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"Time to get cracking"

The challenge of developing best practice in Australian sexual assault prevention education

Susan Evans, Chris Krogh and Moira Carmody

Governments across Australia acknowledge that the prevention of violence against women is a key priority for action. Consequently, the Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) were commissioned to complete a one-year project to develop and trial a National Sexual Assault Prevention Education (SAPE) Framework. The resulting report, *Framing Best Practice: National Standards for the Primary Prevention of Sexual Assault Through Education* (Carmody et al., 2009), recommended the development of the National Sexual Assault Prevention Education Standards to provide a framework to guide current and new programs in developing "best practice" based on international and local research evidence.

In this paper, three of the authors of the standards discuss a number of challenges that programs are likely to face in the effort to formulate best practice in sexual assault prevention education. The discussion is based on findings from interviews conducted with 32 prevention educators and program writers during a research project in which questions were asked about program development. Some of the challenges include: the distinctiveness of the prevention education role, conceptual underpinnings in programs, program development and evaluation, working in schools, choosing a pedagogical approach to work with young people, and program adaptation for the purposes of cultural relevance. In addressing each of these challenges, connections are made between what interviewees said and what is communicated in the standards. The aim of the paper is less with positioning the standards as the final word on best practice, and more with arguing the need for further debate, discussion and action to develop best practice in sexual assault prevention education.

Australian Government

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Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault

The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault aims to improve access to current information on sexual assault in order to assist policy makers and others interested in this area to develop evidence-based strategies to prevent, respond to, and ultimately reduce the incidence of sexual assault.

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Acknowledgements

This paper provides a picture of the challenges faced when designing and facilitating sexual assault prevention education in Australia. For our purposes, the term "sexual assault prevention education" refers to educational programs that target issues related to sexual assault before the problem occurs (i.e., at the level of primary prevention). A key function of primary prevention programs is to promote desirable alternatives to the problem(s) needing to be prevented (Evans, 2008; Guterman, 2004; McMahon, 2000). Primary prevention of sexual assault through education focuses on changing behaviour and/or knowledge and skills of individuals so that healthy and positive sexual attitudes, behaviours and relationships are facilitated (VicHealth, 2007). This is to be distinguished from secondary and tertiary violence prevention activities. At present, secondary and tertiary prevention activities are usually enacted *after* a problem behaviour or attitude has been identified. As such, primary prevention efforts aim to stop sexual violence from occurring in the first place.

In Australia, sexual assault prevention education programs have been delivered in schools and community settings for a little over a decade. One-off information sessions targeting rape prevention have been a feature since the early 1980s. The genesis of such programs has been feminist community-based organisations and enthusiastic workers who have developed programs via "borrowing" from similar programs running elsewhere and learning on the job. Workers involved with such programs have not had access to formal practice standards when developing or evaluating programs. Nevertheless, recent years have seen a growing sophistication in program development (see Carmody, 2009a, for a comprehensive review of the shifts in primary prevention education). Several programs have been written or adapted in response to the "best practice" evidence base suggested in international and national literature, and new programs are being packaged, purchased and innovatively replicated in some Australian communities (see Quadara, 2008, for examples of such programs).

At this time of growing sophistication in the field, a National Sexual Assault Prevention Education research project was commissioned by National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV) with funding from the Australian Government. The aim was to develop standards for best practice in sexual assault prevention education (Carmody et al., 2009; see Box 1).[1] These were

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1   The full report, with complete details of the standards are available at: <www.nasasv.org.au/PDFs/Standards_Full_Report.pdf>.

Box 1: Rationales for standards

Standard 1: Using coherent conceptual approaches to program design

The theoretical or conceptual approach used in a program provides the basis for understanding why sexual violence occurs and the prevention pathway that should be used to reduce sexual violence. There are a range of different conceptual approaches to program design. Whatever approach is taken, a gender analysis of sexual assault is foundational to any program.

Standard 2: Demonstrating the use of a theory of change

Sexual assault prevention programs are to be based on models of attitude change, skills development and behavioural change. Theories of change are widespread in the fields of educational and social psychology, addressing individuals, groups, communities and society. Much has been learned about how to facilitate individual behavioural change through education, and it is known that different interventions can lead to different changes in the target population. Programs should demonstrate a conceptual link between the activities being undertaken and the proposed change outcomes of these activities.

Standard 3: Undertaking inclusive, relevant and culturally sensitive practice

All sexual assault prevention education programs portray the nature of the violence problem, and promote notions about the appropriate means to achieve change. The specifics of these notions and means are culturally-based. Program developers need to be aware of the culturally-based elements of programs and strive to make programs inclusive, relevant and sensitive for all participating population groups. Programs that are developed for one population group may not be suitable for other groups without meaningful adjustment.

Standard 4: Undertaking comprehensive program development and delivery

Sexual assault prevention education programs incorporate decisions about *who* the program is targeted at and delivered by; *what* will be the specific activities and structure of the program; *where* the program will be delivered to reach the target group; *when* the program will be run, and over what period. These decisions are sometimes based on organisational purpose, philosophy and resources.

Standard 5: Using effective evaluation strategies

Evaluation is a tool for learning and a process supporting accountability. There is a range of evaluation strategies that can be used depending on the information sought. Program evaluation is a specific skill set and the development of effective evaluation strategies may require consultation with people with specific expertise in this area.

Standard 6: Supporting thorough training and professional development of educators

The success or otherwise of a particular program, and the sustainability of prevention education in a community, is enhanced by the knowledge, skills and stance of educators. These educators need resources and support specific to their prevention role.

Source: Carmody et al., 2009, pp. 23–29

developed through a critical review and analysis of relevant international and local research evidence. The research team also felt it was important that the standards should be developed in consultation with Australian sexual assault prevention educators and other key mentors working in violence prevention. To this end, the research team conducted face-to-face and phone interviews with violence prevention professionals from most States and Territories in Australia to learn about the current state of play in sexual assault prevention education. These interviews better equipped the authors to write practice standards that are relevant, achievable and aspirational. It is our hope the standards are perceived by those working in the field as a form of guidance, while still being flexible and accommodating of a variety of promising practice approaches.

The purpose of this paper is to identify the challenges that Australian sexual assault prevention educators face during program development, and to consider the implications these challenges might have in relation to the standards. Participants provided context-rich accounts of doing prevention work. Most of the challenges discussed in the paper are relevant to program design (theory, planning and evaluation). Others concern choosing a pedagogical approach and taking a political stance in the work. The findings from our field interviews suggest that the question of best practice remains unsettled in these areas; there are diverse and diverging opinions among Australian violence prevention educators about these areas of practice. In revealing this diversity, our intention is to hold both the standards and prevention educators' practices up for critical consideration. It is our hope that the paper provokes reflection, debate and action as Australian sexual assault prevention educators develop programs in their local settings.

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Methodology: Analysing what program writers and educators told us in interviews

During the course of the research project, semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators and key mentors who are working in an area relevant to Australian sexual assault prevention education.[2] The research team interviewed 28 female workers and 4 male workers. Nine people in this sample were not involved in the direct delivery of prevention programs; however, they had been involved in writing and development, management, support or policy relating to such programs. The other 23 people were educators either currently or previously involved in program delivery. This sample represented 21 different prevention education programs that are being delivered in one or more states and territories in Australia. Tasmania and Queensland were not represented, as we were unable to locate any programs that met the research criteria in these locations despite numerous attempts and consultations with service providers. The majority of programs in the sample had been delivered in school settings or other places of learning, such as universities, while a smaller number had been delivered in community settings such as youth centres or sporting clubs. The majority of programs had been developed to prevent sexual assault or interpersonal violence at the primary prevention level. A small number of programs in the sample were programs focused on sex and relationships education that had some emphasis on sexual assault prevention.

In addition to interviewing workers directly involved with writing or delivering prevention education programs, the project identified practitioners who had extensive experience in working with people with disabilities, or working with communities from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Overall, the sample of workers who were interviewed represents many years of professional experience across a number of practice fields, including gender violence prevention, and experience in academic research and policy work.

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2. The recruitment criteria for involving programs in the research interviews included programs that: extended beyond information giving sessions; had a skill or behavioural change focus; and, wherever possible, had been evaluated.

In the interviews, questions were asked about the genesis and development of prevention programs in which workers were involved or of which they were aware, in addition to questions about opportunities and challenges they faced in prevention work. With the permission of interviewees, the audio of these discussions was recorded and later transcribed. A large volume of data was generated through this process. For the purposes of writing this paper, we were interested in reflections that spoke to challenges in developing sexual assault prevention education.[3]

Many more challenges were raised during the interviews than those discussed in the paper. Absent in this paper is discussion of the challenge of funding and resources in sexual assault prevention education. A number of participants referred to the predicament whereby they feel under pressure to develop "best practice" in their program while running the program on shoestring budgets or from within agencies that may not value primary prevention work. Other challenging trends raised by interviewees not discussed in this paper include: practices of "bluetoothing" or "sex-ting" images[4] of naked peers to others without consent being given, an escalation in young people believing that performing oral and anal sex is the norm, and immediate accessibility to hard core pornography. In this paper, we are concerned with issues relevant to identifying primary prevention practices and program development.

The research project provided us with the opportunity to gain a clearer sense of what is occurring in Australian sexual assault prevention education as a distinct field of practice. The discussion in this paper is not concerned with singling out the views of particular workers interviewed. Rather, we analysed the data to identify trends or patterns when violence prevention educators respond to challenges in the work, and interpreted these trends in relation to the standards and other relevant literature.

To maintain confidentiality, interviewee quotes are differentiated by stating the affiliated program type or setting only. However, to assist the flow of discussion, shorter quotes in the body of paragraphs are unaffiliated. The field is quite small in Australia and giving detailed descriptors of interviewees' state location or program name could violate confidentiality.

Practice challenges in sexual assault prevention education

1. How is the primary prevention role distinct from a tertiary service provision role?

A significant but largely unexplored problem in the gender violence prevention field is recognising the distinctiveness of primary prevention. Primary prevention interventions are those that seek to prevent violence before it occurs and can be targeted to the whole population or to particular groups that may be at higher risk of being the perpetrators or victims of violence. Some primary prevention interventions (such as social marketing campaigns, counselling and group work) focus on changing behaviour or building the knowledge and skills of individuals. However, primary prevention can also focus on changing environments so that they are safer for women, so such interventions may not have a particular focus on violence, but rather address its underlying causes (such as gender inequality and poverty). Tertiary intervention strategies, on the other hand, are implemented *after* violence occurs. They aim to deal with the violence, prevent its consequences (such as mental health problems) and ensure that violence does not occur again or escalate. Such strategies include crisis accommodation and social support for victims of violence and criminal justice and therapeutic interventions for perpetrators

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How different, then, is the set of skills required for prevention education compared with the skills required for tertiary prevention? What level of accountability should exist between the primary and tertiary prevention sectors? The standards provide no clear directive about these things; however, they

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3. For further information about the SAPE project, see Carmody et al. (2009).
4. Sending images electronically using mobile phone or other telecommunication technologies.

assume that primary prevention education is a distinct field of practice requiring specific knowledge and skills such as teaching/educating skills, evaluation skills, and the ability to foster leadership skills in other individuals.

Our interview findings suggest that the concept of primary prevention of sexual assault through education has not been consistently understood or accepted in the gender violence prevention field. Questions about the value and distinctiveness of primary prevention work (when compared with tertiary service provision) are still being asked, as will be shown below.

There is some dissimilarity between workers who moved from tertiary/crisis sexual assault service provision to now engaging in primary prevention and who regard their role as distinctive from the tertiary role, and workers who assimilate or "fit in" prevention education work alongside their counselling or victim-advocacy role. "Converts" to primary prevention as a distinctive field of practice said things like: "Primary prevention is a brand new world, really brand new world"; "You have to get your head around the evidence base of science of the work" and:

> The landscape before us had been a lot of passionate people who just want to go and talk with kids, who [did not] have the academic background or ability to do [the work] effectively. That's what makes our program different. (Male program writer and educator, in-schools program)

One interviewee spoke about how the skill set needed in primary prevention education is different to that required in the tertiary role:[5] "It's not therapeutic, you can't ask therapeutic questions in programs. The goals are different". Another shared that her willingness to be converted to primary prevention didn't occur until she had gauged that the Australian violence against women field was ready for this shift. She went on to say:

> I was very interested about moving into a phase that was about primary prevention because most of my work had been at the other end. I talk of myself as being a bit of a convert because I had previously been quite oppositional to prevention [and] quite critical of behaviour change programs. (Female policy developer)

These comments show that for some people taking up a primary prevention role is a deliberate and considered leap of faith.

However, not all interviewees were necessarily convinced by the primary prevention framework. One interviewee said: "We have never actually felt confident about prevention. Our service was not comfortable about it". Others interviewed did not consider that primary prevention work is necessarily distinct from much of their tertiary prevention role. For example, one interviewee described her role as "half counselling, half education" and went on to say:

> I think all counselling positions should have a component where they do prevention … It's really nice to have the time to do something where you feel it's preventative, it is something positive. (Female educator, in-schools program)

This interviewee considered that doing trauma work in conjunction with prevention work is a "healthier balance" for tertiary workers.

This perspective contrasts with the way in which primary prevention education is conceived in the standards. We speculate that some workers who "balance" having a prevention education and counselling/victim-advocacy role may not appreciate adequately the distinctive concept and practice of doing primary prevention education. Perhaps because tertiary workers are doing awareness-raising as a component in their existing role, this may be mistaken for being the same thing as doing primary prevention education. However, as argued in the standards—consistent with other international evidence (Carmody, 2009a; Ellis, 2008; Martin et al., 2008)—primary prevention education is a practice requiring a distinct set of knowledge and skills when compared with doing tertiary prevention work.

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5. Of interest here is the shift towards a therapy culture in sexual assault tertiary service provision. This shift can be recognised particularly in NSW, where sexual assault workers housed in Area Health Services have few opportunities to be involved in social activism and are under great pressure to relieve the demands of client waiting lists.

The standards lend support to the idea that effective primary prevention work requires workers to be specifically trained in and possess a clear understanding of the concept of primary prevention (see Carmody, 2009a, for discussion of these issues).

Of concern when analysing the interview data was finding that some primary prevention educators working in a tertiary prevention service felt they were not supported. There may be difficulty accessing supervision or guidance in their prevention education role. One program facilitator said: "In tertiary services there's not the recognition [that] workers doing community education might need support or supervision in the same way that a counsellor advocate or an outreach person might need". Other workers in the sample felt very supported working in a tertiary environment, with one saying this set up is what "sustains the prevention work we do".

Several reasons were suggested by participants as to why primary prevention work is not adequately supported in tertiary prevention settings. The reasons given included: lack of funding and resources, lack of ownership (when the program has been imported from elsewhere), lack of time, and participants feeling "left out" or not being invited to forums where primary prevention is promoted and discussed. It is timely for the tertiary prevention sector to recognise that supporting effective primary prevention education efforts is necessary. Supporting the development of effective primary prevention involves the recognition that this is demanding work that requires educators to be skilled in facilitating learning and working with groups. Prevention educators must constantly be aware of and responsive to group dynamics and how these affect the potential for attitude and skill change for individual participants. It is important that educators have access to professional development and supervision and for these things to be paid for by employing agencies. One interviewee stated, "Prevention workers are having to educate people in their own service about the benefit and needs of prevention as well as educating people in schools or communities". This clearly affects the pace and progress of developing sexual assault prevention education.

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The aim to build an acceptance of and commitment to primary prevention in the Australian gender violence prevention field is supported by the introduction of formal standards for best practice in sexual assault prevention education, together with publications relevant to best practice in primary prevention prepared by our research partners at the Victorian Health Foundation (Flood & Fergus, in press). One program coordinator said: "It's time for the broader movement of primary prevention to get cracking, to be seen as something to really try if we're interested in social change". We recognise the need for further debate on how the tertiary and primary prevention sectors can work together in a way that is mutually beneficial.

2. Conceptual underpinnings in sexual assault prevention education: Is feminism now passé?

Feminism is arguably recognised as the most important conceptual framework that has shaped Australian domestic and sexual violence prevention efforts over the last four decades. The use of a "feminist approach" in programs is recognisable when gender inequality and gender relations are understood as the key problems underpinning the occurrence of sexual violence. We recognise that there is no single feminist framework and that different feminisms (feminist hybrid theories) offer up different approaches to prevention. Key varieties of feminism shaping the Australian gender violence landscape have been liberal and radical feminisms (Spongberg, 1998). A feminist prevention approach assumes that women and men have different political responsibilities in sexual assault prevention by virtue of the fact that victimisation of sexual violence is unequally distributed along gender lines.

Our interviews indicated that a feminist or pro-feminist approach underpins most programs. However, the majority of programs appear to supplement a feminist approach to violence prevention with other theories and practice approaches. A few programs seemed to have actively rejected the use of a

feminist approach in that they minimised the focus on gender inequality and the social positioning of women in the prevention strategy. Other programs had given minimal consideration to the question of what theoretical approaches can underpin prevention work.

A number of interviewees expressed the view that sexual assault prevention education is unequivocally a political exercise in terms of gender and power relations. Seventy one per cent of programs were identified by us as "feminist programs"; that is, they used a social learning approach that rested on feminist assumptions. A social learning approach relies on the acquisition of social competency fostered within and between groups. An educator involved with a school-based program said:

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> We use a feminist approach in our program. The core principles are not blaming the victim, the perpetrator taking responsibility, that sexual assault it's a crime [based on] gender, power and control, and is not about sex.

However, the majority of programs combined a feminist approach with other theoretical or pedagogical approaches. Educators have recognised other effective social change strategies on offer (for example, community-based social marketing, bystander training, social norms and critical literacy training) and have appropriated these for the purposes of implementing pro-feminist educational programs. Other reasons given for supplementing feminism included the view that feminism offers a partial vision for change in the area of sexual relationships, or that using a feminist approach exclusively leads to minimising the experiences of young men. One interviewee said:

> I've seen lots of programs that sort of come from an angry feminist position. I can identify with that and I can see why you'd end up in that space. But I think in terms of actually creating attitudinal change and behavioural change in the area of sexual assault prevention that kind of approach may not be that helpful. (Female educator, school-based program)

Another program author who employs an ecological approach to violence prevention said: "Some of the feminist movement was about 'girls stand up for yourself', but that prevention message should be for the male and the female!"

Four educators we interviewed said they avoid the use of a "feminist approach" in their programs, to the extent that a gender analysis of the problem of sexual assault is often not communicated. One educator said: "I got rid of the gender language, and try to make it as non-gendered as I can when discussing perpetration". Another said: "Being safe is the responsibility of everybody. It's not a gender base. It's across the genders". In some interviews, "post-feminist" ideas were articulated; a position that accepts the category of gender as no longer being important due to the many differences between women, or similarities between women and men. Having moved beyond a gender analysis, a "universal risk"[6] understanding of sexual violence is then revealed:

> In our program we don't see women as being less powerful or less in control in a relationship. We are equal. Now it's not about being female. We talk more broadly in terms of we are all at risk, how do we cope with it and strategies to deal with it. (Female educator, in-schools and community program)

Central to the motivation of avoiding a feminist or gender analysis in programs was the desire among these educators to make programs relevant and inclusive towards young men. This sentiment was expressed by a female educator working with young women: "In a mixed gender environment we're very conscious of not putting men down. We're very conscious about respecting everybody's experiences and beliefs". Another educator said: "We are moving away from that whole feminist framework and more toward a gender and diversity and a humanity framework".

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6. The consideration that men and women are at "universal risk" of sexual violence contradicts the empirical data from several national surveys (over several time periods) that women experience higher rates of victimisation and men are overrepresented as perpetrators (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 1996, 2004).

Without a doubt, it is important that educators respond appropriately to the dignity of both women and men coming to programs and make efforts not to vilify all young men. However, being respectful towards young men is not antithetical to using a feminist practice approach. Indeed, recent feminist prevention scholarship stresses that it is the responsibility of men and women to choose non-violent and ethical ways of negotiating in relationships (Allen, 2005; Carmody, 2009a; VicHealth, 2007). Constructing young men as universally likely to commit sexual violence is condemned in recent versions of feminism because this approach has little hope of engaging men in primary prevention and discourages broader community responsibility to prevent sexual assault.

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A broader "post-feminist" trend to deny, downplay and ignore the gendered nature of violence has been interrogated in pro-feminist literature (Faludi, 1981; Pease, 2008; Phillips, 2006). In working out a response to those that downplay feminism or those who argue that a feminist perspective is unhelpful for developing better gender relations, perhaps it is worthwhile to consider Morrison, Bourke and Kelley's (2005) argument that the answer is not to stop being feminist. Rather, they suggest that gender awareness should become more structurally accepted and mainstream. Young men and women can be invited into the recognition that interpersonal violence is a gendered problem. The standards support gender analysis remaining a solid conceptual underpinning for sexual assault prevention education.

Aside from the different positions identified in the sample in relation to using feminism in programs or addressing gender in programs, another challenge we identified was that several interviewees couldn't articulate the conceptual approach underpinning their programs. These interviewees indicated having a pragmatic and less theoretical or conceptual stance in their prevention practice. The predicament whereby workers may not be able to articulate the theories underpinning their practice has been recognised in broader human services literature as well as violence prevention literature—where workers are simply "doing the work" without understanding the theory base underpinning the program (Fook, 2002; Indermaur, Atkinson, & Blagg, 1998; Mulroney, 2003).

Related to this problem is when educators use learning and teaching strategies that are at odds with the theory underpinning the program design. The standards clearly address these problems by proposing that educators have a responsibility to understand and be able to articulate why they use the conceptual approach they do in programs. Without clearly articulated theoretical foundations, it is difficult to understand why a chosen prevention approach is feasible, and difficult—if not impossible—to conduct meaningful program evaluation.

3. Program "borrowing" and replication

A key message of international research reflected in the standards is that programs should be developed with a sound evidence base in both their theorising about sexual assault and developing education for behaviour change (Elliot & Mihalic, 2004; Schewe, 2002). This mode of development will lead to internally consistent, robust, effective sexual assault prevention programs that are replicable and testable for their efficacy. However, this particular vision of program development—where programs are developed in accordance with best practice literature or through borrowing from "successful" models and following the rules of internal consistency and external validity—does not reflect the way in which many Australian sexual assault prevention education programs are developed. Rather, many programs are developed via "eclectic borrowing" and mixing of content from other, similar prevention programs. Accommodating the restrictions or expectations of the site where the program will be implemented is also a core feature of program development. Our findings indicate that educators are often thinking on their feet in selecting program content. In some cases, a program changes each time it is delivered.

The majority of program writers and educators we interviewed take a deliberately flexible approach in program implementation. There were few examples of programs that were comprehensive packages delivered "as is". Flexibility and contextualised programming was generally accepted as a positive and unavoidable aspect of program delivery in schools. One educator stated: "The program is fluid

and a school might say … 'masculinity issues are really important and you need to address this' … so we do. [The program] is different in some way pretty much from school to school". A number of programs had been designed with the intention that educators will select some material and not others. One educator said: "The beauty of that package is that it's got lots of different exercises within each element of it so you can choose and pick which ones you want to do if you don't have time for the whole thing".

We recognise that being flexible and adaptive during program delivery is common practice, and that this is a pragmatic response to working in contexts like schools. We recognise there is support for adaptive programming in response to localised worldviews in the literature (Dyson, Mitchell, Dalton, & Hillier, 2003; Ozer, 2006). However, the trend of "hyper-flexibility" in program implementation or frequent adaptation of programs to suit the context is counter to evidence-based literature, which advocates maintaining program integrity. This consideration was expressed by one interviewee, who said:

> I think sometimes we hit those challenges around—"This is too structured or it doesn't give me the kind of room to just do what I want to do". But that's right, that's exactly the problem, do what you want and I do what I want. And we aren't confident that the student thinks they've had [a lesson] about the same issue. Objectives and outcomes in teaching are affected by these things. (Program manager, community program)

Ascertaining what might be different outcomes on the basis of implementing different forms of the "same" program would be an important area for examination in a broad evaluation of prevention programs.

In the field of prevention science, there is an ongoing tension between programs being implemented in the precise way that they were developed, tested and proven, and educators adapting programs to suit local conditions. Illustrating this, Elliott and Mihalic (2004) argued that:

> a negotiated balance in fidelity/adaptation has the potential for lowering this standard, encouraging and empowering local implementers to make questionable adaptations, and undermining the research community's commitment to fidelity. (p. 52)

Similarly, Bierman (2006) advocated a scientific approach that seeks to balance fidelity with the reality of local implementation. She said: "Moving from efficacy to effectiveness thus requires attention to local, cultural and context-relevant adaptations based upon the input of school and community partners" (p. 91). Reflecting this pragmatic approach, the standards endorse an evidence-based and practice-informed approach to program development, while arguing the importance of understanding context and adapting programs to suit local needs (Carmody et al., 2009, pp. 26–7).

Of interest to us when analysing interview data was learning how common the practice of eclectic borrowing is. Our findings suggest there has been a very relaxed approach to mixing existing program materials into the current program. One interviewee said:

> The process of putting together a program began in about 1995. I found out about a program that was running in Queensland … it is kind of an eclectic thing. People have drawn from it … and it's just been this process of development, continuous improvement over the years.[7] (Female educator, school-based program)

Another educator who frequently adapts his program content said: "Some of this is stuff I've developed and some of it is from a range of programs … I've just altered it for the young people. So it is a range of bits and pieces that we've pulled together".

One participant reported having contacted the person who developed a program and discussed the possibility of using and adapting the material:

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7. Much of this "continuous improvement" has been fed by participant feedback after programs (an issue that will be highlighted in the evaluation section below).

> I read a program … I think it stimulated us to think about writing our own program … I know I did ring [the program author] to make sure that it was alright that I used some of her ideas and expanded on her program. (Female program writer and educator, university program)

Other than this example of contacting the program author, there appeared to be a taken-for-granted assumption that it is acceptable to borrow material and import it into one's own program. Our concern here is twofold: (a) workers need to develop an awareness of how program-borrowing may impact on the success or failure of the current program and (b) there is a need to acknowledge authorship and copyright of existing material. Eclectic borrowing and incorporation of other strategies may reduce the integrity or central message of a program. This problem was recognised by one interviewee who stated:

> We wrote [this program] because of the ad hoc nature of the programs that were out there. People were just running things off the top of their heads. There was no consistency, there was no theoretical basis for it. We wanted something that had a united message so we weren't confusing young people. (Female program writer and educator, in-schools program)

The finding of eclectic borrowing also raises the issue of how source programs are properly cited or referenced and acknowledged—an issue to which the standards draw attention. While this has perhaps been less of an issue to date, there are programs that are now operating from a business model where the program and the associated intellectual property are copyrighted. It will be interesting to see how this intellectual property is "defended" without undoing the goodwill and camaraderie upon which much of this field has developed.

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The trend of eclectic borrowing in the violence prevention education field is perhaps attributable to a community development ethos in this field. This ethos seems underpinned by the desire to have the prevention message promoted as widely as possible—primarily to address the problem of violence but also to promote the work of the agency. As a result, completed packages may be documented, produced and sold to other organisations, generally for the cost of development and printing. Program development in gender violence prevention has not, to date, been driven by a business model; however, two programs in our sample had been developed and disseminated using a business model.

The majority of programs in the sample have been developed by workers who are relatively isolated and/or have infrequent informal contact through violence prevention networks. One participant reported:

> If we had the opportunity earlier to be with others who were doing this work [and] found opportunities to really share the information that we have … share literally the tools and resources that we already have, and what we do and don't know about what works well … that would have been incredibly useful. (Female policy developer)

With respect to the question of program borrowing, replication and "program integrity", it seems important to observe that the cultural context of Australian sexual assault prevention education programs appears to be different from the North American one in that in Australia it has been driven by practitioners, and only recently been entered into by researchers and academics. This was reflected in our interview sample. As such, the scientific or evidence-based notions of testing and replication are less well developed at this point in time in Australia. Educators we spoke to are more concerned with making programs suit the context in which they are delivered, although this focus may change over time as there is greater engagement from prevention science researchers. The standards encourage the voice of practitioners to be heard alongside that of those from research and academia.

4. Evaluation: The difference between "doing it" and doing it well

Doing evaluation well requires a particular set of skills (see Carmody, 2009a) that may require educators and program writers to consult with or be trained by people skilled in evaluation methods. Our interviews revealed that all workers recognise the need to conduct evaluation and most would welcome the opportunity to develop their evaluation skills. However, there was variation in the sample in terms of the meanings being attributed to the notion of "effective" or adequate evaluation of prevention programs. A focus in the discussion below is program writers/educators who were satisfied with their current evaluation practice. This satisfied attitude contrasted with those who recognised limitations in their current approach to evaluation and were keen to evaluate their programs better.

Five interviewees who use post-program satisfaction surveys or informal feedback to evaluate their program were pleased with the adequacy of these methods. The reasons given for this satisfaction rested on having received positive feedback from those coming to programs. One interviewee said: "Our program has been developed and been informed [through] student feedback … I record all the evaluations now and, you know, any feedback that's valuable to us, we hopefully implement, if we can, if it's realistic". Another school-based educator said:

> We've always used, like, a post-evaluation process where you ask people what they liked, what they didn't like, what they'd like to see done differently. The post ones are consistently good and we always get very good responses and how people enjoyed it and they're very open about what they like and what they don't like so it's always been very comprehensive.

Another said: "Informal feedback gives us a sense the program is working". The view that such approaches to evaluation are somehow "comprehensive" suggests a lack of understanding about evaluation. Perhaps the information gathered during and after programs by these interviewees might better be considered "feedback" rather than evaluation data, given the ad hoc approach used.

A number of interviewees recognised the distinction between doing satisfaction surveys and undertaking outcome evaluations (an evaluation approach that measures the effectiveness of a program in achieving its goals):

However, we found that most interviewees sought to improve the current approaches they take in program evaluation. They knew that better evaluation could be done. A school-based educator said: "Unfortunately 99% of the time they're just happy sheets … 'yes I've improved my confidence, yes I've improved my knowledge, no I don't think I need any more support'". Additionally, we found that a number of interviewees recognised the distinction between doing satisfaction surveys and undertaking outcome evaluations (an evaluation approach that measures the effectiveness of a program in achieving its goals):

A lot of the evaluation [we did] was satisfaction levels of the participants … if you just go to satisfaction levels in the group that support it, I mean, that's not evidence of less violence.

The fact that several interviewees recognised this difference is suggestive of how much the field of sexual assault prevention education has developed. Evidently, academic scholarship and publications posted through clearinghouses like the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) that have explicated better evaluation models in primary prevention education have had a "trickle-down" effect in the field. Also, forums on evaluation, like those hosted by Partners in Prevention Network in Victoria, are likely to develop prevention educators' knowledge and understanding of evaluation methods.

Several barriers to doing evaluation better were proposed in interviews—the main ones concerning lack of financial resources and time. Others spoke about the complexity involved in conducting meaningful evaluations; those that could somehow measure what factors bring about social change in any given community:

> The interesting data would be if we have less sexual assaults … and less harassment, you know, if you could measure that. But I think it would be a hard thing to measure … It's like lots of different strands in a spider's web. Where does one start and one end? For

people who need to evaluate … that's a problem. (Female program manager, community program)

Our research project supports previous findings that prevention program evaluation practices are often poor or limited (Carmody, 2009b; Mulroney, 2003; Urbis Keys Young, 2004). Flood (2005–06) identified a lack of longer term follow-up and the problem of programs not examining their effects on actual behaviour (not just professed attitude). Our research found these issues clearly remain problematic for many Australian sexual assault prevention education programs. We also identified further challenges in that some workers workers are satisfied with their evaluation practices even though they are poorly designed or limited. These workers appear to have confused "positive" program feedback as being the same thing as conducting valid evaluation that can measure attitudinal and/or behavioural change. The standards challenge such perspectives.

A further contribution of this study is the identification of some Australian sexual assault prevention education programs that are embarking on more comprehensive evaluation processes, using a multi-method approach to evaluation that is built into program design and that seeks to measure attitudinal and/or behavioural change as a result of program participation. This finding is suggestive of a growing sophistication in program design in Australia. However, it is clear that support needs to be in place for other programs to achieve this kind of sophistication in evaluation. In this matter, programs developed within smaller community organisations would benefit from developing partnerships with research organisations that can offer expertise in program evaluation. The provision of dedicated financial and knowledge resources specific to evaluation is paramount in the effort to develop best practice in primary prevention education.

> Some Australian sexual assault prevention education programs … are embarking on more comprehensive evaluation processes, using a multi-method approach to evaluation that is built into program design.

5. Working in schools: The role of school teachers

Within Australia, primary prevention education programs targeting interpersonal violence are primarily driven by community-based organisations in the secondary school context. Teachers working in schools become involved in the delivery of these programs, perhaps willingly or unwillingly, and play an influential role in program success (Bradford, 2006). School cultures also greatly impact on effective program implementation (Ozer, 2006). In our interviews, there was considerable discussion about the challenges of implementing programs in the school context, and the role of school teachers within the broader vision of primary prevention of sexual assault. The following trends were noticed in our data: caution about the role and contribution of school teaching staff, the significance of the community educator in the school context, and working with teachers as partners in prevention.

In terms of having desirable attitudes and knowledge about sexual assault, school teachers were regarded by interviewees as representing a typical cross-section of the population: "Some [teachers] have got fabulous values and ethics around it and the other 50% just don't." A number of interviewees recalled situations where the classroom teacher sitting in on the program compromised the prevention message they were trying to impart. A school-based educator said:

> Once we had a female teacher in the room—and normally the teachers don't get involved— but this particular female teacher just suddenly said, "Oh, it's her fault, she should have screamed and didn't communicate well!" It's really challenging.

To address these problems, several interviewees indicated they have developed something akin to a management strategy that can function to minimise the role of teachers, or ensure that teachers will be "on the same page" as the community-based educators. One educator working in a school on a regular basis said:

> We've trained teachers up on the issues and clarified their roles. Our expectations of teachers are that they're really there for crowd control, I suppose, for want of a better expression, and just to keep an eye on the groups. (Female educator, in-schools program)

The strategy of "managing" teachers appears to have developed when educators had formed the opinion that teachers lack knowledge and understanding, or are uncomfortable with the sexual content in programs. These interviewees were very comfortable with teachers playing a minimal role; for example: "We take over that whole double lesson and we run the whole thing from start to finish. The teacher just has to be in the room for duty of care, they don't have to do anything".

> Mutual benefit … is gained when community-based educators come in and facilitate the program. Teachers … are relieved not to have to run the program, and the community workers … are keen to share their knowledge and experience.

Another theme in our findings about working in schools was the mutual benefit that is gained when community-based educators come in and facilitate the program. Teachers who are already time-stretched are relieved not to have to run the program, and the community workers who are committed to the issues are keen to share their knowledge and experience. One interviewee said: "The teachers actually say: 'It's so wonderful to have experts come in and run a program so we don't have to be doing it'". Another spoke about the relief teachers have expressed when community educators take on the facilitation role in programs: "They would have a sense of relief: 'Oh thank God, because we don't want to hear about all that. We don't have the space or the time to hear about all those things!'" This comment demonstrates the importance of creating and maintaining links between community services, schools and students, with the result that staff, students and/or parents know where to go to access specialist information and help if needed.

In contrast to these trends, others we interviewed expressed a commitment to teachers having an enhanced role in program implementation. They were keenly aware of the limited presence community workers have in schools, and thus the limited opportunity community workers have to develop relationships with students. When reflecting on why her program now invites greater classroom teacher participation, one practitioner said:

> It used to be strangers came in, did two or three sessions and left and that was the sum total of the program. But, I mean all the best practice research that we've read around this stuff is that teachers have got to own it. Teachers have got to be there because what happens in a week after those [community workers] have gone and a kid gets raped? Do they feel comfortable to go to the classroom teacher and say 'This happened to me', when the teacher sat in the back for the program? They're not likely to! (Female program writer)

The insight expressed here is that classroom teachers have more opportunities to bear witness to young people disclosing an experience of sexual assault, when compared with a community worker coming in to the school. Given this, it seems invaluable that during prevention programs classroom teachers are given training together with an opportunity to speak out against sexual assault and name behaviours that are unacceptable. This might be considered a form of "giving permission" for young people to later approach them. Of relevance to the issue of school teachers as partners in prevention is the question of how much discretion school teachers can demonstrate or are willing to demonstrate working in their professional context. Two interviewees discussed this problem in the context of working with teachers in independent schools, finding that teachers were uncertain about their role in matters associated with sex and relationships education. One said: "The teachers struggled with: 'Well, what's my role', you know: 'Am I a cultural mediator, am I a cultural negotiator?' … They struggled with what they were supposed to do when talking about [sexuality]". Another said: "I think teachers lack the confidence because, especially [in] Catholic, Independent, Christian schools, they're not sure what they can and can't say". While these comments are specific to independent (religious) school settings, it is likely that teachers in government or independent secular schools may struggle with similar questions.

In summary, interviewees expressed diverging opinions about the role that school teachers should or might play in prevention education programs delivered in school settings. On one hand, there was a trend whereby teachers were perceived as requiring management and to be handled with caution. On the other hand, was a trend whereby community-based workers were keen to recruit teachers as partners in prevention. One educator who has worked in the same school settings regularly over the past seven years said:

> I would really like to develop this model that's more about sustainability. Those teachers that we've been working with for seven years, they should be able to be running those programs. I'd like to be a worker who resources and supports those teachers to do that. (Female educator, in-schools program)

It was clear to us that workers who approach prevention education using a "whole-of-school" framework, as well as interviewees who had a teaching qualification, had a higher regard for classroom teachers' skills and had a greater willingness to work with teachers as partners in prevention.

6. Pedagogical approaches working with young people: Should young people be regarded as experts or expert learners?

Central to the issue of choosing a pedagogical approach when working with young people is the question of how adults listen to young people and measure the worthiness of what young people have to say. Wills, Appleton, Magnusson, and Brooks (2008) found that young people are often treated by adults as not having anything worth contributing, and when adults do allow participation they find it hard to act on what young people have said. Even though the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989) emphasises the importance of having young people participate in decision-making, the meanings attributed to "youth participation" are extremely varied in the health promotion field. At one end of the spectrum are advocates of the "youth empowerment" and youth-centred approach that positions young people's views and experiences at the centre of learning. At the other end are those with reservations about how adequately young people understand their rights and responsibilities in social relationships.

Our findings indicate that choosing a pedagogical approach when educating young people about sexual relationships is contested terrain. Some interviewees adopted an approach that views young people as being competent social actors capable of making sense of sexual and intimate relationships. Others expressed the view that educators should not assume too much of young people and that young people have limited capacities to make good decisions in the area of sexual relationships. In this section, we discuss these divergent views as expressed in our interviews. Additionally, we consider the related problems associated with using a peer education model in sexual assault prevention education.[8]

> Choosing a pedagogical approach when educating young people about sexual relationships is contested terrain.

In our sample were a number of programs that firmly position young people as experts in their own relationships and actively engage young people's conceptualisations and opinions during the program. Elements of this approach discussed by interviewees were "engagement through empowering", "use of constructivist theory which means young people deciding this is what we need to know and this is where we will go from here" and viewing "young people as the experts". The reasons offered for using a youth empowerment approach during programs rested on ethical commitments. For example, one mentor working with youth programs said: "I think young people are often seen as objects which other people exercise power over, and I don't agree with that position—I think it's really offensive". Another worker expressed an opinion about how best to achieve prevention: "They [young people] could become the leaders in their communities and they could become the individuals who educate us to try and bring about that shift in the community".

> The reasons offered for using a youth empowerment approach during programs rested on ethical commitments.

It would be a valuable course of exploration to ask those interviewees keenly committed to a youth empowerment model about the challenges and

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8. Use of the peer education model—the practice whereby peers coming to prevention programs are involved in program delivery—varied in our sample. We excluded the young adult peer education/mentoring model that was discussed by two interviewees and focused on peer education models in school-based programs.

opportunities they have faced in positioning young people as the "experts" during sexual assault prevention education programs, and about how young people's (diverging) opinions are acted on in programs. These questions were not explored in any depth in our interviews. In some interviews, we did experience difficulty in identifying the reasons for a strong commitment to the youth empowerment model.

At the other end of the spectrum, two educators involved with a sex and relationships program expressed the view that young people should not be considered experts in prevention programs. One exclaimed:

> Young people are not experts at anything! They may have the bodies capable of reproduction but we say: "Look at the complexity of what a human interpersonal sexual relationship is!" To just assume that kids can navigate this … our experience is that young people just say: "We didn't know this, we didn't know about relationships, we didn't know how to say no".

In contrast to these positions, some programs in our sample appear to take a "middle-of-the-road" approach when including the voices of young people in programs. One interviewee discussed the dangers associated with young people being led to believe that they set the agenda for the prevention program. He ridiculed what he called "lazy constructivism" and said: "I believe strongly in a constructivist approach to education, but for it to be effective you need building blocks at the bottom, in order for the student to get to the higher level learning". Clearly, there are non-negotiable elements in any sexual assault prevention education program and it is important that educators are transparent about these.

> [An] issue of choosing a pedagogical approach when working with young people is the problem of educators making assumptions about the level of sexual activity in which young people have been involved.

Relevant to the issue of choosing a pedagogical approach when working with young people is the problem of educators making assumptions about the level of sexual activity in which young people have been involved. One community educator said:

> I've always been concerned that there is a tendency in the community sector when we're talking with young people about things like drugs or sex or whatever that it is assumed that for all young people this is a real, everyday part of their life. [They are] treated as if, well, you're probably doing this anyway, so I'll teach you from that perspective. (Male educator, in-school and community program)

This educator went on to discuss the importance of treading carefully around sexuality and for educators not to make the suggestion that having sex at a young age is the norm or an expected thing. He suggested that this "sex as a matter of fact" approach in programs may lead to young people assuming that sexual intercourse is a more widespread behaviour among young people than it actually is. This view was expressed by two other interviewees working with culturally specific programs. A Muslim educator said: "You've got to be mindful that you are talking particulars to students who don't necessarily date, so we can't assume that it's a common practice".

Use of a peer education model in programs is clearly relevant to the broader issue of choosing a pedagogical approach when working with young people. The peer education model harnesses the youthful worldview, energy and enthusiasm of educators who are close in age to participants. The strategy of using peer education for general health promotion purposes is widely encouraged (UNICEF, 2002). Others recognise that there are also potential problems with this approach (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Flood & Fergus, in press). Despite these cautions, several educators interviewed were passionate about this model for the successful implementation of their sexual assault prevention program. One said:

> I think that using educators who are closer to the age of the students, and I think that's probably the one driver that really keeps this program going. If this program was done with older people coming in and delivering the workshops it wouldn't work as well. (Female educator, university program)

However, in contrast to the stories told in interviews that commend the power and success of the peer education model, we also found in our analysis issues that disrupt these stories, or that suggest challenges to the peer education model. The challenges with peer education that were revealed included: peer educators being ill-prepared to facilitate programs, peer educators being overzealous in their self-disclosure, and the problem of minimal support and preparation for peer educators. In relation to these, interviewees said the following:

> Things do slip through the cracks [with the process of training peer educators]. That's a weakness. You could easily have someone employed for at least a third to half of their job to do this training properly.

> Over the years, where we've had some peer educators that have been a little bit overzealous in their role, there have been some who [sailed] close to the wind in terms of, you know, their own behaviour verging on possibly being harassing. (Female educator, university program)

There are considerable ethical issues that must be addressed when using peer educators in schools. While it might be hoped that peer educators offer the greatest utility for reaching students and growing an anti-violence culture in the student population, peer educators may become targets of bullying or may experience an unacceptable burden being placed upon them.

> The challenges with peer education … included: peer educators being ill-prepared to facilitate programs, peer educators being overzealous in their self-disclosure, and the problem of minimal support and preparation for peer educators.

The standards emphasise the importance for programs that use peer educators to have a clear rationale for their use, and to provide them with effective training and support (Carmody et al., 2009, p. 28). It was identified through the interviews that training provided for peer educators ranged from comprehensive multi-week processes, through to picking it up on the job. Although a theoretical basis for using the peer educator model was expressed in some interviews, others using this model were not clear about the benefits of using this approach. Our findings suggest that some programs struggle to provide sufficient training and support to peer educators, whereas others have robust support systems and monitoring processes. A challenge identified in the standards is for programs to closely scrutinise the use of peer educators, and the rationales and theories that support a peer education model.

7. Culturally sensitive programs? "Insider" and "outsider" perspectives on making programs effective and culturally safe

The standards are based on the recognition that there are significant differences between population groups in Australia along the lines of language and culture, faith worldview, dis/ability, geographical location and sexuality. These differences have the potential to affect the outcome of mainstream sexual assault prevention education programs and insofar as this was recognised, educators and mentors working with specific cultural groups[9] were actively recruited in our project. In the project sample were two specialists working with immigrant and Muslim populations, two educators with specialist knowledge of working with Indigenous populations, and two educators working in the disability field.

During analysis of the field interview data, we noticed significantly different opinions had been expressed about what it means to do culturally "relevant" or culturally sensitive violence prevention education. Of interest to us was the different meanings attributed to the notion of cultural sensitivity as expressed by those with specialist knowledge of working with cultural groups, when compared with generalist prevention educators. In this section, we use the terms "insider" and "outsider" to designate this difference. An "insider" interviewee was a member of the relevant cultural group or someone who had specialist knowledge of the relevant cultural group. An "outsider" interviewee was

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9. We accept that culture is ordinary and informs every aspect of day-to-day living. However, for the purposes of this paper, the term "specific cultural groups" is used to suggest that the concepts and values of one culture cannot necessarily be translated into or recognised in other cultures.

someone recognised as having generalist experience of violence prevention education who transferred this when working with particular cultural groups.

The challenge of engaging well with young Muslim people in sexuality and sexual violence prevention education programs was an area where there were differences of opinion expressed by insider and outsider workers. One generalist violence prevention educator said of implementing the program in her local Muslim school:

> There was to be no speaking about relationships, just friendships … Not entirely sure why they had us there. They know what we are all about, yet they will ask us to completely modify the material, to fit the school, which is not always possible … Ultimately, it's a violence prevention program and, you know, we can't make it anything but that.

> Of interest to us was the different meanings attributed to the notion of cultural sensitivity as expressed by those with specialist knowledge of working with cultural groups, when compared with generalist prevention educators.

This educator, an outsider to working with young Muslim people, was reluctant to alter the program material to suit the request of the school and clearly had difficulty working with them. However, when working with Muslim communities, the need for consultation and adaptation of the learning process to be sensitive to Muslim moral obligations is paramount. An insider who has mentored educators working with young Muslim people in the area of sex and relationships education spoke about the problem of mainstream teaching resources being inappropriate for young Muslim people. She stated: "There is certain information that teachers couldn't present. For example, dating out of wedlock and teenage pregnancies". She spoke also about the issue of readiness in Muslim communities to engage in the prevention message:

> There needs to be education for the parents and the community before the students. A meeting; letters [sent home to parents] are very intimidating.

This insider also referred to the problem of mainstream relationship education programs being blind to their own "hidden curriculum" concerning relationship norms. She described a role play about dating during a prevention education program where a young Muslim woman was recruited to play someone who has been sexually active. This resulted in a shaming experience for this young person. While mainstream and secular programs can simultaneously normalise and encourage sexual intimacy between young people, this is not acceptable according to the morality of many religious groups (personal correspondence, SAPE project, 2008).

Another issue raised by the insiders interviewed who are working with Muslim and immigrant populations is the problem of culturally safe educators. The importance of young Muslim people learning about relationships from someone with the same faith worldview was expressed by one interviewee:

> It is problematic that the counsellors are non-Muslim. How can you deal with the self and issues that are personal, like relationships, when you're not given Muslim advice?

In contrast, another insider interviewee was of the view that women who have recently immigrated or have sought asylum in Australia are safer when learning in an environment facilitated by someone who is "similar but different" to them. She said: "There is great mistrust. Always give examples that are de-identified. Never have someone from the same community doing the speaking of a story".

Differences of opinion concerning culturally safe practices when working with Aboriginal Australians was also evident in the sample.[10] An outsider commenting about working with these populations said:

> We really had to think on our feet with some of the classes that were largely Aboriginal … The whole thing of even saying their name out loud to a stranger was just so foreign and so it's … like a whole different approach just to do the introduction. (female educator, school-based program)

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10. Only four interviewees specifically discussed working with Australian Aboriginal people.

In contrast, an Indigenous insider working with local Indigenous populations said:

> I will never go to an Aboriginal community without being invited. I won't go. Just because I'm Aboriginal—it doesn't work that way … Also I'll consult the elders as well, regardless, and I don't go in just to one lot of elders because we have diversity within our communities. So you've got to go into each little diverse cut-off group and talk to them all.

Another worker with experience in Indigenous communities said:

> If you want to develop a program that's going to be relevant to Aboriginal men, it has to come out of there … For me, as a middle-class white women, to presume I can develop something for Aboriginal men … it's just impossible.

Both of these insider interviewees raised a challenge, and indeed raised the bar, concerning the question of culturally relevant practice. Both interviewees argued that meaningful consultation with Aboriginal people is a powerful forum for developing ideas for practice. These workers also discussed how cultural relevancy is a contested notion; that Aboriginal communities are changing and complex:

> We have to have different consultation with the [men and] women. We have to sit down with the men and say: "Tell us what you want", because we can all assume that we know the answers, but really the men are the only ones that do. (Program mentor)

Perhaps the challenge for programs is recognising that doing "one-off" consultation does not achieve cultural relevancy or safety.

Our discussion with interviewees about the question of working well with cultural diversity suggests to us that cultural outsiders are more likely to believe that cosmetic changes are sufficient to make programs appropriate, while insiders supported the need for significant changes to program design and delivery. This pattern was evident also in the matter of program delivery for people with an intellectual disability (see Johnson, Hillier, Harrison, & Frawley, 2001). An educator who had little experience working with people with a disability said:

> We have found, with what they call the IM classes,[11] that the best way to do the program was to actually move the desks all to the side, get them to sit on the floor, chuck out the book and just start talking about healthy relationships. It's about being a little bit flexible in your presentations. (Female educator, school-based and community programs)

This outsider communicated that it is flexibility and adaptability that enables mainstream programs to work for people with learning disabilities. This view can be compared with the view of an insider, experienced in working with people with intellectual disabilities, who stated that mainstream programs are not appropriate: "If you look at [mainstream] programs from the perspective of working with students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities … these programs are still too cognitively challenging".

> Cultural outsiders are more likely to believe that cosmetic changes are sufficient to make programs appropriate, while insiders supported the need for significant changes to program design and delivery.

The need to adapt programs to make them culturally relevant for different population groups is an issue debated in the violence prevention education literature. Elliot and Mihalic (2004) discouraged adjustment to evidence-based programs, arguing that participants from different cultural groups will be able to manage the cultural elements in programs.[12] Others support altering program content and delivery modes to suit the local context and different cultural worldviews (Jumper-Thurman, Edwards, Plested, & Oetting, 2003). Nation et al. (2003) have recommended that cultural tailoring of programs goes beyond surface structure translation to deep structure modifications that are sensitive to culture. Cosmetic or surface adjustments—for example, leaving more time for Aboriginal Australians to introduce themselves at the beginning of programs—are not enough. The cultural insiders we interviewed supported the need to make significant changes to program design and delivery in the effort to be culturally sensitive.

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11. A class with young people diagnosed with a moderate intellectual disability.

12. Here, "cultural groups" refers to ethnicity and language groups and does not refer to disability.

In this matter, the standards support meaningful program adaptation to suit the needs of diverse population groups. The need for program adaptation is clearly evident when working with people with intellectual disabilities and learning difficulties. Strategies suggested in the standards for enhancing the cultural relevance and sensitivity of programs include consultation with cultural specialists and conducting evaluations that enable data collection about cultural pluralism. Programs should endeavour to achieve cultural safety while having an adequate focus on the gendered nature of sexual violence. There are important debates to be had in the effort to develop best practice in Australian sexual assault prevention education concerning how and who should assess new pedagogical strategies developed to increase cultural inclusivity and sensitivity.

Naming the challenges

In this paper we have discussed seven challenges facing Australian sexual assault prevention education programs as they develop their practices to address the standards. Below we summarise the key interpretations made in the paper concerning what prevention education professionals need to grapple with to move through these challenges.

Challenge 1: Recognising the distinctiveness of primary prevention

Workers, with their employing agencies, who pursue a "balance" between facilitating prevention education and continuing in a counselling/victim advocacy role should adequately appreciate the distinctive concept and practice of primary prevention education. Some tertiary providers have been instrumental in supporting primary prevention; however, it is now timely for the tertiary prevention sector as a whole to recognise that supporting effective primary prevention education efforts is an advantageous route.[13] It is important that educators have access to professional development and supervision, and for these to be paid for by employing agencies.

Challenge 2: Educator responsibility to understand and articulate the conceptual approach underpinning program

Some interviewees couldn't articulate the conceptual underpinnings of their program. Others had "moved on" from using a feminist or gender analysis because they did not want to marginalise young men. However, being respectful toward young men is not antithetical to using a feminist practice and there are grave implications for using a "universal risk" approach in sexual assault prevention education because this fails to acknowledge women's higher rates of victimisation (ABS, 2004). Educators need to be reflexive and accountable to the research evidence when developing their conceptual approach.

Challenge 3: Recognising the implications of "hyper-flexibility" in program delivery

Rarely are programs implemented "as is" from the program manual, and some programs are adapted for every new audience. The fidelity or effectiveness of a program may be limited through this practice. Ascertaining the different outcomes from these different forms of program delivery methods is an important area for examination prior to implementation and when evaluating programs.

Challenge 4: Doing evaluation well

Evaluating a program's effectiveness is not reducible to conducting satisfaction surveys. It is clear that support needs to be in place for some programs to achieve the same kind of sophistication in evaluation as found in other programs. The provision of dedicated financial and knowledge resources

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13. NASASV and the NSW Rape Crisis Centre are acknowledged for their commitment to primary prevention of sexual assault.

specific to evaluation is paramount in the effort to develop best practice in primary prevention education.

Challenge 5: Working with classroom teachers

Community workers delivering programs in schools bring a unique perspective to that context, and many community-based workers delivering primary prevention education have helped to build positive relationships between schools and services. However, community workers have limited ongoing contact with young people compared with teachers, who have regular and ongoing contact with school students. Efforts should be made to train and support interested classroom teachers to be involved with program delivery and/or program support.

Challenge 6: Choosing a pedagogical approach when working with young people

Young people have limited life experiences to draw on when making sense of desirability in sexual relationships. Despite this, some programs propose that young people are "experts" in their own relationships and/or use young peer educators to deliver programs. For the purposes of developing best practice, some programs in the field may need more theoretically driven approaches to educating and supporting these young people. In particular, it should be recognised that the peer education model is a complex and potentially problematic model unless well-resourced and supervised.

Challenge 7: Meaningful program adjustment for the purposes of cultural relevancy

A challenge for programs is recognising that doing "one-off" consultation or making cosmetic adjustment during program delivery does not achieve cultural relevancy or safety. Programs should take action to achieve cultural safety while having an adequate focus on the gendered nature of sexual violence. Important debates to be had in the effort to develop best practice in Australian sexual assault prevention education concern how new pedagogical strategies should be developed to increase cultural inclusivity and sensitivity and who should assess them.

Conclusion

This paper has considered how the culture and practices in sexual assault prevention education coincide with what is recommended in the standards, based on the findings of 32 semi-structured interviews conducted during the SAPE research project in 2008. In this paper, seven challenges facing educators and program writers on the way to developing best practice have been discussed, and suggestions for how to negotiate these challenges have been made. To support these educators, we advocate clearer communication, dedicated resources to facilitate prevention work and information exchange opportunities.

Many more challenges were raised in interviews than the number discussed here. One issue raised by five interviewees that has not been discussed is the challenge of new information and communication technologies, insofar as they relate to young people learning about sexual relationships. Specific issues raised by interviewees included: practices of "bluetoothing" or "sexting" images of naked peers out to others without consent being given, an escalation in young people believing that performing oral and anal sex is the norm, and immediate accessibility to hard core pornography.

> The intention of the standards is not to impose uniformity or a blueprint for practice in sexual assault prevention education.

The intention with the standards is not to impose uniformity or a blueprint for practice in sexual assault prevention education. As the authors of the standards, we recognise that best practice in sexual assault prevention education is an evolving

concept. Creating space for purposeful debate about what constitutes best practice is indeed warranted as there is yet much to learn about the prevention of sexual violence at the primary level. However, the time for diligence in discovering, testing and taking action with good practice in sexual assault prevention education has arrived. The recently released report, *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009–2021*, locates prevention education as central to achieving the cultural change needed to prevent violence against women (National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009). Part of this comprehensive plan includes a major commitment by the Australian Government to the introduction of respectful relationships education for young people in schools and other settings. For the purposes of developing best practice in existing and new educational programs targeting the problem of sexual assault prevention at the primary level, we consider it crucial that the standards and challenges raised in this paper are engaged with and debated in the field. Policy-makers need to acknowledge the need to dedicate adequate resources to program development and evaluation, in addition to resources that can be used for the training and support of prevention educators. If we are to embrace primary prevention seriously, as researchers and prevention educators we need to write about "what works" and "what needs to work better" in sexual assault prevention education, and make opportunities to share and disseminate this information.

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