

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Cardiff University		
Unit of Assessment: Education (23)		
Title of case study: Transforming national policy and practice in sex and relationships education in Wales, England and internationally		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
EJ Renold	Professor of Childhood Studies	01/03/2000 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/01/2015 – 31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Sex and relationships education rarely addresses children and young people's own experiences of how sex, gender, sexuality and relationships shape their lives. Renold's research into children and young people's gender and sexual cultures, particularly in the area of relationships, sexual bullying and violence, contributed to Welsh legislation on gender-based and sexual violence, underpinned the fundamental overhaul of current sex and relationships education in Welsh schools, and sparked youth activism on gender and sexuality issues. Her resources for schools are used across Wales and England, as well as internationally (Ireland, Finland, USA, Australia), by teachers to safely and creatively discover what children and young people want and need to learn about.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The lives of children and young people are shaped by sex, gender, sexuality and relationships. Their own experiences are largely absent from research into children's sexuality and relationship cultures, and the topic is sensationalised in media debates [3.1]. Renold's research uses creative and participatory methods to prioritise the views of children and young people, shifting the terms of the debate by focussing on equality, rights and children's own voices.</p> <p>Renold's <i>Boys and Girls Speak Out</i> research report focused on children age 10-12 years. It stemmed from a National Assembly of Wales' Cross-Party Group on Children, Sexuality, Sexualisation and Equalities, which she co-founded with Welsh AM Jocelyn Davis. Key findings included [3.2]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children experience everyday sexism and sexual harassment; many are angry about living in a sexist peer culture and society and are critical of sexually explicit media; • boyfriend/girlfriend cultures are prevalent in children's social worlds; • policy and practice need to be informed by children's own experiences. <p>2.1 Listening to young people in the classroom</p> <p>In subsequent funded projects [G3.1, G3.2, G3.3], Renold used innovative creative pedagogies to explore girls' (aged 14-15 years) experiences of gender-based and sexual violence [3.3, 3.4, 3.5]. She worked with girls to co-produce new forms of research, engagement, and activism on issues which matter to them. She introduced two new concepts – darta (arts-based data) and dartaifact (an artefact produced from arts-based data) – which help educators explore the different ways in which youth voice on sensitive issues can be expressed and how we can learn from young people's own creativity to spark change.</p> <p>Key findings included [3.3, 3.4, 3.5]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creative methods can support the creation of safe and inclusive environments where all children and young people are listened to; 		

- working creatively can enable young people to imagine other ways of being in the world, as well as encourage new responses to familiar or unfamiliar feelings, ideas, concepts or situations;
- objects and artefacts created through this process can also be shared with others to interact with in multi-sensory ways and effect change;
- educators should be open to listen to children and to adapt activities to their needs.

2.2 Sex and Relationships Education

Renold's work established that the Welsh Government standards in Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) did not address the realities of children's lives; that curriculum materials to support those wanting to address these issues were absent and/or poorly developed and that specialist professional learning was urgently required. She subsequently urged the Welsh Government to provide experience-near, inclusive, creative and empowering SRE, and recommended that children and young people are more directly involved in policies and practices that affect them. As leader of the Welsh Government's Sex and Relationship Expert Panel, Renold's research evidence report [3.6] demonstrated the negative impact of current SRE's non-statutory status, and the lack of an effective, Wales-wide education strategy. Findings included [3.6]:

- current law and guidance on SRE is outdated; overly biological, with not enough attention given to rights, gender and sexual equalities, emotions and relationships;
- current provision of SRE in primary and secondary schools is poorly resourced and given low priority, with a lack of training provided to teachers;
- there is limited focus on violence against girls and women, as well as a gap between young people's lived experiences and the content of SRE
- there is a need for a whole school approach across Wales.

Overall, Renold's body of work identified the clear need for an updated education strategy, and accompanying resources, to support children and young people to be heard, to challenge gender-based and sexual violence, and to build positive relationships.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Renold, E., Ringrose, J. and Egan, D. (Eds.) (2015) *Children, Sexuality and Sexualisation*. Palgrave. ISBN 978-1-137-35339-9. Available from HEI on request.

[3.2] Renold, E. (2013). *Boys and Girls Speak Out: A Qualitative Study in Pre-teen Children's Gender and Sexual Cultures*. NSPCC/Children's Commissioner for Wales/Cardiff University. ISBN 1384966944624. Available from HEI on request.

[3.3] Renold, EJ, Edwards, V. and Huuki, T.(2020) Becoming eventful: making the 'more-than' of a youth activist conference matter, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 25:3, 441-464.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2020.1767562>

[3.4] Renold, E. (2020) 'Becoming AGENDA: co-creating of a youth-activist resource to address gendered and sexual violence with a run-a-way pARTicipatory praxis', *Reconceptualising Educational Research Methodology* 10 (2-3).
<https://doi.org/10.7577/term.3677>

[3.5] Renold, E. (2019) "Feel what I Feel": Making d(a)rt(a) with teen girls for creative activism on how sexual violence matters. *Journal of Gender Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1296352>

[3.6] Renold, E. and McGeeney (2017) *The future of the Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales*. Welsh Government. ISBN 9781789030310.
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/the-future-of-the-sex-and-relationships-education-curriculum-in-wales.pdf>

Selected grants:

[G3.1] Relationship Matters project (2015). Both this and G3.3 were funded with as part of Cardiff's workstream in the AHRC/ESRC Productive Margins project (for which Cardiff received £384,221 of the £2.4 million total).

[G3.2] The StARTer Project (2015-16, IAA Impact Accelerator Fund, £21,723)

[G3.3] Life Support project (2016-17 – see note on G3.1)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Renold's research into children and young people's gender and sexual cultures led to an overhaul of sex and relationship education in Wales, centralised the needs of children and young people in the country's new curriculum, and continues to support teachers in delivering inclusive, rights-based education. She was awarded the Outstanding Impact in Society Prize by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in 2018 for this work.

4.1 Changing legislation in Wales

Wales' draft Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Bill went out for consultation in 2014. Renold gave oral and written evidence at each stage, drawing on the findings of her *Boys and Girls Speak Out* report **[3.2]** to argue for placing education at the heart of the bill. In 2015, all parties, including those in opposition, voted in favour of the bill following agreement that education provisions would be included. These provisions included guidance for teachers on healthy relationships, domestic abuse, and gender-based and sexual violence, underpinned by Renold's research **[5.1]**.

Jocelyn Davies, a member of the National Assembly for Wales at the time, confirmed that Renold's report "*played a vital role in informing the campaign to introduce healthy relationships education in Wales. The education amendments...were very much informed by the study. The severity and commonplace nature of the harassment experienced by girls in schools, and the understanding of how early gender stereotyping limits both boys and girls, was one reason I was so determined to succeed in our campaign*" **[5.2]**.

4.2 Transforming the curriculum in Wales

In 2017 Renold was invited to chair the Sex and Relationships Expert Panel set up by Cabinet Secretary for Education Kirsty Williams. In May 2018 Williams accepted all of the Panel's recommendations as set out in Renold's Panel Report **[3.6]**, including a major overhaul of Wales' SRE curriculum **[5.3a]**. Sally Holland, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, confirmed that the Report **[3.6]** "*led to some significant changes, most notably a public commitment to boost the content of the curriculum on healthy relationships, to change the name to Relationships and Sexuality Education, and to remove the right of parents to withdraw their children from these lessons...I believe that Renold's style of both returning again and again to the evidence and using creative methods has been the key factor in encouraging the Welsh Government to take these steps*" **[5.4a]**.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) will be embedded in the Welsh curriculum from 2022 and will be statutory from the ages of 3 to 16. It will be supported by clear professional learning pathways for teachers, in both initial teacher training and within the existing workforce. Following Renold's recommendations, the new statutory RSE curriculum **[5.3b]** – released in 2020 – is broad, fully inclusive and addresses core issues, including LGBTQ+ lives, sexuality and gender rights, and relationship abuse. Renold has supported the development of the new curriculum as an ongoing advisor. Her new definition of RSE and its underpinning core principles (empowerment; inclusivity; rights and equity; protection; creativity; co-production; holistic; relevant and developmentally appropriate) are clearly outlined and defined within the curriculum's mandatory cross-cutting themes.

4.3 Changing practices in the classroom

A key focus of Renold's research has been the need to prioritise children's own views and experiences **[3.6]**. She translated her research work in this area into a suite of healthy relationships resources which support RSE curricula in both Wales and England **[3.2]**.

AGENDA – the culmination of Renold’s long-term partnerships with schools, youth groups, third sector agencies, artists and policymakers – began in 2016 as a guide enabling young people to creatively and safely raise awareness of relationships in their schools and communities. In 2019, Renold also developed it into a practical guide for educators working with children age 7-18 years. It encourages young people to speak out on what matters to them through a range of formats, such as visual arts, poetry, dance and theatre.

Based on practitioner feedback, the guide has expanded to become a guide for practitioners, and to encompass a wider age range (7-18). It is also now accompanied by an additional resource (CRUSH) which invites teachers to undertake their own creative audits informed by AGENDA activities to explore what their pupils need from their RSE curriculum [5.4a]. To date, AGENDA, which *“originated from Renold’s original research with children”* [5.4b] has reached around 4,000 educational practitioners and at least 7,000 children and young people (age 7-18 years) in Wales, England, Ireland, USA, Australia and Finland [5.4c].

AGENDA has been endorsed and embedded into practice by key Welsh Government organisations. For example, regular consultation and training has been provided for all 20 staff from the Hafan Cymru Spectrum Project, which delivers free sex and relationships education to primary and secondary schools across Wales. Confirming the benefits of AGENDA, a School Liaison Officer from the Project stated that *“it really allows the pupils to speak, to interact, and especially with pupils who are normally very shut-down to education and very shut-down to the traditional format of a lesson. AGENDA allows them to explore things in a different way”* [5.5].

The Children’s Commissioner for Wales confirmed that *“we have used the resources extensively with schools and community groups in all areas of Wales, through the medium of Welsh as well as English, and have seen how transformative they can be”* [5.4a]. She highlighted Mountain Ash Comprehensive as an example where *“a group of pupils were angry about gender inequalities”* [5.4a]. Following attendance at an AGENDA conference led by Renold, they began taking actions to raise awareness and *“the school has subsequently taken systematic actions to reduce gender stereotyping, including starting a girls’ rugby team and a boys’ choir, and holding peer-led tackling homophobia lessons...when I attended a school celebration a year later some parents said it was also having a wider impact in the former mining village”* [5.4a].

AGENDA has also been launched in England. In 2018-19, the National Education Union (NEU) funded the development of additional practitioner resources for its 450,000 members across the UK. These included ten new English case studies, which were – according to the NEU – *“particularly timely and necessary when Relationships, Sex and Health Education became statutory in all schools in England from September 2020”* [5.6], and an interactive bilingual website, which is now freely available to teachers worldwide. The NEU’s support came as they *“were particularly drawn to, and impressed by, the creative pedagogy used, including the centring of pupil voice. This unique approach (as distinct from many other teaching resources available) gives schools the flexibility and autonomy to adapt the resource and explore with children and young people what matters to them”* [5.6]. Resources developed by the NEU to support the implementation of statutory RSE in England *“reference AGENDA and use the principles that AGENDA adopts”* [5.6].

Sexplain is an organisation that provides comprehensive and inclusive sex and relationships workshops for UK secondary schools, as well as training for current and trainee teachers. Initially drawn to AGENDA because CEO Amelia Jenkinson *“could see the transformative effect of Professor Renold’s and AGENDA’s approach on these young people”* [5.7], the organisation adapted and embedded AGENDA-inspired approaches across several workshops for secondary school students. Jenkinson stated that *“the light-touch activism of these activities have proved to be extremely effective ways to close the workshops, with students having critically engaged with the subject matter, but also feeling positive and empowered, as AGENDA intends”* [5.7]. These workshops have so far been delivered to approximately 3,000 young people (mostly aged 12-16).

AGENDA activities have been used internationally by practitioners in higher education (City University of New York), secondary schools (Melbourne, Australia), and primary schools (Oulu, Finland). Ileana Jiminez, a high school teacher in New York noted how using an AGENDA activity provided a valuable outlet for students to express their feelings following a two-year process of writing a sexual harassment policy with the head of school: *“We were having such a hard and challenging two years of working on this [sexual harassment] project. AGENDA allowed us [to have] a more optimistic space and feel more connected to each other as activist students and activist teachers”* [5.8].

4.4 Inspiring activism

“Without AGENDA we wouldn’t have started our healthy relationships group ‘We are more’ in our school. We can make a change in society with AGENDA, and change is what is vitally needed right now” – An AGENDA youth ambassador and pupil at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School [5.5].

Renold keenly identified the need to involve young people in her work to improve policies and practices, as they are both the subjects and end-users of any outcomes.

Prior to the VAWDASV Bill, Renold embarked on a series of engagement activities such as ‘Lunch Clubs’, working with students to establish why healthy relationship education was important to them and identified ways to campaign for its inclusion in the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. She helped them find ways to influence government and highlight the vital role of education in preventing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. For example, over 1,000 students co-produced a campaign, which involved writing an open letter and policy poem to Members of the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament), and online and arts-based activism [5.9].

Renold used AGENDA to provide training for school-based youth workers as part of a new Wales-wide programme promoting gender equality and girls’ rights for Plan International UK, a global children’s charity. Nikki Giant, Acting Head of Girls’ Rights and Youth Team, Plan International UK, said that, as a result they *“noticed an increase in the breadth of creative approaches being utilised throughout the programme, with increased engagement from young people and a greater connection to the themes and topics”* [5.10]. Giant confirmed that Renold’s training was used by their Youth and Support Coordinator when she travelled to Brazil to work with colleagues on the global programme from which Champions of Wales was developed. She took gender equality kites made by young people in Wales (at an AGENDA session Renold delivered) to Brazil – an example of how AGENDA methods have enabled young people across the world to connect as one collective voice.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [5.1] Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015
- [5.2] Testimonial: Jocelyn Davies, Member of the National Assembly for Wales (1999-2016)
- [5.3] Welsh Curriculum a) Announcement of reforms to RSE in Wales (May 2018) b) the new Welsh Government curriculum guidance 2020 (pages 38-40)
- [5.4] a) CRUSH website b) Testimonial: Sally Holland, Children’s Commissioner for Wales, c) AGENDA activities data
- [5.5] ESRC ‘Outstanding Impact in Society’ 2018 prize winner film and online case study, includes testimonials by practitioners, Sally Holland (Children’s Commissioner for Wales) and Kirsty Williams MS (Welsh Government Education Minister)
- [5.6] Testimonial: Sally Thomas, Policy Specialist, National Education Union
- [5.7] Testimonial: Amelia Jenkinson, CEO, Sexplain
- [5.8] Interview with Ileana Jiminez, a high school teacher in New York
- [5.9] Open Letter to Assembly Members (co-produced with young people)
- [5.10] Testimonial: Nikki Giant, Acting Head of Girls’ Rights and Youth Team, Plan International UK