

Human Sexuality/Teachers Edition

ARTICLE

Sexuality education in South Africa: Whose values are we teaching?

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This article presents a critical discussion on how teachers teach sexuality education in South African schools. Using data collected from classroom observations and in-depth interviews with Life Orientation teachers, it focuses on how values and comfort play out in the teaching of sexuality education. I argue that teachers teach sexuality while inserting their values in ways that undermine the key points of a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum. Also posited is the distinction between comfort and values and the overlap of each in relation to whether and how different aspects of sexuality education are taught. The article concludes this with a brief description of the future directions that teacher education and classroom practices in sexuality education might take.

KEY WORDS: sexuality education, schools, teacher comfort and personal values, value conflicts and presentation of curriculum

INTRODUCTION

In the face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic which has severely affected young people between the ages of 14 and 24 (UNAIDS, 2008; UNESCO, 2008), sexuality education in South Africa has become synonymous with HIV prevention and the need to provide accurate information about the disease. The development of effective school-based HIV education and sexuality education is vital as it is well documented that schools are an appropriate environment for the teaching of sexuality and HIV education (Harrison, 2002; Morrell, Moletsane, Karim, Epstein & Unterhalter, 2002).

In South Africa, HIV and sexuality education are integrated into the Life Orientation (LO) curriculum mainly under the heading of Personal Well-Being. Life Orientation is a new learning area and the majority of teachers teaching in this area have received very little training in the teaching of LO, as set out in the *Revised National Curriculum Statement* approved in 2002 and implemented in 2004 (Department of Education of South Africa, 2002). In addition, some LO teachers have been drawn from other teaching areas such as guidance, religious education, physical education, and even languages and the social sciences (Rooth, 2005). Although questions have been raised regarding teaching and learning about sexuality education in South African schools (Ahmed, Fisher, Mathews, Mukoma, & Jansen, 2009; Heileve, Fisher, Onya, Mukoma, & Klepp, 2009; Rooth, 2005), research has not sufficiently addressed the key issue of how teachers' comfort and values play out in the sexuality education classroom.

All sex and relationships education programmes are based on values (UNESCO, 2008). Halstead and Reiss (2003) argue that it is impossible to plan or put into practice any program of sex education without reference to values, as these permeate every aspect of sex education in schools. As values are at the core of sex education, teachers have a duty to reflect seriously on the explicit and implicit values that underpin their work to ensure that they are reasonable, justifiable, and in the best interest of learners (Halstead & Reiss, 2003).

The present study

Drawing on a larger study that explored the teaching of sexuality education, my aim in this article is to produce further knowledge on how values and comfort play out in the teaching of sexuality education. In unpacking a discussion on values in sex education, I want to understand how teachers approach their roles, curriculum, students, and pedagogy and, if necessary, how teachers can change the direction in the way in which sexuality education is taught.

Background on sexuality education in South Africa

In South Africa, the promotion and maintenance of Christian values (Malherbe, 1977) and the draconian policing of sexuality were fundamental to the apartheid project (Posel, 2004). This can be noted in the emphasis, during that time, on sex education to include social and moral hygiene (which focused on the prevention of disease by promoting health, including

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