



Ending Violence Against Women Queensland (EVAWQ)

Bringing Together Women's Health, Refuges, Sexual Violence and Domestic & Family Violence

6 July 2021

Australia Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Subject: EVAWQ submission to the Australian Curriculum Review consultation.

By Email: engagement@acara.edu.au.

Dear ACARA,

Ending Violence Against Women Queensland (EVAWQ) would like to commend Australia Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) for increasing the inclusion of content on consent, sexuality and respectful relationships in the revised Foundation – year 10 (F – 10) curriculum. The review poses an opportunity to make a commitment in Australian school curriculum to educate our young people on consent, sexuality, respectful relationships using evidence-based, whole of school approaches addressing the drivers of gender-based violence. It is crucial this is consistent across all year levels in an age-appropriate way and is addressed across all curriculum areas. EVAWQ would like to recommend three areas of improvement for the ACARA review of F – 10 curriculum.

1.0 Consent and respectful relationships education including sexuality and sex positive concepts should be part of Health and Physical Education curriculum for all year levels appropriately.

It is imperative young people are taught consent, respectful relationships, and sex positive concepts before they reach the danger zone for both experiencing and perpetrating sexual assault which starts at age 15. Currently sexuality and sex positive concepts are not included in the Health and Physical Education curriculum for Foundation – Year 2. These are important lessons that need to occur in an age-appropriate manner from formative years in an education setting. Not only does this create a huge shift in culture, but there is well supported [evidence](#)¹ this approach prevents the occurrence of gendered violence. Furthermore, the sex education needs to be completely inclusive of LGBTQI+ students, to make sure they are not alienated by peers or missing out on important health and relationships information. Removing the

¹ World Health Organisation. (2010). *Violence Prevention the Evidence: Series of briefings on violence prevention*. https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/4th_milestones_meeting/evidence_briefings_all.pdf.



heteronormative lens from education is imperative considering the growing number of children and young adults identifying as a part of the LGBTQI+ community.

In addition to the revised curriculum EVAWQ recommends incentives or mandates should be introduced for schools to receive expert training and or support for staff and teachers. This ensures a consistent evidence-based whole-of-school approach to consent, sexuality and respectful relationships education addressing the drivers of gendered violence such as harmful stereotypes and norms leading to inequality, disrespect, and violence.²

Furthermore, it is important that these concepts are included across curriculum areas such as Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, The Arts and English. A whole of school approach as outlined by Our Watch³ is shown to be more effective method of introducing and reiterating these concepts.

2.0 In the digital age where it is difficult for students to avoid harmful online use, such as accessing inappropriate pornography, it is imperative Digital Literacy curriculum includes education addressing the harmful stereotypes and norms leading to gendered violence found in such material.

In 2016, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) was engaged by the Department of Social Services to review what the available research evidence tells us about the issue of pornography and young people.⁴ They found that nearly half of children between the ages of 9-16 experience regular exposure to sexual images and pornography. With increased access to technology at all ages, these figures are not likely to change.

The eradication of porn, or an abstinence approach to pornography, is not going to help students and young adults to avoid exposure. AIFS research shows the best approach to student's exposure to pornography is to encourage open communication, discussion, and critical thinking on the part of the students.

Digital Literacy capabilities include practicing digital safety and wellbeing. This includes:

- Improve students' understanding of the nature and impact of technology use on their health, work productivity, wellbeing, and lifestyles.
- Assist students to develop the appropriate technical, social, cognitive, communicative, and decision-making skills to address online risks.

²Our Watch. (2021). *Respectful relationships education to prevent gender-based violence*. <https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/04/28133853/RREiPS-evaluation-report-accessible-280421.pdf> (page 32).

³ Our Watch. (2021). *Respectful relationships education to prevent gender-based violence*. <https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/04/28133853/RREiPS-evaluation-report-accessible-280421.pdf> (page 33).

⁴Quadara, Antonia, El-Murr, Alissar and Latham, Joe. (2017). *The effects of pornography on children and young people*. <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/effects-pornography-children-and-young-people-snapshot>



- Support students in understanding content risks they face online, such as hurtful user generated content, and the strategies involved in dealing with them.

It is important these skills are taught in an age-appropriate manner as they relate specifically to exposure to harmful content such as pornography. This must include:

- Develop critical thinking skills students can apply if they are exposed to pornography, so they can understand concepts may be dramatized or edited.
- Improve understanding certain imagery may strengthen attitudes supportive of sexual violence and violence against women, which may include not portraying affirmative consent to any or all acts, social scripts and discourses about men, women, and sex, such as "once aroused, men cannot control themselves", "women say no when they mean yes", "women often play hard to get", "it's men's role to pursue women".
- Emphasise education on safe sex practices not explicitly portrayed in pornography, such as not using condoms and unsafe anal and vaginal sex.
- Assist students to develop skills to regulate emotions, cope and discuss imagery that may have been confusing, or made them feel uncomfortable.

3.0 Evidence based education interventions promoting equity and diversity using a gender based intersectional lens must be embedded and mandated as part of 'general capabilities' and as a 'cross-curriculum priority' for all year levels.

Evidence shows a consistent whole of school approach to equity and diversity using a gender based intersectional lens is the most effective primary prevention to gender-based violence. This includes the breakdown of drivers such as harmful stereotype and norms across the whole school community: staff, teachers, coaches, and students. Short of becoming a 'cross-curriculum priority' it is imperative all curriculums and general capabilities include learning outcomes across all year levels focused on concepts promoting equity and diversity. This may include but not limited to:

- Challenge gender stereotypes through personal and social capability learning outcomes.
- Highlight diversity and equity using a gender based intersectional lens through English curriculum sub-strands: language and literature.
- Add under all Humanities and Social Sciences year level descriptions/ learning outcomes encouraging the use of alternate historical evidence that challenges harmful gender and cultural norms and encourages positive concepts of change, equity, and diversity.

4.0 Recommendations for implementation

EVAWQ understands the scope of this review is on curriculum. However, it is critically important the implementation of the elements discussed above is both consistent and informed by evidence-based approaches.



ACARA, the Australian Government, and schools across Australia must harnesses the expertise of specialist organisations to support the design of curriculum and the implementation of its delivery in individual schools. Engaging expert sector organisations to support embedding the evidence-based gendered drivers of domestic, family and sexual violence is essential to a consistent and effective approach.

There are certain risks to introducing such content in F- 10 curriculum. These risks, such as disclosure, can be appropriately managed and avoided if schools are supported by the Australian Government to receive expertise training, or support from specialist organisations to implement this curriculum content using trauma informed approach.

As part of a whole of school approach discussed above it is recommended that curriculum is implemented and co-designed with young people to ensure their voices are heard and embedded in curriculum delivery. ACARA and the Australian Government must value the learning and experience of future generations and provide a vehicle for self-determination in education on a subject that disproportionately effects people under the age of 18.

EVAWQ urges ACARA to use this review as an opportunity to make meaningful changes to the Australian Education Curriculum to assist in the effort to prevent the perpetration of gender-based violence in our communities and ensure the Curriculum reflects the current movement and sentiment in society. In summary, improvements recommended to the review include ensuring all year levels receive consent and respectful relationship education that includes sexuality and sex positive concepts, digital literacy capabilities are explicitly applied to the exposure to harmful content such as inappropriate pornography and the introduction of equity and diversity curriculum wide using a gender based intersectional lens to ensure a whole of school approach.



5.0 Signatures of Support

Ending Violence Against Women Queensland



Women's Health Queensland
WHQ Women's Health
QUEENSLAND

Children by Choice
CHILDREN BY CHOICE
ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

Lutheran Services

Mary & Martha's Domestic Violence Refuge



Micah Projects

MICAH PROJECTS



Breaking Social Isolation
Building Community

Domestic Violence Action Centre



Mackay's Women's Service



Sera's Women's Shelter



DV Connect
DVCONNECT
Be heard. Be safe.