The discourses of sexuality in curriculum documents on sexuality education: an Australian case study

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This paper identifies three underlying discourses on the nature of sexuality evident in two Department of Education curriculum documents on sexuality education in Victoria, Australia, over the past 15 years. These discourses are a cultural 'preservation' perspective, a risk minimisation perspective, and a view that sexual expression should enable cultural and individual enlightenment and emancipation. This analysis of underpinning discourses is used as the basis for identifying a range of issues relating to course content, implied characteristics of learners, and appropriate teaching methods that need to be addressed in future documents if diverse goals in this area relating to knowledge and attitudinal outcomes are to be met.

Introduction

The perceived appropriateness of sexuality education curriculum documents and programmes in Australia in recent years has been questioned from various perspectives. These concerns relate to calls for prohibiting explicit sexual information for minors (Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, 2002), claims that new programmes should address the problem of unsafe adolescent behaviour (Dunn, 2002) and the need for young people to be given 'information about contraception and disease prevention before they begin their sexual career' (Rissel *et al.*, 2003, p. 131). Other writers from feminist perspectives, such as Blackmore *et al.* (1996), have sought to contextualise sexuality education within broader issues of gender, education and inequality, arguing that schools needed to examine how they have perpetuated hegemonic masculinity as a starting point for a more enlightened approach to sexuality education. Supporting this approach, Harrison (2000) asserted that the AIDS epidemic and the subsequent implementation of HIV/AIDS prevention education have revealed that schools are often sites of intolerance and inequity. In this way, sexuality education is perceived by Blackmore

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et al. (1996) and Harrison (2000), among others, as requiring whole school change rather than just curriculum development.

These ongoing contested accounts of the nature and purposes of sexuality education are indicative of the different discourses and their ideological commitments that underpin this field. Following Gee (1989, pp. 6–7; 1999), we view discourses as ways 'of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities'. From this perspective, discourses on sexuality are recognisable orientations to the nature, expression and desirable outcomes in this area of human practices and beliefs. In this paper we explore how different discursive constructions of sexuality have been drawn upon to structure curriculum documents in the state of Victoria, Australia over the past 15 years. We consider that this analysis provides a basis for identifying current needs and new directions in curriculum guidance in this area. We focus specifically on the prescriptions and advice in these documents for programmes for students in upper primary school and junior secondary school (11–12 year olds). These texts were selected because they represent a first attempt and a subsequent attempt to provide state-wide prescription in this curriculum. The year levels (11–12 year olds) were selected for analysis because there was no explicit focus on sexuality education issues for younger levels in these documents. The focus at earlier year levels within these curriculum documents was largely self-identity within the contexts of family (including changing family structures), non-sexualised friendships and the wider community (Office of Schools Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 65). Students were also expected to explore needs in terms of love, trust, rest, food and shelter along with predictable social, emotional and intellectual change over time (Board of Studies, 2000, pp. 16, 22).

We first identify the major discursive constructions of sexuality as noted in the relevant literature and analyse how these have influenced curriculum policy and programme documents in an Australian context. We draw on key orientations and concepts used in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995) to guide this study. Our paper concludes by considering the challenges for policy-writers in addressing conflicting and emerging discursive accounts of the aims and rationale for sexuality education.

We recognise that curriculum policy does not necessarily translate neatly into practice, that what students are taught is not necessarily what they learn and that just getting the curriculum documents 'right' will not automatically 'fix' sexuality education. There is a rich literature that shows how education policy, particularly in relation to sexuality education, can become distorted in practice (see Wolpe, 1988; Thomson & Scott, 1991; Harrison *et al.*, 1996; Kehily, 2002.) These authors have identified a range of factors that influence the success and relevance of sexuality education. These include, among others, the social relations that structure student–teacher relationships, the tensions between popular culture and moral codes or cultural expectations embedded in official policies, the gendered construction and positioning of students and teachers within schools, and the valuing of various subjectivities by students that might allow some success in the classroom.

Discourses on sexuality

Our analysis of relevant literature suggests that three major discourses currently influence Australian sexuality education in terms of advocated themes in schooling in general, and curriculum documents in particular. These discourses of sexuality are: a cultural 'preservation' perspective often underwritten by an overt or implicit biological determinist view of sexuality; a risk-minimisation perspective; and a view that sexual expression should enable cultural and individual enlightenment and emancipation. We acknowledge that these three discursive categories overlap with past analytical accounts (see Aggleton *et al.*, 1989; Carlson, 1992; Lees, 1993; Johnson, 1996). Our discursive constructions are not discrete or unchanging, but can be seen as clusters of broad and often intersecting perspectives. The first two represent traditional discourses in that they produce conservative understandings of sexuality and thus, by implication, sexuality education. The third category consists of discourses borne out of a critique of the other two. However, it needs to be noted that there is also overlap between discourses; for example, where saying no to sex is advocated by both conservative and radical perspectives. Each discourse proposes a necessary relationship between technical knowledge and affective or value dimensions in sexuality education. In other words, each discourse assumes that particular practices based on appropriate knowledge or absence of knowledge will secure desirable individual and cultural experiences, feelings and behaviour. Each discourse implies a particular view of the ontogenesis or process of emergence of an appropriate set of attitudes and behaviours in relation to sexual expression and identity. In this way, each discourse implies how the education of young people about their sexuality should be conceptualised, including appropriate teaching and learning strategies, and desirable success indicators. This ontogenesis of an appropriate sexual identity can be understood as fulfilling a biological and cultural destiny (a conservative perspective), negotiating a successful pathway through a field of risks (harm minimisation) or developing a healthy individual perspective of self-expression based on rational analysis of alternatives (emancipatory perspective).

Conservative discourses

The first group of discourses often draws on biological justification to legitimise its perspective, appealing to factual 'scientific' understandings of bodily functioning. The purpose of sexuality is largely explained teleologically in terms of reproduction (Diorio & Munro, 2000, p. 348). Heterosexuality and procreative sex are marked as 'normal' within this discourse (Connell, 1995; Moran, 2001), where '[G]ender is also heterosexualised through notions of the complementarity of masculinities and femininities' (Wallis & Van Every, 2000, p. 410). Linked to these 'scientific'-based understandings of sexuality are psychologically based developmental theories that identify the child as innocent but potentially corruptible (Weeks, 1986; Moran, 2001). The child is perceived as needing moral guidance and 'protection' from knowledge that might corrupt, especially in the case of premature exposure to sexual experience. Bay-Cheng (2003) adds another 'scientific' dimension to this account,

claiming that adolescence is often perceived as a biologically determined period of 'hyper-sexuality' requiring adult control.

In criticising a culturally conservative view that attempts to essentialise sexual attributes, Bay-Cheng (2003) argued that the common focus on sexuality at an 'individual' level reduces it to a decontextualised, disembodied state. Medical and psychological discourses that underpin the field of adolescent sexuality (and thus sexuality education) have largely drawn upon 'atomistic, disjointed studies of individual behaviours whilst ignoring the influences of gender, race and social location' (Bay-Cheng 2003, p. 68). Pallotta-Chiarolli (1996, p. 56) criticised the 'context-less' nature of this version of sexuality, claiming that schools construct an artificial homogeneity within categories of ethnicity and sexuality, and called for pedagogical practices that create space for 'interweaving' between categories.

Risk minimisation discourse

The second discourse of risk minimisation arises out of a secular public health perspective that seeks to separate sexual preferences and their expression from any explicit religious sanctions. From this viewpoint, children need to be educated about the technical and possibly harmful aspects of sexual expression to enable them to make 'socially desirable decisions regarding sexual and reproductive relationships' (Thorogood, 2000, p. 431). This discourse presupposes a rational 'learner' who can manage harm or risk through thoughtful strategic action based on access to appropriate sexual information and enlightened technical rationality. However, this discourse does not rule out the possibility of affective 'risk' relating to the potential for emotional harm caused by premature sexual expression. The advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has added support to the risk minimisation discourse, with many governments moving to mandate HIV/AIDS education in primary and secondary schools (see Ministerial Policy, 1987) as part of the sexuality education curriculum.

Emancipatory discourses

The final cluster of culturally emancipatory discourses critiques the other perspectives. This cluster of viewpoints assumes that current mainstream accounts of sanctioned sexuality are psychologically repressive, socially discriminatory and overtly sexist. These discourses assert variously that informed self-determination of sexual expression can be healthy for individuals, that sexuality is a central element of individuality and that sexual expression is crucial to self-realisation. One theme within these discourses, first highlighted by Michelle Fine (1988), is the absence of a discourse of desire particularly in relation to females. Fine (1988, pp. 32–33) argued that sex education in the USA was underpinned by discourses of 'violence', female 'victimisation' and 'sexuality as individual morality' leading to suffering, particularly by young low income females and non-heterosexual males. Fine (1988, p. 47) also called for 'the framing of female subjectivity within the context of

entitlement—including a sense of sexual, economic and social entitlement'. She suggested that this required reforms to provision of school-based health services, curriculum reform and the inclusion of non-traditional training programme and employment opportunities.

Fine's conclusions were supported by subsequent research, particularly by Epstein and Johnson (1998) in the United Kingdom and Diorio and Munro (2000) in New Zealand. In discussing how pubertal changes in girls and boys are treated differently in school materials in New Zealand, their research revealed that puberty is reflected as 'exciting' and 'powerful' and something to be 'enjoyed' for boys, but for girls is dealt with only in terms of future reproduction and conveyed as 'negative and disgusting'. Diorio and Munro (2000) considered that this distortion is 'damaging' to a girl's sense of self. Fine (1988), Bay-Cheng (2003), Tolman (1994), Epstein and Johnson (1998), and Diorio and Munro (2000) all claimed that a discourse of desire must underpin sexuality education if it is to be relevant and useful, particularly to adolescent females.

The call to recognise adolescent sexuality as positive in its diversity was asserted by Gourlay (1996, p. 49), who argued for a sexuality education in context—a recognition of the 'socio-political realities' of young peoples' lives. Mac an Ghaill (1996, p. 300) also identified the need 'for a broader conception of sex/sexuality education that incorporates power relations around issues of class, gender, sexuality, age, ''race'' and ethnic differences'. The need for a broad-based sexuality education that goes beyond 'sexuality education classes' to include whole-school approaches to gendered/sexual identities as constructed within and through schooling has been identified by many, including Epstein (1995), Mac an Ghaill (1996), Blackmore *et al.* (1996) and Harrison (2000). Renold (2000, p. 324) added that 'sexuality needs to be included as an equal opportunity issue that can deal with the *everyday* realities of boys' and girls' early sexual experiences'. In critiquing the normative heterosexist discourse that underpins most sexuality education, Epstein and Johnson (1998) argued that sexuality education should not begin with biological discourses of reproduction. Rather, they suggested, it 'should begin with relationships, respect and difference, taking up questions of reproduction along the way rather than privileging them from the start' (Epstein & Johnson, 1998, p. 190).

Needless to say, these three broad discourses, as outlined above, are not represented in any straightforward way in curriculum documents in Australia. Because of the highly contentious nature of this field, these documents are often written in a style and format that seeks to minimise controversy, presents information as 'neutral' or self-explanatory, does not make overt the value assumptions underlying the proposed programmes, and provides guidelines that are calculated to avoid public disquiet. We acknowledge the degree of obliqueness in how discourses on sexuality are treated in these documents, but consider that these discourses need to be identified as the basis for review of these documents as well as any recommendations for future proposals. We have used critical discourse analysis in this study because it provides a systematic approach to textual meaning and also provides a framework for analysing contextual factors affecting the documents. We

also consider that this analysis provides a reasonable basis for the development of policy documents that are socially just, broadly inclusive of all students, and equitable. The next section outlines the key concepts and approaches from critical discourse analysis used in this paper.

Critical discourse analysis

This analysis is concerned with identifying discursive methods used in texts to support particular value positions or ideological perspectives. Fairclough (1992) claimed that all texts are perspectival in the sense that they represent the selection and advocacy of particular value positions and the omission or suppression of other contrary perspectives. Consequently critical discourse analysis for Fairclough (1989, p. 7) highlights 'how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes'. By 'power relations', Fairclough (1989) refers to the implied roles of writer and readers in written texts as well as the implied agency of human subjects within these texts. Within this orientation, texts are always shaped by, but also influence, the social practices to which they refer. In relation to curriculum documents on sexuality education it would therefore be possible, according to Fairclough, to identify the influence of cultural and discursive conventions on the content and nature of these texts, to interpret the particular conventions used in these interactive processes, and to explain how these interactive processes affect social action—in this case, identifying and analysing the classroom programmes and practices that are mediated by the curriculum documents and other influences on teachers' practices. In this paper we focus on the first two areas but recognise that critical discourse analysis also entails more than document interpretation.

   Fairclough (1989) argued for diverse analytical strategies in interpreting texts, from macro-level investigation of how texts 'talk' to similar texts, to micro analysis of patterns and structures in specific texts in relation to implied ideological perspectives. We have selected strategies we consider relevant to identifying distinctive discourses and their implied values in curriculum documents on sexuality education in Australia. Fairclough (1989, pp. 35–36) argued that in order to identify the influences of cultural and discursive conventions on texts, a discourse should be studied 'historically and dynamically in terms of shifting configurations of discourse types', noting how 'such shifts reflect and constitute wider processes of social change'. To address this issue we investigate these broad shifts across two sets of curriculum documents on sexuality education, indicating contextual factors that shaped their broad focus and major orientation. Following Fairclough (1989, p. 36) we also identify the 'diverse range of features of form and meaning', such as text structure and vocabulary in these documents, to indicate the underlying ideological commitments and power relations implied in these texts. This analysis focuses on the specific genre of the text with its underlying assumptions of how the text will be used; on the text's style according to its tenor (implied tone of the relationship between writer, textual subject and reader), its mode (the degree of formality or

informality of language) and rhetorical style (such as the use of expository or argumentative language); and on the text's coherence and degree of explicit meaning. We also focus on what Fairclough (1989, p. 64) calls the 'constructive effects of discourse', referring to the 'social identities' and 'subject positions' that these texts seem to imply for readers or subjects of these documents. Finally, we focus on what Fairclough (1989, pp. 235–236) characterises as the 'grammar' of the texts, their 'transitivity', 'themes' and 'modality'. 'Transitivity' refers to patterns of causality and agency in the text relating to how much authority or power is ascribed to subjects in the texts. 'Themes' refers to key textual emphases on topics, and 'modality' to the degree of certainty, conditionality or hesitancy of textual utterances and claims. This analysis focuses on interpretation of textual wording and rewording to indicate underlying textual values and orientation. While it is not possible in the space constraints of this paper to analyse in detail all these elements, indicative examples from each text are investigated, drawing broadly on this range of interpretive strategies.

Analysis of curriculum documents

The first text chosen for analysis was an innovative attempt to provide a state-wide coordinated approach to the teaching of personal development in Victoria, Australia, in 1989. Prior to the introduction of this framework, schools were encouraged and expected to develop their own programmes in the light of their students' particular needs and within the context of each school's broader community. The writers of the documents were conscious of the need to avoid a highly prescriptive approach that might imply a failure to recognise local school expertise, and to offer a framework that provided general guidance to all state school contexts. The publication *The Personal Development Framework P-10: Deciding and Acting in Everyday Life* (*PD Framework*) (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989) was one of 10 frameworks covering each curriculum area to provide 'support and guidance for schools involved in planning and reviewing their curriculum' (Curriculum Branch, 1985, p. 5) in the state of Victoria, Australia. These frameworks offered broad and relatively open-ended recommendations to schools on curriculum and teaching. The documents were expected to support school-based curriculum development while reorienting teachers to emphasise the notion of the 'autonomous learner' (see Hinkson, 1991, p. 28). The then Labor Government described the documents as a mechanism to ensure 'that schools do not devise programs that promote narrow, sectional interests or that exclude important aspects of learning' (Minister of Education, 1984, pp. 3–5). The *PD Framework* document was partially a response to the perceived neglect of the personal development area in the curriculum, but also reflected the government's reassertion of the need for a broad secular approach to this aspect of education.

   The *PD Framework* brought together six components (Health Education, Physical Education, Traffic Safety, Home Economics, Outdoor Education, Textiles and Clothing) with a focus on 'people … making responsible decisions and taking action

to enhance the quality of life' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 9). The document sought to define sexuality education within a very broad context where 'health education must foster the capacity for young people to adopt a socially critical perspective about health issues' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 79). Each of the main three discourses on sexuality is implied in the overview of the field. There is a focus on physical growth and development including knowledge about 'reproductive cycles, pregnancy and birth, fertility and infertility' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 80). In line with many curriculum documents in this area, the social and emotional change aspects of sexuality are perceived to have physical origins, implying a mild version of biological determinism where a 'problem' curriculum results from learners' physical development. There is also a discourse of harm minimisation where students are expected to develop knowledge of risks associated with sexual expression and develop strategies to avoid these risks through 'safe sexual practices' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 80). However, the dominant implied discourse on sexuality in this document relates to self-expression and learning about 'being myself' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 80). From this perspective sexuality education is about informed self-determination and appropriate self-expression, where 'young people need competencies which enable them to deal with situations as they arise, and to decide what to do and how to act on their decisions' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 79). Sexuality is defined as 'an integral part of selfhood … that influences our perceptions, attitudes and behaviours in relation to other individuals and to society' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 79). In this way, sexuality education:

> involves improving personal and social skills, such as understanding and managing a range of feelings and moods; trusting and being trusted; communications skills including attentive listening; and coping with peer-group pressure, sex-role stereotyping, sexual violence and other conflict situations relating to sexuality. (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 79)

This emphasis on the individual in relation to sexuality education is evident in both the general explanatory text and in the diagrams. For example, the diagram titled 'Sexuality education as part of a comprehensive approach to health education' (see Figure 1) depicts an individual looking in a mirror as a starting point for investigating a range of issues associated with his sexual identity.

In this diagram there is a strong implied sense of the agency of the learner to engage with the personal, social and embodied meanings and issues entailed in sexuality. The individual is pictured literally at the centre of the topic and is invited to see a range of personal decisions that she or he can make that will affect her personal and social identity in relation to sexuality. The topic is pictured as a range of developmental and social influences affecting the individual's identity. In general the document does not propose a strong normative heterosexist viewpoint, but rather invites learners to follow a personal autobiographical focus. However, this specific diagram implies a male subject dealing with attraction to a female ('How can I let her know that I like her?'). While this

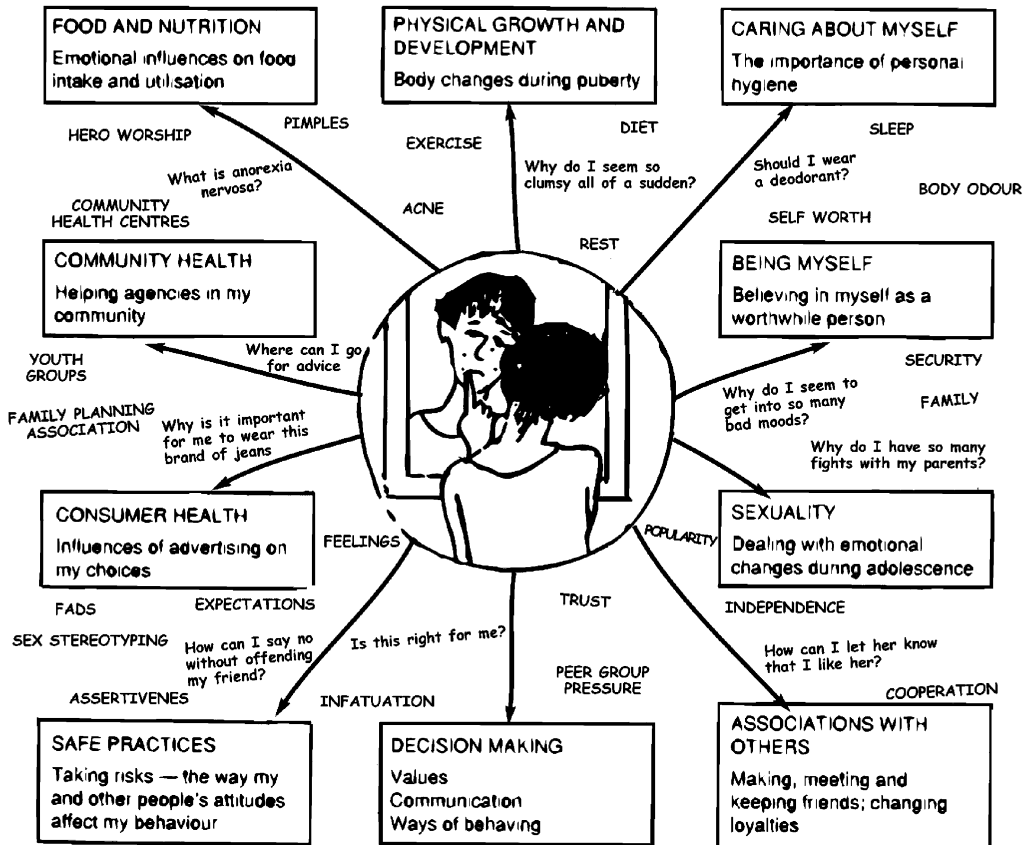## SEXUALITY EDUCATION AS PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO HEALTH EDUCATION

Figure 1. Sexuality education as part of a comprehensive approach to health education. The *Personal Development Framework P-10* (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 80)

diagram does not provide an explicit discourse of desire or sexual pleasure, it is possible to interpret the category of 'association with others' including issues such as 'making, meeting and keeping friends' and 'changing loyalties' as signalling a tacit recognition of the possibility of this theme in this subject. In general, the diagram seeks to embed sexual understanding within a range of decision-making options for the individual, encouraging the individual to see himself or herself as able to consider the consequences of different actions and feelings. This dominant discourse of self-determination, self-expression and agency of the learner is evident elsewhere in the writers' choice of verbs to characterise learners who are 'understanding coming to terms with … selfhood, developing self confidence and self esteem, practising emotional wellbeing, loving, respecting and sharing, managing difference in beliefs between myself and others' (Office of School Administration, 1989, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 63).

As these indicative textual examples suggest, this curriculum on sexuality education proposes that 'learning experiences need to concentrate on students' feelings, attitudes, values, relationships and social skills', as well as 'decision-making and action' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 79). While the usual conventions of expository text associated with a curriculum document are observed (such as overviews, definitions and bullet-pointed lists), the text is relatively open-ended in terms of prescriptions for teachers' practices. How the ontogenesis of a sexually responsible, self-governing student might be achieved is left up to individual teachers, who are expected to 'deal in context with the health issues that arise in a community' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 79). A 'holistic approach' (p. 80) is advocated where sexuality should be seen as 'part of the total self, and not a separate compartment of one's life' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 80). The document implies that students will learn an appropriate sexuality understanding through investigation of personally relevant issues and through rational critical reflection, entailing acquisition of knowledge and clarification of values and attitudes. From this perspective, the teacher is construed as a facilitator and challenger promoting 'critical inquiry', 'questioning' and building on the values of home and community.

Sexuality education is viewed more as the clarification of values rather than the acquisition of neutral knowledge and information. The document specifies no prescribed learning outcomes in terms of knowledge or attitudes to be acquired by students although a general description of a successful learner is implied in the goals of the document. The tenor of the text implies that the teacher as reader is an informed collaborator in relation to development and implementation of this curriculum, someone who is not motivated by 'finding and teaching quick solutions to community problems' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 79). Rather, the teacher is expected to share the assumption that 'long-term' (p. 79) approaches are needed to deal with these issues and that a broader contextualised conception of sexuality education is essential for effective teaching in this area. At the same time, the text's mode is formal, implying the seriousness of both the topic and the document's purposes. In terms of modality, the document is written in a style that signals a high degree of certainty about the knowledge claims and assertions of the text, as is normal for this kind of curriculum text. However, a minor degree of conditionality is implied occasionally when learning outcomes are framed as understandings 'students should be encouraged to develop' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 80). Learners are generally universalised with an absence of a gender focus, although there is a potential capacity to focus on individual gender construction when students discuss topics such as 'challenging traditional sex roles' (Office of School Administration, Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 65).

Revised documents

Whilst these first Frameworks documents brought general uniformity to curriculum development across Victorian schools, greater accountability was introduced with

the *Curriculum Standards Frameworks* (CSFs) published under a conservative State Liberal Government in 1995. The CSFs developed out of a Federal government attempt to establish a National Curriculum. The *Health and Physical Education Curriculum Standards Framework* (Board of Studies, 1995) was developed to provide schools with not only a basis for curriculum planning for years P-10, but also a predetermined set of 'learning outcomes' or 'standards' providing a basis for the reporting of student achievement. In an attempt to redress the concerns of an 'overcrowded' curriculum, the *Health and Physical Education Curriculum Standards Framework* drew together elements of the six separate but potentially linkable components within the *PD Framework* into seven more 'fully' integrated strands: Human Movement, Physical Activity and the Community, Human Development, Human Relations, Safety, Health of Individuals and Populations, and People and Food. Continuing concerns about the 'overcrowded' curriculum and the large number of 'outcomes' on which teachers were expected to report led to the development of a revised CSF. This *Health and Physical Education Curriculum Standards Framework II* (*CSF2*) (Board of Studies, 2000) further merged strands of knowledge and reduced outcomes for each strand. Indicators of achievement were introduced adding to the focus on accountability in reporting.

In contrast to the earlier *PD Framework* document, sexuality education was redefined as mainly knowledge about sexual development and the implied risks of sexual activity. Rather than an interlocking focus on various dimensions of sexuality with a strong emphasis on an experiential individualised perspective, *CSF2* (Board of Studies, 2000) embedded sexuality education into larger themes of growth and development as part of a Health and Physical Education focus. Students were expected to develop knowledge and skills to promote safe community and personal environments. The curriculum offers a generalised view of safety as associated with a risk-free environment. There are two implied discourses on sexuality in the document: the biological aspects of sexuality, and the discourse of risk associated with sexual activity. At level four of the curriculum programme, students are expected to learn about significant transitions between life changes, particularly the changes associated with puberty and different maturation rates. 'They [students] consider the changing roles and responsibilities within the family setting and among friendship groups that often come with sexual maturation and the physical, social and emotional aspects of sexual development' (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 36). The mode of the language is formal, implying that the subject is expected to acquire technical knowledge removed from a personal orientation. Students are invited to examine feelings about difference, including stereotypes about sexual preferences, and to consider the construction of gender related to needs and aspirations (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 36). Coping with sexual risk in this document is conceptualised as the need for effective management of the self. The implied learner is a rational subject able to act on appropriate technical knowledge and set goals for achieving healthy and safe personal environment. The student is expected to 'generate personal health goals based on your understanding of what it means to be healthy, and develop a plan to achieve these …' (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 34). One of the

goals for the subject is listed as 'knowledge and skills to plan, implement and evaluate actions to promote the health and safety of individuals, families, groups and communities' (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 6). Elsewhere in the document the risk discourse is de-emphasised by focusing on safety. The document also identifies two versions of risk: positive risk-taking in terms of experimentation, and a negative version of risk-taking that endangers self and others. While this view implies considerable agency for the learner, the document, unlike the earlier 1989 account of sexuality education, downplays the constraints on the learners' environment such as peer pressure or sex stereotyping.

In the proposed framework for exploring biological knowledge, the document links physical changes to possible feelings. Students are asked to 'discuss feelings associated with developing early or late, and ways to acknowledge these differences in development' (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 36). Feelings are referred to only in terms of general preferences rather than personal feelings of individuals in the context of actual relationships. Students are expected to consider various ways that people view each other on the basis of characteristics. These include observable characteristics such as gender, race, sexual identity, abilities and economic status as well as more abstract features such as needs and aspirations. Students are asked to 'discuss the ways some colloquial terms for sexual organs can indicate negative attitudes towards males and females' (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 36), but such a recommendation assumes that these issues can be effectively treated as knowledge that is easily dissociated from the learners' peer culture and embodied perspectives. Students are expected to learn that relationships change over time, to develop strategies for managing the loss of some relationships and skills for the development of new relationships (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 36). The document assumes that learners need to develop an adult perspective to minimise any potential suffering arising from these relationship changes.

The proposed learner outcomes for upper primary students indicate that students should acquire knowledge about sexuality and prudence in sexual expression where they are able to 'discuss some community views and standards concerning appropriate behaviour for young men and women and how these change with sexual maturation' (p. 36). The implied attributes of the successful learner are that she or he is a rational, risk-managing individual who is able to cope with her or his sexual nature. The themes of the document assume that a formal understanding of factors affecting the expression, development and the nature of sexual identity in the abstract will promote such an outcome. Like the earlier document, the writers refuse to acknowledge or canvass any doctrinal or moralistic perspective on the themes, preferring to focus on a broad sociological orientation to the topic, emphasising the acquisition of knowledge rather than feelings, individual perceptions or responses.

Compared with the earlier *PD framework*, the treatment of sexuality education is more diffuse and implicit, with a tendency to attempt to objectify issues or to not acknowledge the contested nature of attitudes towards sexual preferences. For example, in the discussion of an 'effective' relationship, there is a tendency to objectify attributes of this relationship. Discussion of relationships is also treated in

general terms, such as the development of skills of honesty, trust, understanding and conflict resolution rather than sexual physical relationships. Students are encouraged to 'develop a charter for good friendships' (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 28). Sexual feelings in the body are ignored but feelings relating to relationships are considered. In the topic of 'self and relationships' possible negative behaviours are listed, including 'coercion, bullying, not sharing, put-downs, name-calling, and spreading rumours' (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 28). However, sexual abuse is not covered. This document also tends to universalise learners rather than acknowledge the nature of gendered experience.

Currently, in many schools in Victoria and across Australia, Protective Behaviours or Personal Safety programmes are widely utilised in an attempt to raise awareness of abuse and to prevent of abuse, including sexual abuse (Tomison & Poole, 2000, p. 58). These programmes aim to educate children to protect themselves although this is not meant to make children solely responsible for their own safety; however, the programmes may be seen as complementary or as an approach to teaching within the health curriculum area. They are not directly referred to in the curriculum documents in Victoria. The Protective Behaviours Program in Victoria seeks to empower students through promoting resilience, general well-being, feelings of self-worth, assertiveness, belief and trust in oneself, rights (including the right to feel safe all of the time) and responsibilities, problem-solving, seeking and providing support and adaptability and flexibility (Children's Protection Society, 2003).

Discourse analysis of these two curriculum documents reveals the positioning of the learner in sexuality education in two different ways. While both documents imply considerable agency for the learner, the more recent one ignores the realities of the constraints on individual choice and decision-making. The first curriculum document recognises embodied dimensions that influence decision-making and actions. To some extent there is potential here for an opening up of sexuality education to the exploration of the socio-political realities of students' lives. Also, although again implied, there is potential for students to examine the contested nature of sexual expression. The emphasis on values clarification marks issues in sexuality education as personal as well as non-neutral. The revised curriculum, however optimistically, positions the student as a rational non-gendered adult who can effectively manage relationships as they would their material lives. There is a lack of focus on personal meaning within the subject as it attempts to reshape sexuality education as non-problematic factual learning. The focus on individual risk management refuses to acknowledge social context or the embodied nature of sexual expression, assuming that it can and should be submitted to rational control. Neither document addresses the question of sexual preference and the possible implications of this in terms of peer and social values, and the effects of preference on the individual, friends and family.

The more recent *CSF2* emphasises measurable learning outcomes in terms of formal knowledge about the topic. Differences here between the documents can be explained in terms of their different curriculum and social contexts. The first document was produced in a context of collaborative school and state-mandated

curriculum where there was an expectation that teachers should customise the curriculum within broadly agreed parameters of themes and year levels. The second document was produced in a climate of increased curriculum standardisation and heightened teacher accountability where there was a strong emphasis on detailed measurable learning outcomes in all curriculum areas. This concern for measurable learning encouraged a thematic shift to more easily assessed neutral 'academic' content associated with sexuality education, such as asking students to 'identify the major stages of development across the human lifespan' (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 29).

Some future implications

This comparison of the discourses on sexuality evident in these two curriculum guidelines suggests various implications for future documents in this field, including identification of particular preferable learning outcomes in sexuality education, a plausible pedagogy for achieving appropriate learning outcomes, and the necessary mix and emphasis of discourses on sexuality that should shape such documents.

While we recognise that prescribed curricula do not translate neatly into practice and what teachers aim to teach may not always be what students learn, we believe there is value in education policy that makes explicit key values, concepts and approaches to teaching. This is particularly the case in the area of sexuality education where the complexities of teacher and student identities, values within various cultural contexts, and expectations of official texts are often in tension. There is a need for some technical scientific knowledge about the body, its changes and the impact of culturally defined meanings and behaviours. Such knowledge allows students deeper understandings of themselves and others, as well as risks associated with sexual health issues. Nevertheless, students also need to understand that this knowledge is evolving and is influenced by socio-cultural contexts. While examining the biological aspects of sexuality, students can also explore cultural mores based on essentialist perspectives. Such an understanding of the contested nature of knowledge about sexuality offers an exploration of the basis for both historical and current practices, allowing also for a clarification of students' own values.

We suggest that learning outcomes might also focus on understanding both social and personal perspectives on sexual expression. As a critically oriented discourse analysis of this field makes clear, sexuality education is, by definition, concerned as much with contested values as it is with technical knowledge about responsible sexual behaviour. Our analysis suggests that learning outcomes should focus on student understanding of the contested nature of value positions towards sexual behaviour evident in conflicting judgements made about the sexual behaviour of individuals and groups within society. Students in upper primary school and junior secondary school are well aware of this social reality. Therefore, a meaningful curriculum might offer opportunities to explore the nature and effects of this reality on others and themselves. Such an exploration might recognise the powerful contextual constraints on individuals' choices, actions and decisions posed by

mainstream social and familial expectations. Students need to understand the probable consequences in terms of value judgements that different behaviours will elicit. At the same time, sexuality education should examine the personal and experiential aspects of this subject.

A holistic approach here suggests that issues of gender, relationships, sexual identity, self-esteem, interests, behaviours, motivations, feelings, beliefs and attitudes can be explored. There is scope for a focus on the personal and the affective as well as opportunities for students to explore issues of sexuality in an embodied way. Massey (1990, p. 137) suggests that students need the opportunity to gain 'autonomy in their attitudes and behaviours about sex' by refusing 'to isolate sex from its social context and also from discussions of the conflicting and confusing emotions which surround sex'. Within this context, learner differences including ethnicity/culture, gender and sexual identity are acknowledged as a basis for exploring the contested nature of the field. Clearly, values clarification can be an essential learning strategy in sexuality education. While we agree with Morris's (1994, p. 21) view that values clarification can easily be reduced to a set of 'tools for making decisions about sexual-moral problems', students may benefit from an opportunity to use value clarification strategies to explore a range of experiences including 'pleasure, joy, playfulness, intimacy, tenderness, and sensuality'. The learning outcomes of such an orientation might entail increased understanding of personally relevant issues for each student, along with critical reflection and values clarification about gender, race and sexual identity.

The evidence from this curriculum analysis suggests that issues of pleasure and desire are largely absent, although not entirely prohibited (at least in the first curriculum document). There is little doubt, however, that such issues cannot be explored without due consideration of the gender-based construction of sexuality. Unless issues of the construction of masculinity and femininity are examined, it is unlikely that issues of identity and sexual expression as well as pleasure and desire can be explored with any relevance. Of course, replacing masculinist, heterosexist discourses in sexuality education is less likely to be successful when the rest of the school curriculum and organisation remains steadfastly based in such discourses. In engaging with these issues, students need to develop some personal understanding of the nature and effects of these constructions.

The demand for measurable learning outcomes has impacted on the curriculum development process for sexuality education in Victoria. The focus on knowledge within the revised curriculum document has limited the possible approaches utilised by teachers. It is our contention that while technical knowledge is easily measurable, measuring changes in value stances is fraught with problems. However, that is not a sufficient reason for abandoning a focus on the affective domain. Certainly the process of learning can be measured. For example, teachers can measure students' ability to participate in discussions and debates with confidence and provide supporting arguments for their particular stance. The skills and abilities students develop in analysis of their own and others' values can also be measured (see Misson, 1996). Students can be assessed on their ability to:

- identify bias, prejudice and stereotype in arguments;
- critically analyse argumentative strategies and discourses in texts; and
- recognise the costs and benefits of holding particular viewpoints for ourselves and our society as a whole.

Assessments can also be made of changes in self-efficacy, self-esteem, changes in attitudes, and ability to think broadly about social issues.

An orientation to learning outcomes that encompasses affective outcomes also implies a different conception of the nature of learners. From this perspective the curriculum might acknowledge and start with students' current sexuality, values, beliefs, feelings and emotions as well as concerns, rather than positioning the student as a rational adult. Gourlay (1996, pp. 43–45) supports this viewpoint, arguing that, among other factors, sexuality educators need to accept and not generalise about adolescent sexuality, while adopting multi-dimensional and developmental approaches. Within this context, learner differences including ethnicity/culture, gender and sexual identity are acknowledged as a basis for exploring the contested nature of the field. Issues of mutual respect, responsibility and tolerance, or even celebration of diversity, are more likely to be identified as key values underpinning the curriculum.

An effective pedagogy for these learning outcomes that takes account of the diversity of learners, their current and developmental needs, experiences, capacity for (and constraints on) agency will necessarily entail a broad range of teaching and learning strategies. These include discussion-prompted reflection, role-play, media analysis, values clarification and personal decision-making processes, case-study analysis, and opportunities to express understandings of the embodied nature of this subject. From this perspective, the various strategies advocated in each of the curriculum documents could address the physical, social, cultural and personal dimensions of this learning.

The three dominant discourses on sexuality identified in these documents will clearly inform future curriculum prescriptions in this area. We have suggested that a discursive emphasis on prohibition and risk, or rational autonomous control and 'adult' management of sexuality, could be tempered by a focus on emotional maturational issues and reflection on affective dimensions of this subject as lived and felt by learners. A future-oriented curriculum needs to take seriously learner perceptions and differences, to acknowledge the contested values of this field and to promote in learners mutual respect, responsibility and tolerance of diversity. Such an orientation may provide the grounds for realising Fine's (1988, p. 47) worthy goal of the 'social entitlement' aspect of sexuality education.

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