person’.

One student had noticed a significant change in her friend:

I hang around with one girl and she seems to have benefited from it. She used to be depressed and very down but now I can see that she’s changed and she’s a lot happier.

Finally, one student described the effect the program had had on creating an atmosphere of trust among those who attended. She noted how this enabled them to solve problems independently:

Sometimes now the people that you helped out [in the workshops] they’ll come up to you with a different problem and you go sort it out here, you’ve got friends outside of your group now. Once when one of them had a problem she came to (us) and we could remember her from the group. She came round and told us [her problem] and in the end we found out a solution and it made her feel good about herself and others feel good about themselves too. Usually if we had a problem we’d go to a counsellor but now we can just sort it out ourselves.
**Peer Educators**

The RPC peer educators and coordinators were consulted several times during the evaluation process to provide information on the content of the program, give feedback on the student questionnaires, make suggestions as to areas of inquiry, and help in conducting student interviews. In October 2006, several peer educators also participated in a focus group interview which aimed to learn their opinions on their professional experience working on the program. This area of enquiry was in line with one of the stated objectives of the RPC program: that the peer educators should benefit in a variety of ways, particularly through gaining leadership opportunities and developing their skills for future employment.\(^{110}\)

Questions examined peer educators’ overall impressions of the program, their early involvement with it, training and professional development issues, program design and materials, program delivery and classroom practicalities, professional support, reporting, communication, timetabling, etc. There was an obvious overlap between professional issues for the peer educators and the perceived impact the program had on students, and the focus group was designed to explore this without setting up rigid boundaries between the two areas.

For those peer educators who could not make the focus group interview, some one-to-one interviews were conducted within the same week. Peer educators also phoned or emailed ideas or thoughts that came to them at several points during the evaluation. This section is a synthesis of the information and ideas the peer educators provided through all of these channels over the course of the evaluation.

**Overall impressions of the program**

When asked what initially drew them to the program, most peer educators spoke of the excitement of doing something they perceived as interesting and useful. Most had a commitment to working with young people, and several spoke of the desire to work specifically with young men or young women because of the perspective they felt they could bring at this stage in the young people’s development. For instance, one of the peer educators for the young men’s program was interested in practicing social work on men’s issues, particularly young men. Another said he felt straight away that peer education work was something he could be good at, and it was also community related, which was important to him. One of the peer educators for the young women’s program noted that she had wanted to work from a feminist background, another that she was specifically interested in women’s health. The content of the program was also an attraction:

For me I was really excited when I read the ad. The topics they were going to be discussing in schools were really interesting for me.

It really struck a cord with me.

Working on the program was also perceived as affording peer educators the opportunity to work in their current fields of study (which included social work, women’s studies, psychology, community development and health promotion), but without requiring the qualification to have already been gained. One peer educator noted that it was hard to find jobs in certain areas (such as social work and psychology) before being fully qualified, so the RPC program allowed them to gain experience in a related field, and also might open up future work possibilities.

It was exactly what I was looking for.

Training

When asked to reflect on the training they received, and the extent to which this was useful when they came to teach on the program, most peer educators noted that the aim of the training was to provide ‘a really good base to work from, to get started with’, but that it was expected that the bulk of the information and skills they needed to practice would be learnt ‘on the job’:

The training sessions were really helpful and I could see that I was going to learn a lot from doing the program.

The training for peer educators on the young women’s program took place over six half-days (10am to 3pm), structured to fit in with the potential childcare commitments of trainees. For the young men’s program, the training was over two days, from 9:30 am to 4:30pm. Though the women’s and men’s training sessions were run by different people and covered somewhat different issues (to reflect the different content of the boys’ and girls’ RPC workshops), they shared the dual objectives of, firstly, providing content/information and, secondly, developing classroom skills. The first area included information on youth issues, violence and sexual assault, constructions of masculinity and femininity, drugs and alcohol, bullying and service provision. Classroom skills were developed in practice situations and role plays, and included active listening, ‘how to handle situations, how not to get into one-on-one arguments and an overview of classroom management’, and also ‘how to handle a dominant student or student who was talking too much, getting students to open up - tactical things on how to run sessions’.

I found it overwhelming at the beginning because there’s so much to learn but very exciting.

One female peer educator felt that the training was most useful in providing a chance to practice workshops, but it was ‘also frustrating because everyone was from a different background with different levels of knowledge’. She also felt that more information on
how violence, particularly sexual assault, affects mental health was essential given the statistical likelihood of there being survivors among the students in the classroom.

One of the peer educators working on the young men’s program confessed he did not really remember most of the training information he received, other than it included lots of activities and seemed in that respect more skills-based than information intensive. Another recalled the open-ended approach of the training as useful, in that it provided suggestions on how to respond to students, or challenge problematic attitudes, but was not dictatorial.

One male peer educator expected the program to be more structured and formal on the basis of the training (and other preparatory steps like the job interview) than it actually was in the classroom situation. However, he was pleased that it ‘turned out to be a lot more casual’, and this made it more enjoyable for him. He also noted that a casual delivery approach by the presenters seemed more effective in engaging with the students and getting them to open up and respond naturally. Another male peer educator said he learned more about students’ attitudes and development simply through talking to them, getting their responses and taking time to consider what had been said, than from the information provided during training. Also it seemed more natural for him to respond to students with his own opinions rather than the responses suggested during training. A long-term female peer educator noted that even after five years working on the program, students could still take her by surprise (‘whether that be in positive or negative way’), but that after hearing the same issues/problems/questions a few times, ‘you learn what an effective response is’.

A lot of importance was therefore attached to ‘on the job’ training, and in this respect having new peer educators start by observing workshops with more experienced educators was considered highly useful. Generally, they then move on to co-facilitation, ‘starting with the basics such as introducing the games, obtaining group agreements, evaluations etc’. The aim was not to have new peer educators ‘thrown in on their own’ for at least a few months. Though most were nervous during their first (co-facilitated) session, it also was helpful to have a format to work from:

I thought it was going to be scary, but I think when I got there […] I found it really useful to have this skeleton to work with. You can ad lib a bit off that if you like [but] it’s something to hang on to.

Given the importance of what was learned ‘on the job’, one peer educator suggested that a format involving several days of training, followed by two sessions observing/co-facilitating at a school, and ending with another day (or two) of training, would be an effective way of dealing with the questions and difficulties that are inevitably encountered in the first few sessions.

It was considered by most of the peer educators that an ideal situation would be to have more training sessions than currently exist, but there were difficulties in coordinating this with other work/family/study commitments. For the male peer educators, it was thought the current two training days would be better spread out over three to four days, with
‘more practical content’. For the female peer educators the training time had been set up to suit women who have to pick children up from school.

Everyone agreed that the timing issues would be easier to resolve if the training were paid. Trainees currently need to rearrange and sacrifice work/study commitments in order to participate in training, and some need to pay for childcare.

It would be a good idea to pay them to go to that training so that they could choose to be there and sacrifice their day of work…ideally if there was more money, we could do that.

Some peer educators thought an improvement to the training would be to introduce ongoing observation of each other’s classes/workshops, ‘to see how different people work and how they deal with different things’. Again, money was identified as an issue for the peer educators in this case, and would need to be found to reimburse them for the observation time. Others thought that changing co-facilitators and swapping teams around would be more valuable, as observation might feel intimidating.

**Professional development and support**

While some professional development workshops and sessions had been made available (such as ‘groupwork games’ and public speaking), most peer educators considered there was scope for further, more targeted professional development to take place. One peer educator for the young men’s program said it would be useful to have professional development sessions (or be supported to attend talks) with other people working in the field who could report on developments, for example on shifts in societal and youth attitudes. It was noted that, in working with young people on a daily basis, peer educators were in a good position to ‘understand where young people are at’. However, given their role in shaping attitudes and ‘where [young people] are going’, it was thought there could be much to learn from outside agencies and professionals.

Another peer educator noted the additional benefit of attending workshops as participants rather than facilitators, as it gave them the opportunity to see things from a student’s perspective: ‘to observe and pick up ideas, what is good/bad about the way people run sessions’ and ‘identify ways that it could’ve been done better’.

Informal ‘debriefing’ was considered a useful existing part of the professional support offered to peer educators in the RPC program, such as spending a little time immediately after sessions to debrief with co-facilitators. Informal discussions between the young women’s and young men’s peer educators at schools (for example, at recess and lunch times) was found to be particularly useful to ‘feed off issues’ that the other program was dealing with, including, as one male peer educator said, ‘how the girls’ groups would respond to a situation, how girls feel about something and how to address such problems with the boys based on the issues expressed by the girls’.
However it was suggested that regular, paid debriefing sessions with all peer educators would be an effective way to exchange ideas, talk about problems, and discuss possible solutions in a more systematic and thorough way. It was also thought this would be a good way to meet new peer educators, and establish more cross-program communication (i.e. between the young men’s and the young women’s program) as ‘sometimes [male] peer educators need to represent girls’ points of view to the guys and we don’t want to have to guess what the girls might be thinking’. Given it was inappropriate for male peer educators to observe the girls’ classes and vice versa, a regular ‘catch up’ of the male and female peer educators was considered an effective way to share information about ‘where the students are at’. However, there was some difference of opinion as to how often such sessions would be necessary or useful. One peer educator thought once a month, another once every few months (for example, at the end of each term), and yet another only once or twice a year.

One of the peer educators from the young women’s program also thought there was a need for some follow-up, formal training after they had been working on the program for some time, because she felt they ‘tended to lose track of methodology and why we do things in certain ways’. She also felt that such sessions could cover such ‘advanced’ issues as curriculum development and workshop planning.

**Program design and materials**

The design and materials for the young men’s program has been recently updated, with the manual presented in a ring binder allowing for materials to be added and removed later. The materials are divided into two main sections, the first providing information on content-based issues such as violence and constructions of masculinity, and the second providing ideas for designing and facilitating the workshops, example session outlines and activity sheets. The male peer educators said they found the materials very useful, particularly when they first began working on the program. Some peer educators said they had modified or developed their own activities over time, based on how various ideas have panned out in the classroom situation. They also use current affairs as a resource, such as issues raised on TV shows like ‘Big Brother’ and ‘Home and Away’ because these topics are familiar to students.

It was agreed that the young women’s program materials needed updating, and time was identified as a limiting factor for the current coordinator in achieving this. Women peer educators were making use of the existing manual (last revised in 2003), which, like that provided for the young men’s program, is divided into content- and activities-based sections, though is somewhat briefer. Women peer educators said they also used the internet as a resource along with materials from the manual, and tailored activities to the topic being delivered. New material or modules have been developed however, such as the ‘Safe Partying’ workshops which began in 2006.
One of the peer educators for the young women’s program felt there was a need to review and re-develop particular parts of the curriculum. She noted that time pressures meant they were often simply responding to school’s requests rather than being proactive in developing a generalist curriculum. Another concern she had was that, as the focus of workshops had broadened to cover issues outside of violence and sexual assault, peer educators no longer seemed to be getting as many disclosures from students of abuse. She felt there was a need for the peer educators to discuss this, to determine if it was a problem and if they felt they were providing adequate support.

The same peer educator was keen to see the program expanded to take a more ‘whole-school’ approach. She perceived a need to ‘broaden the program beyond peer-driven one-off sessions, and bring in teachers and schools more’. She noted that most school teachers simply ‘don’t have information on incorporating sexual diversity, healthy relationships, etc into classroom situation’, and considered the RPC program to be uniquely placed to provide such a resource. She suggested developing a specific manual of information and activities for teachers:

A specific teacher resource would be good – it could be developed with those who work in curriculum development at either the school or state level – and could include materials which teachers could easily use in class.

This peer educator also suggested an advisory service to teachers, student welfare coordinators and other key people at the schools. She noted that peer educators were already fulfilling such a role in an informal capacity, for example in discussions with teachers following workshops, but there was considerable scope for expansion. This could include keeping in regular contact with key teachers and following up workshops with information on what was covered, what the students’ main concerns were, what areas it would be good to examine in other classes, etc. This would also enable RPC workers to keep up to date with developments in schools.

Another peer educator agreed, and suggested that a ‘whole-school’ approach should also include parents. He noted that keeping parents informed and engaged with the issues covered in the program was important to ensure that ‘students get consistent positive messages both at school and at home’. Though it was not considered practical for RPC to run parent sessions at present, one idea proposed was that ‘follow up’ letters were sent to parents after the program, letting them know of the issues raised, any problems identified, and what support mechanisms were available.

It was noted that a lot of students have requested mixed-sex sessions in their post-workshop evaluations, and that some secondary prevention programs do a series of single-sex sessions and end with a mixed-sex session. Everyone agreed that, while this could be valuable, current RPC materials and curriculum were not appropriate and would have to be carefully reconsidered and expanded if mixed sessions were to be incorporated. It was also agreed that holding mixed sessions should not be done at the expense of single-sex sessions, only as an additional component (for example, for content on healthy relationships), given the identified value of single sex workshops.
Program delivery and classroom practicalities

Peer educators raised several factors which impacted on the effectiveness of the program delivery at the classroom level. The first was the space provided, which needed to be reasonably distraction-free, and with chairs and desks amenable to being organised into circles for groupwork.

Don’t stick us in a science lab!

Another practical inconvenience identified was having to change classrooms for different sessions at the one school, which could mean tables and chairs had to be rearranged up to six times a day. Peer educators also mentioned they’d appreciate being able to get a glass of water or make a cup of coffee between classes, something they are not always able to do because of the time taken to change and rearrange classrooms, or simply because lack of communication from school staff meant they didn’t know where facilities were.

There was some discussion as to whether or not it was useful to have teachers present as observers in the class room. Some schools preferred not to have a teacher present so that the students felt more comfortable to contribute and talk during the workshop. In this case they would often have a teacher walk by on a regular basis to check on a session. For other schools it was a matter of policy to have a teacher present. Where this was required, the important thing, according to the peer educators, was that the teacher chosen be someone the students trusted and didn’t find intimidating.

Some teachers take a hard line and are intimidating towards students – then students don’t respond or give opinions and everyone shuts up. It is very hard to run a session under these conditions.

It was also considered essential that the teachers be the same sex as the group (for similar reasons as those identified for single sex sessions), though not all schools respected this. Indeed, all the peer educators in the focus group agreed that having a trusted teacher of the same sex present in a supervisory role during a group session was preferred to having none at all. In addition to the benefits for classroom management, it provided teachers with an opportunity to learn what the program was about and perhaps communicate this to other teachers for follow up in their own classes.

It was considered particularly useful to have a teacher present for groups which had been chosen for the program because of behavioural difficulties. In such cases teachers were required for maintaining a certain level of discipline, though several peer educators had in the past felt ‘let down’ by teachers in this position who chose not to intervene in difficult situations. There was therefore an identified need to meet with teachers before the workshops to discuss expectations and communicate how much intervention the peer educators might require and in what circumstances.

In some circumstances when a situation gets out of control […] if the teacher is quietly standing in the corner, they can intervene and ask people to quiet down.
One suggested way of improving communication on issues such as these was to send a letter out to schools prior to a session, outlining the expectations peer educators have of a session, space arrangements, teacher’s present etc. Alternatively (or additionally), meetings with key teachers or student welfare coordinators prior to the sessions have been found useful in the past, and could be organised systematically.

Some teachers have expressed that they felt ignorant about what went on in the RPC sessions and would like to be able to pick up some of the themes in their own classes. One peer educator noted that teachers would often informally seek feedback on the program, coming up after the workshops or during lunchbreaks to ask what was covered, how it went, etc. A suggestion made was that a more formal feedback session could be organised with key teachers (involved with the same year level as the students receiving the program), where peer educators could communicate the issues raised in the RPC sessions, identify any problem areas, provide ideas for follow up, and respond to teachers’ questions. This would require funds being available to pay peer educators, as well as teachers and peer educators having enough time to participate, ideally at the end of the day when RPC workshops had been held.

One peer educator thought that another possible avenue for providing this feedback, either in addition to or instead of a feedback session with teachers, was for a written report to be sent to the school following the workshops. Currently, letters are sent to schools outlining students’ responses from post-workshop evaluations, and the peer educator thought this might provide an opportunity to highlight certain issues and report back on the workshop for teachers who had not been able to speak to peer educators.

**Organisational issues**

A concern for all the peer educators was job stability and remuneration. Currently, peer educators are employed on a casual basis and receive $50 for a half-day’s work, which generally includes travel time, and $70 for a full day. Peer educators working on the young men’s program have access to a work car through SECASA (and don’t pay for petrol), but those working on the young women’s program at WHISE do not. These latter peer educators are therefore paying transport costs, and some are also paying for childcare, out of the $50 or $70 they receive. Though all peer educators agreed that the rewards of working with young people were the main reason for doing this work, and that it ‘wasn’t for the money’, meeting financial demands was nevertheless identified as a source of stress in their lives.

I can’t live on nothing so I have to do other things.

Several peer educators relied for their income on other jobs, often with better pay or more regular hours, which therefore took precedent over working on the RPC program when there were timetabling conflicts (even though all said they preferred the RPC work over their other jobs). Others had study commitments, or only had set times when they could
get childcare, making the irregularity of RPC work difficult to manage. For these reasons, several peer educators noted that they often had to turn down RPC workshops that they would have liked to facilitate.

If I was paid more for [RPC] I would do it more often because I wouldn’t need to do my other work…my other work is a base, I get that and my Youth Allowance and that just covers me.

If I knew [RPC] was more on a regular basis and I was going to get paid more for it I would definitely be more active because I obviously wouldn’t have to do my other job as much – it would mean I could be more available.

Of course, it was recognised that RPC workshops have to be timetabled to fit in with schools, and peer educators were aware that regular workshops were impossible. One of the program coordinators also noted how this irregularity ‘worked both ways’, in that sometimes there were a lot of peer educators available to work and at other times no-one: this made coordination with schools difficult.

One possible solution lay in the fact that several peer educators had expressed an interest in being more involved in curriculum development, liaising with schools, or even working on expanding the program to include, for example, developing resources for teachers. For these peer educators, regular part-time or job share work on the RPC program, which would involve facilitating workshops whenever required and developing the program at other times, was identified as their ideal working arrangement. It was noted that this would require extra funding to be secured, but that it also might bring more money into the program through increased outreach to new schools and possible additional services, such as the advisory service suggested earlier.

One of the program coordinators suggested an arrangement where there was a ‘core team’, of the coordinator and one or two experienced and committed peer educators, for each program. Members of the team would work regular days part-time or on job share, and between them cover the working week so that there were always peer educators available for schools. When there were no workshops they could work on developing the program, and when there was a large number of workshops the existing pool of casual peer educators could be drawn on.

There was finally some discussion of peer educators’ motivation and commitment, with one program coordinator wondering if providing more money or greater stability would mean expectations of performance would increase. Some peer educators, as mentioned above, found the idea of being more involved in program development motivating, others wanted to concentrate on facilitating workshops. Program coordinators noted that there were different levels of ability and experience in the peer educator team, and a lot of ‘untapped potential’. It was clear that for some peer educators, working in this area was a conscious career choice. There was an identified need to consider how to make full use of the knowledge and experience they were developing, both through their work on the program and through their study, and find ways to feed this back into the program, as well as provide opportunities for career progression.
Summary

Throughout the interview, peer educators demonstrated a high degree of commitment to the RPC program and a passionate interest in its future development. They spoke of being attracted to the content and approach of the program, and of a desire to work specifically with young men and women because of the perspective they felt they could bring at this stage in the young people’s development. Coming from studies linked to social change and community development, these young people also envisaged their participation on the program as part of a career path.

The training they received was considered helpful and informative, but peer educators noted that a great deal of their learning was accomplished on the job. Having new peer educators start by observing workshops with more experienced educators was considered highly useful. A format involving several days of training, followed by two sessions observing/co-facilitating at a school, and ending with another day (or two) of training, was considered an effective way of dealing with the questions and difficulties that are inevitably encountered in the first few sessions. More training sessions overall were considered ideal, covering both greater content (for example, on violence and mental health), and more skills development. It was noted that further training would be difficult to coordinate with work/family/study commitments, though it was agreed that timing issues would be easier to resolve if the training were paid.

Peer educators were keen to develop their skills and showed an interest in participating in relevant professional development programs. It was suggested that some form of formal ‘follow up’ training was essential for peer educators working long-term on the program, in order to keep up with pedagogical and research developments and cover advanced issues such as curriculum development. With regard to wider professional support, informal ‘debriefing’ with co-facilitators and discussions between the young women’s and young men’s peer educators at schools was considered extremely useful. Regular, paid debriefing sessions with all peer educators were proposed as an effective way to exchange ideas, talk about problems, and discuss possible solutions more extensively.

In terms of classroom practicalities, distraction-free classrooms with movable chairs and tables, and which remained the same throughout a day’s workshop or week-by-week, were considered ideal. It was also agreed that having a trusted teacher (of the same sex as the students) present during sessions was preferred, for classroom management reasons as well as to provide teachers with an opportunity to learn what the program was about and perhaps communicate this to other teachers for follow up in their own classes. It was suggested that a letter be out to schools prior to a session in order to communicate these requests. Meetings with key teachers or student welfare coordinators prior to the sessions have also been found useful in the past, and could be organised systematically.

Program materials were found useful and easy to use, though it was agreed that the young women’s workshop manual needed updating. One peer educator felt that time pressures left peer educators and program coordinators simply ‘reacting’ to schools’ requests rather than proactively developing program content and materials.
Two peer educators were keen to see the program expanded to take a more ‘whole-school’ approach, bringing in parents, teachers and other school staff. One peer educator noted that the lack of information and resources available to teachers on issues such as violence, sexual diversity and healthy relationships, and considered the RPC program to be uniquely placed to provide such a resource, whether in the form of a practical manual or the provision of an advisory service. Though it was not considered practical for RPC to run parent sessions at present, one idea proposed was that ‘follow up’ letters were sent to parents after the program, letting them know of the issues raised, any problems identified, and what support mechanisms were available. Similarly, formal feedback sessions with key teachers were suggested as a way of involving schools more, responding to teachers’ desire for more communication on the program’s content, and encouraging follow-up of the program’s messages in the formal curriculum. This would require funds being available to pay peer educators, as well as teachers and peer educators having enough time to participate.

Finally, job stability and remuneration was presented as a major concern for all the peer educators. The irregularity of RPC work was considered difficult to manage in conjunction with family or study commitments for some, and for others financial need meant they often prioritised better-paying regular work. One of the program coordinators noted how this had occasionally resulted in no peer educators being available for workshops, and therefore compromised coordination with schools. An arrangement was suggested by which a ‘core team’, of the coordinator and one or two experienced and committed peer educators, would be employed part-time or on job share, and between them cover the working week so that there were always peer educators available for schools. When workshops were less frequent, they could work on school communication, curriculum development and program expansion.


**Teachers**

Over the course of the evaluation, individual interviews were carried out with key teachers and student welfare coordinators (SWCs) at five schools. These included the three schools where students were also interviewed and given questionnaires, and two schools where the program had been carried out in the past, but which did not otherwise participate in the evaluation. Interviews were conducted in person with the evaluator, Lara Fergus, recorded and later transcribed. Again, as for the interviews with the peer educators, the anonymity of those who participated was assured and has been respected here.

The purpose of these interviews, like the interviews with the peer educators, was to generate information about the organisation and delivery of the RPC program in schools, in order to identify the possible strengths and weaknesses of the program, and therefore aid program managers and coordinators in their decision-making. Teachers and SWCs at the schools were also uniquely positioned to give input into the impact of the program on students, and this was examined alongside the organisational issues. Results are presented below, largely in the teachers’ own words, beginning with general comments about the program and then moving into specific areas that were felt to warrant examination.

**Overall impressions of the program**

Overall reactions to the program were largely positive:

I think this was a fantastic preventative program to be delivered in schools [especially in regards to domestic violence].

There’s such a need for this in the schools and at all year levels.

The program gave the boys an opportunity to articulate their concerns and generate a range of strategies to resolve issues. In a sense it was empowering because they were able to articulate the solutions through [the peer educator’s] guidance rather than simply being presented with the ‘correct way’ to do things.

It made [the students] reflect on their own violent reactions to situations and apply the strategies when confronted with potentially negative situations at school and outside of school.

When asked what they thought was the best thing about the program, teachers, like the students themselves, tended to nominate the inclusive atmosphere created:

The informal chats and discussions. I found these very beneficial and [the students] loved the games. It gave everybody the opportunity to take part.
[The peer educators] let the kids be themselves, the kids thought they were cool, you could see there was a good connection, the quieter kids were looking up and making the odd contribution.

By the end of the program, there was a strong rapport between [the peer educator] and many of the boys. Overall I do think it was a positive experience for these boys.

Many teachers specifically identified the quality of the peer educators as being a key factor to the program’s success:

I thought it was really, really good. They [the male peer educators] were charismatic young people, they weren’t teachers, they connected very well with the students, the students seemed to be really listening, there seemed to be good conversations, they managed to draw the boys out which I thought was really excellent. They were certainly the kind of guys that the boys wanted to be like so once again it was perfect. There was role modelling and they established their respect.

Overall, I’ve found it really, really good. [The female peer educators] are good at engaging the students and they’re very respectful of the girls and you can sense that because they open up to them. The content [was] adapted week by week according to what the needs of the girls are so it couldn’t have been better. I think it’s fantastic. I’ve worked with a lot of agencies with schools and I find these two girls [the peer educators] fantastic and I would be more than happy to recommend [the RPC program] to other schools.

Others noted the observed impact the program had had on the students:

A number of the boys now reflect more on their actions and don’t automatically respond to conflict as they did in the past. They were able to recognise the triggers that set them off. It also improved their sense of connectedness to the college with a reduction in absences amongst two students in particular.

That’s what I’ve seen here over the weeks… the girls have relaxed enough to open up and there are certainly girls talking now that weren’t necessarily saying much at the start of the program.

However, one teacher thought that the program had had ‘little’ effect on the students she had observed.

**Involvement of teachers**

The same teacher also had concerns regarding the involvement of teachers in the program:

I observed that [one of the other teachers] was having to prepare materials for the classes and that staff, including myself, were required to supervise in each session in order to ensure positive outcomes and constructive behaviours/conversations.
While this teacher thought the program should be run independently, without the involvement or supervision of teachers at the school, other teachers said they found the experience of being involved with RPC workshops rewarding:

I really valued the opportunity to participate in these sessions – initially I thought it might inhibit the boys but it certainly helped me to know them better and develop a positive relationship with many of them. In the past my experiences with the boys was solely based on the consequences [of violent behaviour] but now through the program, I was able to impact on their behaviour in a more positive manner rather than simply punitive. Some shared family situations with me outside the group which enabled me to link them to support agencies outside school. Outside the group I was also able to assist them through personal crises that they were experiencing.

I am very grateful to [the peer educator] for being so generous with his time - he was willing to spend more time at the college to make this work. He was open to me being involved in the sessions and clearly role-modelled to the boys’ positive ways to resolve situations, through his actions and speech.

One teacher noted, like the peer educators in the focus group interview, that having a teacher present was an issue of classroom discipline, but that guidelines about what was expected of teachers needed to be specific:

When the boy’s program first started, just the physical nature of boys, I did feel for [the peer educator] because it is challenging…teachers can’t cope with one or two…and [the peer educator] had 15 of them. There are certain requirements for teaching in the classrooms, I think the guidelines that are there about what we expect from the teachers needs to be really specific in relation to discipline.

**Reporting**

Another advantage of having a teacher present, identified in the peer educator focus group, was that the teacher could then report on the workshops to other staff. This might enable the topics covered by the program to be incorporated into, or reinforced by, other subjects. However, one teacher noted that lack of time was an issue, and thought that this ‘reporting back’ role might be better played by peer educators or trainees:

We’re all [teachers] rushed and we’re off to our next classes or appointments and then some time goes by. […] It’s a coordination thing and they [SECASA and WHISE] are short-staffed and they’re running on the bones of everything too. It’s the old story, like it is for us. […] we haven’t got somebody else who can actually go, ‘C’mon we’ve got to brainstorm this, what did we find?’ […] Maybe they could employ somebody on work experience or maybe they could get a student involved in that.

It was suggested that peer educators in training could perhaps have this responsibility: taking an observational role for some workshops, and feed back to teachers and parents.

I think that would be very helpful to take it to the next level. [Regarding recruitment] it could be promoted better in the universities […] there may be room for an expansion through departments of health and medicine, or educational faculties.
One way in which the RPC program reports or ‘feeds back’ to schools is through the post-workshop student evaluations, which are used to gain student’s view on the program and what was covered. Information from these two-page questionnaires is destined to be used by both peer educators as well as schools, but one teacher noted that this feedback was sometimes not provided in a timely fashion:

I’ve sometimes had to write and request [student evaluation reports] sometime later. I think they should be done on the spot automatically and then left with the school.

**Organisational issues**

While most responses regarding issues of organisation and coordination were positive …

Really excellent…always been able to liaise with them well, make contact, have them return the calls, times always what they say they’re going to be.

[The program coordinator] always responded to emails and was willing to work through suggestions made by the school. He was flexible and open to advice and changes.

… other teachers raised concerns regarding timeliness in addition to that of receiving student evaluation reports described above. One teacher implied that more could be done to ensure workshops were set up and started on time, and that this could be incorporated into the training of peer educators:

[It would be good to have] an induction [for peer educators] into how schools run, somebody like myself […] that could come in and say, ‘Alright, a little checklist, these are the things to watch out for: turn up 15 minutes early, get your Melways out and check where you’re going, and make sure you then liaise with that person the night before and say, “Are we right for so and so, have you got the stuff, where are we going and we have to be there on time”’. Because often one [peer educator] will get there and be waiting, waiting and the bell will have gone, and I will have gone to an appointment. So she’s waiting for her colleague and that sort of thing is really important in terms of how then I’m judged, it’s: ‘Well these people don’t seem to know what they’re about’.

With this last comment, the teacher pointed to the fact that it is often only one or two teachers who advocate for the program to be implemented at a school, and that their own credibility and reputation is therefore linked to the program’s perceived quality. As one SWC said:

When you’re trying to run a program from a welfare point of view you’ve got to be seen as ‘credible’. Because they [the peer educators] are outsiders, it means everyone’s focussing on them, and judging. I’m funding this program, it’s paid for out of my budget, I’m not getting money from elsewhere and when you take time out of the school curriculum for anything…especially for a school like ours, it’s always ‘Was it really necessary?’; ‘Does it really do any good?’ ‘They didn’t seem to be very with it.’
The fact that teachers who are interested in, and supportive of, the program, usually have to ‘sell’ it to school management or principals to obtain approval has implications in other areas. For example, one teacher noted that the more professionally the program is presented, the easier the task of convincing decision-makers at the school of its credibility. Regarding the quality of the materials sent out to schools which present the program, she said:

It’s a series of hand-outs […] what they do and how they go about it, but they probably need a bit of an upgrade, [to be] a bit more snappy, a bit smarter looking. Sadly you’ve got to market everything now.

For similar reasons, this teacher felt that more could be done to increase the apparent ‘credibility’ and professionalism of the program, as decisions on whether or not the program would be allowed to continue at the school might depend on it. She noted that, whether valid or not, the program’s quality might be judged on such factors as what peer educators wear and how they present at the school’s reception, especially at the more conservative schools:

It might be really helpful when they’re liaising with the school to ask ‘[…] what should our people wear in coming to you?’ There are some Christian schools who take that sort of thing very seriously. […] Even if they arrived in a jacket which they could take off when they got down to the room. It’s really silly but some people unfortunately don’t cope well. People in the office are saying, ‘Who are they?’ The point is that there will be some schools that might struggle because of that.

Program delivery and classroom practicalities

Organisational issues were again raised when teachers were asked about the quality of the program’s delivery:

In the main [delivery] has been good, but there have been a few lurches mainly because the people that they thought they were going to have on the day as [peer educators], suddenly at the last minute weren’t unavailable, pulled out or just didn’t turn up.

She also speculated on the staffing implications of such ‘lurches’:

[It would be good to make] sure they’ve got a core group of people that are tuned in as a team, knowing where they’re going, what they’re doing and little things that are very important in the school’s function such as turning up well before classes and being prepared and having your stuff with you and knowing which colleagues have what box. Some of that organisational stuff and fitting into a school’s timetabling has been the main thing they’ve had difficulty with.

Another teacher felt that some of the peer educators needed further training and/or support before running programs:

You could tell that some people that came to present were really not ready, they were very nervous and very fearful and that was indicated in some of the feedback I got informally and that’s not helpful.
A teacher at another school felt similarly, but limited her comments to peer educators on the young women’s program, saying that those on the young men’s program had ‘been great’. She also specified that her comments by no means applied to all of the peer educators on the young women’s program, but to a few whom she believed had been ‘thrown in the deep end’ and were not fully prepared for the responsibilities they faced.

When asked about classroom management, comments were generally positive:

[The peer educators] manage classroom issues like dominant/talking girls very respectfully and this enables the girls to feel that they can keep coming back to the workshops each week.

Two practical issues, of class size and of room layout and location, were brought up as being something that the agencies and schools needed to consider. These issues were also raised in the peer educator focus group as something which might be negotiated with schools before workshops begin:

Rapport with the boys improved when we changed the format of the program. In a group of 15 boys, classroom management was a significant issue and created an unsafe environment. Some boys were also reviewing their involvement in the program. We were faced with the option of either cancelling the program after 3 weeks or revising the organisation. The decision taken by the school to divide the boys into smaller groups of 3-4 worked much better. It gave [the peer educator] an opportunity to engage more closely with the boys.

I think the relocation was an issue one week, we’d been given a room that was totally unsuitable, it was an art room, and not having the ability to [rearrange the chairs]. So I found another classroom that was more suitable and apparently the person who allocates the rooms wasn’t happy because we hadn’t put the chairs and tables back. It would be good to be allocated the same room for each workshop and have that continuity for the students as well.

Another teacher talked about the implications of workshop length on the quality of the program’s delivery:

At times the pace was a bit slow and the boys needed to be moved along briskly to maintain their interest. Having a 50 minute session with each group worked best. For Year 8 boys a double period in the format of a discussion and some role plays did not always work. [The peer educator] was encouraged to use a variety of activities to keep them engaged.

Yet another teacher thought that the ‘rapport’ established between peer educator and students could be taken further:

In the lesson I observed the [peer educator] provided good questions and insight from the prepared plan but did not seem to ‘latch on’ to the students answers and take it forward in a positive manner… [The peer educator] needs more direction and training in leading. He had a genuine interest but did not seem to have the skills to take it further. To be fair I should note that I only supervised one session. My comments and observations reflect that.
Program content

This issue of leadership was again brought up by the same teacher in regards to the content of the program:

[There was a] strong focus on relating to students, comparing interests, etc, but I did not see this used to influence or lead. [The RPC program] could fit in well [with the curriculum] and be of great benefit if better managed and directed.

However, the relationship that peer educators established with students through the content was, by other teachers, considered a positive outcome in itself:

Each week [the peer educators] discussed issues with the girls by giving them examples from their own lives, and then that was used in the following week. I.e., it’s real life stuff for example, ‘A few people mentioned this last week so we thought that we’d explore it a little bit more today’. [The peer educators] are very flexible and I think that’s a really good thing because that’s what the kids really appreciate that the program is meeting their needs and not somebody else’s.

The content was good in that it got the boys thinking and questioning the way they interact with others and how their decisions and actions impact on others. [The peer educator] did encourage them through the scenarios to question their beliefs and the stereotypes they held.

Teachers particularly appreciated the use of folders which were given to students and then personalised by them. This was seen not only to provide a sense of continuity from one week to the next, but also to encourage students to explore issues such as personal goals:

[The peer educators] have done a lot of follow up work about things that were discussed one week, they had actually printed them out onto a sheet of paper and then given that to the girls the following week and the girls have all got folders [to keep the summary sheets in and any leaflets given out over the course of the RPC Program as well as their own notes].

[The use of folders] would send the message to the boys that their contributions were valued and taken seriously.

One teacher talked about her own involvement in developing content and using the folders:

At the start of the small group sessions, I developed a series of sheets on personal planning to assess what each boy saw as personal goals in their life and engage them in the program after the shaky start [the big group which was then reduced to several smaller groups]. I also personally responded with written feedback to each boy’s personal goals, based on the school-generated worksheet that [the peer educator] had completed with them. This set up a dialogue and resulted in our careers teacher also being drawn into the program because the boys wanted further advice on careers. [The peer educator] then spent time trying to get to know each boy better in the program and speak to them about their interests. He went back to the SECASA focus once the boys were back on track and worked hard to make a link and find that balance between facilitator and friend.
Another teacher had a practical suggestion for the ordering of content within the young
women’s workshops:

Having the bear cards [50 cards displaying bears with different expressions, no words] at the start
[would be an improvement]. [The peer educators] leave the cards out and get the girls to pick one
out that reflects how they are feeling at the moment. It gives everybody an opportunity to talk, to
make sure all the girls are feeling part of it and to break up those girls who are talking in groups [at
the start of the workshop].

An area which was seen as problematic at one school was the content on same-sex
relationships and homophobia. This wasn’t due to any conservatism on the part of the
school or its staff, but rather to the strong homophobic attitudes of the male students
themselves. The SWC at this school, speaking of the first time he was involved with the
young men’s program, put it this way:

Everything was going perfect, I thought ‘This is 10 out of 10, we’ll have this back every year’, and
then [the peer educators] broached the subject of same sex attracted. One of the problems we have in
this school is the feelings amongst the kids is very anti homosexual, very strongly so. When they
broached the subject they opened a can of worms. The responses from the kids, the things that they
came out with … and I thought if I was a same sex attracted kid and I was sitting there in the corner
I would’ve wanted to disappear off the face of the earth.

When asked if he thought there was a different way of approaching this content, or if
there was anything the peer educators could have done to manage the situation better, the
SWC said:

Most probably not because that was a grenade that went off in the classroom […] you can’t deal with
this situation like that. It wasn’t really the fault of the agency or the delivery it was the fault of our
clientele here. I was surprised at the turnaround because I felt that the [peer educators] had
developed the discussion very nicely - I did not expect the response that came out. The [peer
educators] did what they could to contain it […] but the damage was there. You had a herd
mentality…if [students] didn’t add to the fuel, they would be labelled. In a classroom things can
escalate in seconds. The guys delivering the program…I was very impressed but it didn’t suit our
clientele.

The SWC believed more damage had been done by bringing up the issue than if it had
not been mentioned. When asked how he thought changes to student’s homophobic
attitudes might best be brought about, he considered that ‘special programs’ like RPC
were not the place:

I went to some professional development on same sex attracted issues, and the push there was you
don’t specifically teach about it you just let it slip into the curriculum as if it was just a part of
everyday life. So it’s not spotlighting it because as soon as you spotlight on it, then people look at it
with harsh relief. [But] it’s a dilemma because it’s very difficult to do that sort of curriculum
change…The [RPC] sessions were really good, though, I was impressed up until that point.
A teacher at a different school, speaking about the young women’s program, also noted the ‘very strong homophobia in the school as a whole [including among the girls]’. However, unlike the SWC above she ‘didn’t think that any student who was a lesbian would have felt uncomfortable during the RPC sessions, in fact she probably would have felt quite relieved [by the peer educators’ support]’.

**Place in the curriculum**

Teachers were also questioned about the RPC program’s place in the school curriculum, and what year level they felt was best served by the content. Many thought Year 9 was the best time, after students had begun some of the sex and health education curriculum…

The nature of the content was probably more geared towards Year 9 boys as opposed to some of the year 8 boys.

…but the different levels of maturity among adolescents of the same age was considered a complicating factor:

There is such a diversity in experience amongst teenagers so it is difficult to know when to target them [for sex and health education]. The longer you put it off the safer you are in terms of getting a terrified parent, ‘How dare you say this to my child,’ [though] some parents do have genuine concerns because their child is not ready for it. [However] others should have had it four years earlier.

I think [Year 8] is a very good age to be working with students because, in my experience, [that’s when] they are starting to get into challenging behaviours. [Although] I think at this age it’s good to have a selected group because some students are not ready to hear RPC messages and do not behave in challenging ways, whereas at the Year 9 and Year 10 level, you can have the whole class. There is such a variation in maturity and development [at the Year 8 level].

When asked if it seemed better, in relation to the curriculum, to have one-off workshops or a longer series, most teachers thought that a longer program was ideal in terms of what the students learned:

I think it’s been great having the eight sessions, you’ve really seen the relationship build up over those eight weeks between the [peer educators] and students. […] I personally think it would be a great thing to meet up with those [peer educators] even for a period in fourth term and maybe again next year just to reinforce everything that’s been discussed and to see how they’re going…I think follow up is really important.

However one teacher noted that curriculum pressures made it difficult to get approval for longer programs:

My concern is that extended programs are too much imposition on the existing curriculum [in that] the curriculum is already so fragmented and to get approval for some extended program I’d have minimal chance.
Summary

Overall reactions to the RPC program on the part of teachers and SWCs were positive. Teachers in general appreciated the inclusive atmosphere created in the workshops, the relationships the peer educators developed with students, and the opportunity the program provided for students to discuss issues and learn skills related to violence and relationships, which were not otherwise covered by the curriculum. The program was generally seen to have had a positive effect on students, and peer educators were appreciated as being skilful listeners and classroom managers, as well as being good role-models for students.

Areas of concern were mostly related to organisational issues. Some teachers felt, for example, that they hadn’t received adequate reporting of what was covered in the workshops, and others noted occasions where the smooth running of workshops (and the school’s wider timetable) had been disrupted because of peer educators not being available, changing week by week, or not arriving on time. Two teachers felt that the peer educators they had observed needed further training and support. The need for the RPC program to present as credible and professional was stressed by several teachers who were in the position of advocating for its continuance at their schools.

In terms of classroom practicalities, the advantages of having a regular room (where furniture could be appropriately arranged) and small class sizes were pointed out. One teacher felt that a double period was too long and that student attention was maintained better over a single period. With regard to involvement of teachers in the workshop: one teacher felt there should be none and that the program should be run independently, but all the others appreciated the opportunity of being involved, whether to the extent of creating materials or simply by observing/supervising.

The content covered in the RPC workshops was generally considered well-focussed and appropriate. One teacher felt the workshops could be more directive in their aim to influence or change attitudes. Another SWC thought content on same-sex relationships and homophobia should not be broached in the young men’s workshops because of the potential for homophobic attitudes to be reinforced through vocal negative reactions on the part of students. This was not considered to be as great a problem in the young women’s workshops.

As for the place of the program in the school curriculum, teachers noted that there were certainly a number of students ‘ready’ to hear the program’s messages in Year 8 (or even earlier), but that there was a great diversity in experience and maturity in that age group. The content of program was considered to be more appropriate to a wider a number of students by Year 9. However, it should be remembered that the RPC program is adapted to suit different levels from years 7 to 12. The teachers interviewed here were speaking of their experience with RPC workshops run at the year 8 and 9 levels, so conclusions about the appropriateness of the content for other year levels should not be drawn.
Conclusion

This evaluation has determined, in answer to the questions posed in the methodology section, that, firstly, the RPC program is largely consistent with international good practice in this field. An expansion of the program to include a ‘whole-school approach’ would bring it more completely in line with international good practice, and although there are ways in which the program can work towards this goal, its full achievement would necessitate interventions at the state and school levels which are beyond the control of the agencies running the program.

At the level of the schools-based interventions, the impact evaluation assessed the extent to which students were affected by the RPC program, against indicators developed from the program’s objectives. For the young men, the questionnaires returned positive indications that the RPC program was achieving its objectives with regards to attitudinal change in decreasing favourable attitudes towards violence and gender-stereotyping. The conflict resolution skills development measure showed more limited results, with most questions providing inconclusive data and only slight positive development indicated by others. This may be due to the small numbers of students involved and relatively large numbers of possible responses (meaning results are ‘dissipated’), or may simply indicate that the skills which the program is seeking to develop may not be apparent immediately following the program, and will instead require time for ‘processing’ by the students.

Questionnaire results for young women were more limited, with only some questions showing evidence of change. There was some positive indication the program was effective in reducing young women’s beliefs condoning violence against women. School A, which received the longer version of the program, showed an overall decrease in such beliefs, while the control school showed an increase. School B, which received a short version of the program, showed results between the two, though with no overall decrease in such attitudes found. For similar reasons as those given for the young men, the results for the skills measurements were statistically inconclusive, though there were some positive indications that the program had developed assertiveness and support-seeking skills and their capacity to support friends who might be victims of violence. Finally, the results on the knowledge measure indicate a greater awareness of issues surrounding violence for those young women who participated in the program.

The qualitative results from the interviews were overwhelmingly positive for both young men and women. Of the twenty students who participated, all thought the program had been beneficial in some way, and most felt it had changed them ‘for the better’ (on self-identified criteria). Many students identified changes in their behaviour and attitudes corresponding with the program’s objectives. Nearly all had enjoyed the experience, the activities and the atmosphere created. While offering differences of opinion on how often the program should be held, all felt they would like to do the program again, and, if possible, on a regular basis.
At the organisational level there are many factors which contribute directly to the success of the program at the intervention level, such as the employment of peer education principles, an effective program design, and various informal procedures for working with schools and teachers. Support structures for peer-educators could be improved by providing more training and professional development opportunities, and regular meetings of peer educators to enable them to share experiences across the two programs would also be valuable. Teachers and student welfare coordinators felt positively about the program, though some reiterated the need for further peer educator training and professional stability in order to ensure the smooth running of the program. They noted, like the peer educators themselves, a need for greater communication with schools on practical issues like the presence of teachers in workshops and classroom setup. There would appear to be scope for expanding the work of current peer educators to create more permanent part-time or job-share positions, which would allow them to develop the program curriculum and provide more support for teachers and schools. Peer educators also had several suggestions for program expansion towards a whole-school approach, such as providing an advisory service and resources to schools and teachers, reporting on the program to parents, or conducting debriefing/feedback sessions for school staff.

In conclusion, there is a great deal of evidence to indicate that Respect, Protect, Connect has a positive impact on students that is in line with the program’s objectives, and that it is viewed positively by the students and peer educators who participate in it. There is scope and justification for expansion of the program so that more students might benefit from it, and so that it might operate in and contribute to a ‘whole-school’ environment promoting healthy and respectful relationships.
Appendix A

Young Men’s Questionnaire

This is not a test! We’re asking you to fill out this questionnaire now, before you do any
classes on the Respect, Protect, Connect program, and we’ll ask you to fill out the same
questionnaire again after the program. This will help us work out how effective the
program is and what we can do to make it better.

You do not have to participate, and can stop participating at any time. The
questionnaire asks what you think about, and how you would react to, some difficult
situations. If you feel uncomfortable with this and don’t want to participate, then you can
simply not answer certain questions, or hand in a blank questionnaire.

If you do decide to participate, it’s very important that you answer the questions as
honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers – we want to know what you
think (not ‘what you think we want you to think’).

Your responses will be completely confidential and anonymous and you cannot be
identified. We don’t want you to put your name on the questionnaire. The only person
who will see the completed questionnaires is the person evaluating the Respect, Protect,
Connect program (Lara Fergus) - the person taking the course won’t see them, and
neither will anyone else. The results will be studied as a group – no-one will be able to
tell which answers were yours.

‘CODE’ NAME: ......................... (we ask you to make up a ‘code’ name so that we can
compare ‘before’ and ‘after’ answers accurately. It can be anything you like, as long as you can remember
it in […] weeks’ time when we’ll ask you to put it on the second questionnaire as well)

AGE: .........................
YEAR LEVEL: .................
SCHOOL: .................................................
Please circle the number that indicates how much you agree or disagree with each statement …

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Agree a lot</th>
<th>Agree a little</th>
<th>Disagree a little</th>
<th>Disagree a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It's important for a man to be strong and tough.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. If someone is angry, they can't help it if they get aggressive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. If someone insults you, it’s okay to smash them.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It’s okay to hit someone who hits you first.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. A man should always refuse to get into a fight, even if there seems to be no way to avoid it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. If I’m mad at someone, I just ignore them.</td>
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<td>7. Sometimes a person doesn’t have any choice but to fight.</td>
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<td>8. When my friends fight, I try to get them to stop.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If I back down from a fight, everyone will think I’m a coward.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. There are better ways to solve problems than fighting.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel big and tough when I push someone around.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. When people get really angry, they can’t help being violent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Nobody respects a man who frequently talks about his worries, fear and problems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. It's okay for a guy to cry in public.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. It's okay for two guys to hug each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. It's okay to be gay.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. Getting lots of sex makes you more of a man.  1  2  3  4
18. When guys yell out sexual comments to women, the women usually like it.  1  2  3  4
19. If a girl wears a short skirt or low-cut top, it means she wants to have sex.  1  2  3  4
20. It's okay to have sex with someone if they are drunk or on drugs.  1  2  3  4
21. Girls shouldn’t sleep around with a lot of guys.  1  2  3  4
22. It is all right for a girl to ask a boy out on a date.  1  2  3  4
23. Girls should have the same freedom as boys.  1  2  3  4
24. Sometimes violence is the only way to express your feelings.  1  2  3  4
25. Violence is never the victim’s fault.  1  2  3  4

Select the response that best corresponds to the way you would react or behave in the following situations.

1. Imagine that you’re in line for a drink of water. Someone your age comes along and pushes you out of line. 
   What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)
   □ Say something nasty to him.
   □ Ask him why he pushed you.
   □ Nothing, just walk away.
   □ Tell him it’s your place in line.
   □ Push him out of line.

2. You’re walking to the shops. Someone your age walks up to you and calls you a name. 
   What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)
   □ Call him a name.
   □ Ask him what’s going on.
   □ Walk away from him.
   □ Tell him to cut it out.
   □ Hit him.
3. You see your friend fighting with another guy his age.
What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)
☐ Cheer for your friend to win.
☐ Find out why your friend and the other kid are fighting.
☐ Go away and let your friend and the other kid fight it out.
☐ Try to get both of them to calm down and stop fighting.
☐ Join your friend fighting against the other kid.

4. A friend tells you that he thinks he’s gay.
What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)
☐ Avoid him from then on – you don’t want to be associated with him.
☐ Tell him that’s fine – it doesn’t change your friendship.
☐ Feel sorry for him, and try and talk him out of it.
☐ Tell him he’s disgusting and to stay away from you.

5. You’re at a party and you see another guy who’s talking to your girlfriend – you think he’s trying to pick her up.
What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)
☐ Walk up and ask him why he’s messing with your girlfriend.
☐ Ignore it, it doesn’t matter.
☐ Walk up and push him away from your girlfriend.
☐ Go to join in the conversation.

6. Another student says something insulting about someone in your family.
What would you probably do if this happened to you? (tick all that apply)
☐ Say something insulting about someone in his family.
☐ Ask him what’s going on.
☐ Walk away from him.
☐ Tell him to cut it out.
☐ Hit him.

Thank you for taking the time to do this questionnaire.
Appendix B

Young Women’s Questionnaire

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If you do decide to participate, it’s very important that you answer the questions as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers – we want to know what you think (not ‘what you think we want you to think’).

Your responses will be completely confidential and anonymous and you cannot be identified. We don’t want you to put your name on the questionnaire. The only person who will see the completed questionnaires is the person evaluating the Respect, Protect, Connect program (Lara Fergus) - the person taking the course won’t see them, and neither will anyone else. The results will be studied as a group – no-one will be able to tell which answers were yours.

‘CODE’ NAME: ......................... (we ask you to make up a ‘code’ name so that we can compare ‘before’ and ‘after’ answers accurately. It can be anything you like, as long as you can remember it in […] weeks’ time when we’ll ask you to put it on the second questionnaire as well)

AGE:  ......................
YEAR LEVEL:  ......................
SCHOOL:  ...........................................
Please circle the most correct answer:

9. Women are most at risk of violence:
   a. on the street
   b. in the home
   c. anywhere in bad suburbs or cities

10. In most cases, violence is committed by:
    a. someone the victim knows
    b. strangers
    c. people with psychiatric illnesses

11. What percentage of people who commit violent crimes are men:
    a. 50%
    b. 82%
    c. 98%

12. What is violence:
    a. physical abuse, like hitting, kicking, slapping
    b. emotional abuse, like humiliation, trying to control or manipulate someone, spreading rumours about them
    c. sexual abuse, like rape, incest, sexual put downs and insults
    d. all of the above

13. Men who were abused when they were children:
    a. sometimes can’t help being violent because their parents taught them to be violent
    b. can control their aggressive behaviour
    c. will always be violent

14. Violence:
    a. is never the victim’s fault
    b. is sometimes the victim’s fault
    c. not sure

15. If a man has sex with a woman while she’s drunk or drugged, that’s ‘rape’:
    a. true
    b. false
    c. don’t know

16. Women in violent relationships:
    a. can leave easily
    b. should try and make it work
    c. can find it very difficult to leave
**Please circle the number that indicates how much you agree or disagree with each statement …**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree a lot</th>
<th>Agree a little</th>
<th>Disagree a little</th>
<th>Disagree a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26. It is all right for a girl to ask a guy out on a date.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. It’s okay for a guy to grab or restrain his girlfriend.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. It’s okay for a guy to try and convince his girlfriend to do other sexual things she doesn’t want to do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. It’s okay for a guy to physically force his girlfriend to do sexual things she doesn’t want to do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. A girl who makes her boyfriend jealous on purpose deserves to be hit.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Sometimes violence is the only way to express your feelings.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Some couples must use violence to solve their problems.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Girls shouldn’t sleep around with a lot of guys.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Circle the response or responses that best correspond to the way you would react or behave in the following situations.**

1. You’re in line at the canteen, and a guy your age comes along and pushes in front of you. Do you:
   a) Say something nasty to him.
   b) Ask him why he pushed in.
   c) Nothing, just walk away.
   d) Tell him it’s your place in line.
   e) Push him out of line.
2. One of your friends starts acting differently from normal. She’s started getting argumentative and aggressive with you, she swears at the teachers and dresses more ‘provocatively’. Do you:
a) Tell her to get a grip.
b) Think ‘it’s not worth it’ and stop hanging around with her.
c) Start criticising her behaviour with your other friends.
d) Try and find out what’s going on - maybe something’s happened to make her act this way.

3. A friend tells you that her boyfriend keeps putting her down and making her feel bad about herself. You’ve met her boyfriend and he seems like a really nice guy to you. Do you:
a) Think she might be making it up for attention.
b) Give her information about where she might get help and support.
c) Ignore it – it’s her problem to sort out, not yours.
d) Talk to another friend about it to see what she thinks.

4. A group of guys yell out sexual comments and whistle at you when you walk by. Do you:
a) Ignore them and stare straight ahead.
b) Shout abuse at them.
c) Stop and ask them what the hell’s the matter with them.
d) Wink at them and blow them a kiss.

5. You’re in line at the canteen, and a girl your age comes along and pushes in front of you. Do you:
a) Say something nasty to her.
b) Ask her why she pushed in.
c) Nothing, just walk away.
d) Tell her it’s your place in line.
e) Push her out of line.

6. You are on a crowded train and you become aware that the man behind you is standing much closer than he needs to. Do you:
a) Get off at the next stop,
b) Move away.
c) Say loudly ‘Back off’.
d) Nothing.

7. You are on a train and you notice that another young woman about your age is being hassled and touched up by a man in the carriage. Do you:
a) Shout out ‘Leave her alone’.
b) Ignore it and face the other way.
c) Go up to the girl and pretend she’s your friend.
d) Glare at him and give him dirty looks.
e) Get off at the next stop.
8. A friend tells you that her boyfriend gets jealous when she talks to other guys, shouts at her and holds onto her arm so she can’t get away. Do you:
   a) Tell her that’s violence and offer her support.
   b) Say ‘He must really love you’.
   c) Do nothing – it’s her business.
   d) Confront the boyfriend about it.

_Thankyou for taking the time to do this questionnaire._
Appendix C

Student Interview Schedule

Pre-interview brief (for interviewer):

- Introduce yourself + the purpose of interview – point out that you are helping with an evaluation of the RPC program to find out what is good about it and what can be improved.
- Note that there are no right or wrong answers – we’re doing the interviews because we don’t know the answers to the questions we’re asking – only they can tell us!
- Important that they answer as honestly as possible, and if they don’t understand, ask.
- Cover confidentiality – you would like to record the interview so that we can remember what has been said, but no-one else will hear it except the evaluator (Lara Fergus). Also point out that you will not report what interview participants have said to any of the teachers, either on the program or at the school. What students say in the interviews may be quoted in a report, but the student and the school will not be identified – no-one will know who said it.
- Any questions on all that?

For the record:

1. What year are you in? _____________
2. How old are you? _____________
3. Last week you finished a series of classes on the “Respect, Protect, Connect” program. Can you remember if you missed any for any reason? [remind them we’re not going to tell anyone!]
   Y/N

4. How many? _______

5. OK, so of the # classes that ran, you were there for _____ of them?

Main questions:

The rest of the interview is in two parts. We want to know firstly, how you think the program affected you, and secondly, what you think we could do to make the program better.
As for how it affected you:

6. What is the thing that stays in your mind most about the whole program? (that is, what is the thing that you personally remember the most?)

7. Why do you think that’s the thing you remember?

8. Moving on, can you tell me about a time during the classes when you felt really good? (that is, when you were really happy to be there?)

[Follow-up questions at discretion]
   a) Can you describe the situation a bit more?
   b) How exactly did you feel – strong, safe, part of a group?

9. Going to the opposite extreme – can you tell me about a time when you didn’t feel good at all? (when you felt a bit uncomfortable or annoyed …?)

[Follow-up questions at discretion]
   a) Can you describe the situation a bit more?
   b) How exactly did you feel – sad, angry, unsafe/threatened, bad memories?

10. Can you think of any point during the entire program where something was said that really affected you, whether good or bad? That is, something you’d never thought of before, or which put into words something you’d felt for a long time, or which you felt strongly was right, or was wrong?

[Follow-up questions at discretion]
   a) Why do you think that affected you so much?
   b) Do you think that might change the way you see things in the future?

11. Can you think of anything else that happened during the program that changed the way you think about something?

12. Along the same lines, can you think of any past situation which you would now handle differently, or judge differently, because of the program? (eg – a situation where you were uncomfortable or felt unsafe, or where a friend told you something that you would now react to differently?

13. Can you think of anything else you learned during the program which might affect the way you act in the future?
14. Overall, what changes in yourself do you see or feel as a result of the program?

15. What changes have you seen in other students who participated in the program?

**Moving on to the questions on how you think the program could be made better.**

16. What do you think was the main purpose of the program? That is, what do you think it was trying to achieve?

17. To what extent do you think it achieved these aims?

*Follow-up questions if appropriate*

   a) What stopped it from achieving the aims (even partly)?

   b) What are some of the ways you think it would have worked better? That is, if you were teaching these classes, and you wanted to achieve the aims you mentioned, what would you do differently?

18. What do you think was the best thing about the program?

19. And what was the worst?

*If not covered in last two questions*

20. What was your favourite game or activity? Why?

21. What was your least favourite? Why?

22. Finally, how often do you think you would like to do this sort of program at school? (eg – every two years, every year, every week?)
Appendix D

Parent/Student Information and Consent Form

Evaluation of the ‘Respect, Protect, Connect’ program

As you may know, Year Eight/Nine students at […] are currently participating in a positive life-skills program called Respect, Protect, Connect. This program has been running in schools throughout the Southern and Eastern metropolitan regions for ten years, and was developed by two community organisations, with state government funding. The current program consists of weekly workshops over a […]-week period, with the final workshop being held next […].

In the interest of providing feedback to the educators and managers of the Respect, Protect, Connect program, we’d like to ask students to participate in an evaluation of the program. This evaluation will explore what students learn from the program, and how it might affect their attitudes, skills and behaviours with regard to conflict resolution, relationships, and other life skills. It will also ask students how they felt about the program and which parts of it they found most useful. It will enable program managers and educators to improve the program so that it will be of increased benefit to schools and their students in the future. The results of the evaluation may also be used to inform and improve positive life-skills education in other Australian schools.

What students will be asked to do:

If parents and students agree to participate, students will be given a questionnaire to complete one week after the last class of the program. This will take around 5-10 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will explore what students learnt from the course. For example, students will be asked about their attitudes and knowledge related to conflict resolution and relationships, and how they deal with problems.

Approximately ten students will also participate, if they choose, in semi-structured interviews with a trained peer-educator. The interviews will take about half an hour per student, and will follow the questionnaires a week after the end of the program. The aim of the interviews is to learn how students felt about the program, what they found most useful, and what they think could be improved. Participating students will be offered a $20 music or movie voucher to thank them for their time and thoughts.
Consent and confidentiality:

This information sheet is designed to allow parents and students to make an informed decision about whether or not students want to participate in the evaluation. If you have any questions about the evaluation, please feel free to contact the researcher evaluating the program, Lara Fergus, at the email address or telephone number below. Regardless of students’ or parents’ previous consent, students will be able to withdraw from the evaluation at any time they want to.

Students’ responses will be completely confidential and anonymous and students will not be able to be identified. They will be told not to put their name on the questionnaire or mention it during the interview. Results, including questionnaires and interview recordings, will be stored securely for five years and then destroyed. Only the evaluator and the program managers will see the results. Any results published from this evaluation will be in the form of group results so that no-one can identify particular students’ answers. At no point will the school be identified by name in any published results.

Further information:

We hope you will agree to participate in this evaluation. We believe it will be of great benefit to future students by providing us with the information we need to improve the Respect, Protect, Connect program, at minimal disruption to the school and students. If you would like a copy of the questionnaire, or have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact Lara Fergus at […]

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PARENT / STUDENT CONSENT FORM

If the student agrees to participate in the evaluation, AND if his/her parents are agree, then there is nothing that needs to be done. You do not need to return this form. Students NOT wanting to participate, and parents NOT wanting their child to participate in this evaluation should sign and return the following form. If either or both signatures are present, the student will not be allowed to participate in the evaluation.

Students
NO I do not want to participate:
Print name: ____________________________
Signed: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Parent/guardian
NO, I do not want my child to participate:
Print name: ____________________________
Name of student: ____________________________
Relationship to student: ____________________________
Signed: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________