

## My Perfect Partner: Creative Methods in Relationship Education

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**Abstract :** The paper presents our experiences of working in both mainstream and Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) schools in England from 2012-2019, using creative methodologies to deliver and evaluate healthy relationship education. It aims to explore to explore how young people's perceptions of relationships and their "perfect partner" are mediated by factors such as gender, body image, and social media. It will be an interactive session, inviting participants to reflect on their own experiences of relationship education, and to take part in an example of a classroom activity of 'a perfect partner'. Young people aged 16-25 are most at risk of relationship abuse and intimate partner violence. This can be enacted both on the body, through physical and sexual violence, but also emotional and psychological abuse. In England and Wales relationship education became compulsory in schools in September 2020. There is increasing recognition for the need for whole school approaches to prevent gender-based violence, in particular domestic abuse, from happening in the first place and for equipping schools to feel more confident supporting young people affected by gender-based violence. The project used creative methods, including arts, drama, music, poetry, song, and creative writing, to engage participants in sensitive topics related to relationship education. Interactive workshops with pupils aged 11-19 enabled young people to express themselves freely, pupils then used drama to share their knowledge with their peer group. We co-produced material with young people, including an accessible resource pack for use in SEND schools, particularly for children with visual and sensory impairments. The project was evaluated by questionnaires and interviews with pupils. The paper also reflects on the ethical issues involved in the research. After the project, young people had a better understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships, improved knowledge of the early warning signs of abuse and knew where to go to for help and advice. It found that creative methods are an effective way to engage young people in relationship education and sensitive topics. We argue that age and ability appropriate relationship education should be compulsory across the curriculum and that implementing creative and art-based approaches to address sensitive topics can enhance the effectiveness of relationship education programs in promoting healthy relationships and preventing abuse. The paper provides academic and practitioner perspectives, providing a reflection on our research, looking at practical, methodological, and ethical issues involved in research on Gender Based Violence with young people in a school setting.

**Keywords :** relationship education, healthy relationships, creative methods, young people

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