

**"What should be the *subject* of sex education?"**

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## Abstract

This is a background paper which explores the role of teachers and the way they (and others) construct the curriculum in school-based sexuality education programs in Australia. We argue that an over-emphasis on cognitive processes and the construction of sex as 'risky practice' fails to adequately account for desiring bodies both inside and outside the classroom. This may result in students viewing safer sex education as unduly coercive and/or something that is unconnected to their lived experience. Moreover, the current emphasis on penetrative reproductive heterosexual in the curriculum has the effect of reconstructing normative heterosexuality thus excluding or making invisible other ways of being sexual. This has negative consequences for students who do not identify as heterosexual. As well, this emphasis has the effect of narrowing the range of (hetero)sexual practices available to those which privilege hegemonic constructions of masculinity and femininity thus restricting knowledge about the repertoire of possible safe sex practices available to young people. In trying to imagine a more inclusive sexuality education that celebrates different ways of being sexual and takes into account desire and pleasure we are also forced to contend with the personal, social and structural barriers that impact on such a vision.

Simon Watney argues that 'most official HIV/ AIDS 'education' has only tended to reinforce negative perceptions of safer sex as a system of imposed constraints that are only able to be complied with reluctantly' (1994, p. 146). As a consequence he argues that the sustainability of safer sex practices is problematic. Linda Singer expressed a similar concern regarding the failure of safer sex discourses to adequately account for desire and pleasure and in this regard has called for an eroticisation of safer sex. According to Singer this eroticisation would of necessity require a changed relationship between knowledge and desire and a reinscription of the body's 'erotic priorities' moving away from what she calls '...an ejaculatory teleology' towards a more 'polymorphous' sexuality which would include numerous forms of non-genital contact (1993, p. 122). Singer urged an examination of the forms of discipline that are socially mobilized in dominant sexuality discourses and what the consequences of this mobilization might be 'for empowering bodies, with respect to currencies of both pleasure and safety' (1993, p. 82). Schools are one site in which 'adolescent' sexual bodies are disciplined into the norms of (hetero)sexuality. A site where historically sex has been constructed as 'risky business' and where discussions of pleasure and desire without utility (Britzman, 1996) are largely absent.

Although this background paper does not include empirical data it does emerge from our experience on a number of research projects related to young people's sexual health that have been completed or are currently in process which have been undertaken under the aegis of the Youth/General Population Program at the National Centre in HIV Social Research. In what follows we explore the role of teachers in mobilizing particular forms of discipline within school-based sexuality education programs and what the consequences might be for the sexual health of students in their care. While we recognise that there are historical and cultural limits on what teachers can speak about in sexuality education classrooms more recently 'radical movements of sex and gender' (for example, some feminisms, lesbian and gay movements) (Johnson, 1996, p. 165) have opened up new ways of thinking about,

and being, sexual. This in turn has caused some educators to turn their attention to the possibilities (and the problems) of teaching for and with difference in the sexuality education classroom. We argue that an overemphasis on penetrative heterosex in school-based sexuality education programs has the effect of reconstructing heterosexuality as the norm thus excluding or making invisible other ways of being sexual. This has negative consequences for students who do not identify as heterosexual as well as narrowing the range of (hetero)sexual practices to those which privilege hegemonic constructions of male desire and pleasure.

### **SCHOOLS, SEX AND SOCIAL REGULATION**

...social regulation can function, not only in a sense through overt oppression, but rather through defining the parameters and content of choice, fixing how we come to want what we want (Henriques et al, 1984, p. 219).

Michel Foucault argued that the '...emergence of "population" as an economic and political problem' in the eighteenth century was 'One of the great innovations in the techniques of power...' (1976, p. 25). Once governments perceived that they were dealing with populations rather than people, measuring such things as 'birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, patterns of diet and habitation' became necessary (1976, p. 25). It was in this context that '...the sexual conduct of the population' became both '...an object of analysis' and '...a target of intervention' (Foucault, 1976, p. 26). Following Foucault various theorists ( Rose, 1985; Donald, 1992; Tait, 1993 and Hunter, 1995) have argued that schooling can be seen as one of the main institutional sites for the government (and self-government) of bodies. Michelle Fine has argued that 'public schools have historically been the site for identifying, civilising, and containing that which is considered uncontrollable' (1992, p. 33).

John Tulloch and Deborah Lupton have observed that sexuality education in schools '...is a type of sexology directed at specific bodies; adolescent bodies in the process of becoming sexual bodies' (1995, p. 3). The recognition of HIV/ AIDS as a major (often cast as *the* major) public health concern on a global scale since the 1980s has meant that safer sex discourses have become a primary site for regulating the sexual behaviour of populations. It is in this context that school-based sexuality education, representing as it does the confluence of sex and schooling, takes on particular significance as a site of governmentality.

Lupton has pointed out that school-based sexuality education is based on a mixture of '...libertarian and romantic discourses. These discourses:

...are not repressive in terms of seeking to render young people as chaste beings, but are both libratory and regulative, acknowledging the inevitable sexuality of adolescents while seeking to shape it in certain ways (1995, pp. 3-4).

Sociologists and other educational theorists have historically constructed a progressive notion of teaching in which teachers are cast in the role of political activists - fostering student empowerment. McWilliam argues that these theorists '...have continued to demand that teachers re-invent themselves as radical redeemers of the educationally oppressed or marginalised' (1996, p. 17). Sexuality education as empowerment - the acquisition of knowledge to make your life safer and more fulfilling, to find pleasure and power - fits into this mould. But as McWilliam points out the insistence by critical theorists on teachers as 'agents of social revolution' obscures the fact that 'all pedagogy is a form of activism, and the radical teacher's activism is therefore second degree' (Ryan, 1986, p. 58 in McWilliam, 1996, p. 17). Teachers themselves are complicit in this when they insist that they are merely

facilitators to a discussion or when they do not acknowledge that the silences in the curriculum (in this instance around desire, pleasure and difference) do not give at least equally powerful messages to students as does the 'formal' curriculum. As Thomson and Scott note:

...the power of school sex education may be in what it omits rather than what it includes and consequently the boundaries which it draws between areas of sexuality which can be spoken about and those which remain shrouded in silence (1992, p. 9)

Student centred curriculum according to McWilliam can render a teacher's own desires invisible (1996, p. 17). We would argue however that they are more an absent presence and that students' are able to read messages that conform to dominant cultural norms about acceptable (hetero)sexuality off the teacher's body as well as in the formal curriculum.

Ian Hunter has argued that principled accounts of education rely on 'an image of the person as a self-reflective and self-realising moral agent' and that liberal and sociological educational theorists overplay the role of the school as 'a democratic means for the self-realisation of the self-reflective person' (1994, pp. 2-3). It is important to acknowledge the limits of what schools can be expected to achieve in relation to social change. Increasing class sizes, timetabling, the status of sexuality education within the curriculum, teacher professional development (or lack of it) and under-resourcing are just some of the structural factors that sexuality educators have to contend with. However, an acknowledgement of these limits and how we, in our role as educational theorists, are implicated in casting schools as the failed realization of *our* dreams should not stop us from taking up 'principled positions'. We do not only want to state *what is* ; we also want to think about *what might be*.. Unlike Hunter's moral reformists however, who tend to position themselves outside of social processes, we want to think about what might be possible *within* existing structures which can both constrain and enable. Whilst acknowledging that

widespread change is dependent on 'public support for a different ethos and alternative practices in institutions like schools' (Johnson, 1996, p. 178) this cannot be done without 'personal and political' work on the part of educators. Using the metaphor of the closet Johnson urges a speaking out about sexual matters, not in the sense of personal disclosures because this is still 'dangerous under existing conditions', but in a more general sense within educational institutions and 'in the culture at large' seeing this as a necessary condition for change (Johnson, 1996, p. 177).

### **SCHOOL-BASED SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

Ian Hunter, tracing the historical antecedents of the school, maintains that a reciprocity 'between the institutions of social administration and those of spiritual discipline - lies at the heart of the school system'. It is in what he calls 'Christianity's 'shepherd-flock game' that we see obedience and self-regulation articulated long after the school's 'doctrinal supports have fallen away' (1994, p. xv). Given both Hunter and Fine's comments it is not hard to see why schools in the contemporary situation in Australia are emerging as a primary site for the public articulation and circulation of safer sex discourses designed to 'contain' the spread of HIV.

Contributors to *Sexuality and the Curriculum* (Sears, 1992) raise concerns about sexuality education as a form of social control which often reinforces patriarchal and antisexual norms (see also Diorio 1985). James Sears argues that school-based sexuality education consists primarily of 'sexual hydraulics and social relations skills', that homosexuality is the topic least often taught and 'bisexuality is not even an option open for debate' (Sears, 1992, p. 148). He also maintains that sexuality educators rarely address questions such as 'What sexual knowledge is of most worth (and consequently included or excluded in sexuality education)?; How do educators incorporate that knowledge into the school curriculum?; How do students interpret

it? and Who has access to what types of sexual information?' (1992, p. 8). Our ongoing research in schools attempts to provide answers to some of these questions<sup>1</sup>.

The examination of safer sex discourses through their production in the print media suggests that these discourses are based on a system of exclusions related to gender, sexual orientation and age. Just as in the eighteenth century, girls were regarded as the playthings and helpmates of men rather than people with needs and desires in their own right (Rousseau, 1762), in the 1990s dominant discourses around (hetero)sexuality are based on similar exclusions constructed largely through the sex/gender system binaries femininity/masculinity and homosexual/heterosexual. Richard Johnson argues that this version of heterosexual relations is based on a 'very condensed category' of the *ideal* family:

...fusing a version of heterosexual relations (love, marriage and preferably monogamy), conventionally asymmetric gender relations (separate spheres, the woman as main carer, man as main breadwinner), and stable procreative unit of two opposite-sex biological parents, and a 'moral' environment for children of a strongly normative kind. The *combination* is crucial: the incitement/containment of heterosexual desire, the freezing of gender roles, and the stress on biological and social reproduction - all secured through the same relations (1996, p. 165).

However, contradictions such as '...[i]ncreased rates of divorce, single-parenting, cohabitation and the enhanced visibility of same-sex relationships' (Johnson, 1996, p. 165) mean that this construction of family and the 'ideal' form of heterosexual

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<sup>1</sup> An evaluation report of a pilot project in school-based sexuality education conducted in four Victorian schools in collaboration with the Directorate of Education (Victoria) during 1996 will be available in late 1997.

relationships which underpins much of school-based sex education are becoming increasingly fragile.

### **Risk and safety discourses**

Much of the content of sexuality education curricula, particularly in the age of AIDS, is designed around informing students about what is 'bad' for them - unprotected sex, sex outside a monogamous relationship, and, often in fact 'sex' *per se*. Bollerund *et al* have argued that '...this lack of a positive standard leaves adolescents without guidance in making decisions, beyond the injunction to 'just say no' to sex' (1990, p. 282, cited in Morris, 1994, p. 17). Given this injunction, it is sometimes difficult then for young people to work out what they should be saying 'yes' to. In relation to this Michelle Fine has argued that the construction of (hetero)sexuality in school curricula 'allows girls one primary decision - to say yes or no - to a question not necessarily their own' (1992, p. 36).

Sexuality education, as it is most often constructed, concentrates on risk and safety and is usually concerned with solving problems like teenage pregnancy and STDs. The current *Health and Physical Education Curriculum and Standards Framework* (1995) in Victoria, Australia, has included *Safety* as a topic heading in the section on Human Development and Human Relations. By organising issues around sexuality under the umbrella term *Safety*, programs tend to address the dangers rather than the pleasures of human relationships and sexuality.

### **MISSING DISCOURSES/SILENCES**

The naming of desire, pleasure, or sexual entitlement, particularly for females, barely exists in the formal agenda of public schooling on sexuality (1992, p. 35).

Michelle Fine has found that sex education curricula in many public schools in America authorise the 'suppression of the discourse of female sexual desire', *normalise* female sexual victimisation and privilege 'married heterosexuality over other practices of sexuality' (1992, p. 32). What is missing is an adequate articulation of pleasure and this has important consequences for young women's safer sex practices and for their sense of identity. It also has important consequences for health education. Morgan and Scott have suggested that in the contemporary context,

[u]nnatural barriers must be erected and practices that have been taken for granted must be questioned. However, the body in its sexual mode is supposed to be a source of pleasure/power, not a source of disease and danger, and this contradiction lies at the heart of the problem which faces health educators trying to get their messages across (1993, p. 10).

A positive female sexuality in which women are able to articulate what might be pleasurable for them, as opposed to what is pleasurable for their partner (this of course is not mutually exclusive although it is more often than not constructed as such) is a difficult and often impossible thing to negotiate in cultures where pleasure is largely defined in terms of hegemonic constructions of male desire and when a presumption of trust underpins sexual practices<sup>2</sup>. Sexuality education, by its very focus, serves to reproduce young women as the object of attention; as still somehow the 'problem' that needs to be fixed or the sex in most danger.

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<sup>2</sup> Wendy Hollway (1995) in a chapter titled *Feminist Discourses and Women's Heterosexual Desire* (in Wilkinson & Kitsinger, 1995) attempt to imagine an emancipatory discourse of women's heterosexual desire largely in an attempt to counter claims by radical feminists that this is an impossibility under current heterosexual social arrangements.

McWilliam asserts that when capability is measured in terms of the cognitive then 'good pedagogy works as 'the marriage of *two* minds'', the physical presence of bodies in the classroom are thus rendered 'immaterial' (forthcoming, 1996, p. 2, see also Sears, 1992, p. 7). This has particular consequences for sexuality education given that the ideal (although often unmeasurable) outcome is behaviour change in terms of participation in safer and more fulfilling relationships. The cognitive is evident in the dominant approach to sexuality education with its emphasis on 'learning the facts' about reproductive heterosex, and avoidance of disease (mostly HIV) often coupled with decision-making strategies which will make it easier to 'just say no' or to declare 'if it's not on it's not on' (Sears 1992, p. 9).

We do not wish to suggest that this knowledge is redundant. Although there is little evidence to suggest a causal relationship between knowledge and sexual behaviour change (Sears, 1992, p. 13) this knowledge is nevertheless an important prerequisite and Australian research has shown that young people of all subgroups are well-informed about safe penetrative sex (Rosenthal etc; Hillier Warr & Haste; Homelesstoo). However, we do agree with Holland et al who maintain that 'rationality' is the 'hidden assumption in many safe sex guidelines' : an assumption which does not take into account that decisions are often governed 'by the multifaceted and often contradictory pressures of everyday life' (1991, p.2).

Singer has argued that under epidemic conditions the relationship between knowledge and desire in erotic situations shifts so that knowledge about 'one's partners' physical condition and sexual history now becomes a prime object of concern". In this way 'the erotic gaze' becomes 'infected to some degree by the medical gaze which must learn to see sickness' (1993, p. 122). This means that very often desire and pleasure are missing from young peoples' conceptualisations of sex . Simon Watney has criticised behaviourism in research on HIV disease because it lacks any theory of desire. This absence is substituted for a

...mechanical and simplistic notion of 'sex', taken as a *a priori* reality that blinds researchers to the multiple, uneven, shifting relations of desire to sexual behaviour and identities, both in the lives of individuals and desiring collectivities (1994, p. 135).

The same holds true for school- based sexuality education programs where the emphasis is placed on disease prevention and 'young people are taught to control their sexuality rather than affirm it' (Sears, 1992, p. vii). As McWilliam states, '[f]or young people with a profound desire to desire, this can look like a preference for killjoy sexual politics' (forthcoming 1996, p. 8). Research in the United States indicates that homosexuality, gynecologic examinations, birth control, abortion, and masturbation and other non-procreative safer sex practices are the topics least discussed (Forrest & Silverman, 1989; Orr, 1982; Sonenstein & Pittman, 1984). In the Australian context this also holds true except for birth control which is often given some priority. As well, schools increasingly include some coverage of issues around homosexuality, albeit within the context of HIV/ AIDS education which is problematic in terms of risk perception for students who do not identify as homosexual (Trudell, 1992, p. 216).

The 'objects' of this curriculum are sexed and sexual student bodies, but within safer sex discourses they become strangely devoid of feelings, emotions and sensuality and somehow are thought to be (and come to think themselves to be) operating outside of existing gender power relations. There is no recognition of desire or pleasure (except as something to be deferred or avoided altogether) and relationships are to be endlessly 'verbally' and rationally negotiated. These are cognitive bodies, capable, or so we are lead to believe, of endless deferral. Sexual appetites are to be transcended to make way for 'higher order abstract principles' (McWilliam, 1996, p.

6), in this instance the concepts of 'risk' and 'safety', in order to ensure continuing 'health', itself an abstract principle. However, as Watney asserts;

Eroticism - that is, the pleasures of the body - is rooted in desire and desiring fantasy, while it is invariably articulated through practices that are intimately connected to contingent cultural forms and institutions. Located thus, eroticism cannot simply be switched on or off, or subjected to arbitrary redirection (p. 135).

Safer sex discourses rely on a rational self-realising subject and as such are unable to adequately account for the production of fantasy and desire. Cuban, writing particularly about teenage pregnancy, has pointed out that the 'decision to become pregnant is seldom rational' but instead tends to 'be shaped by personal and cultural traits' and that schools 'tend to be weak when it comes to altering emotionally based and culturally conditioned responses' (1986, p. 321). It must be stressed however, that schools operate within a broader cultural context that privileges rationality and informed decision-making as a means of achieving safer sex and that safer sex discourses themselves reflect '...an older liberal humanist rhetoric of self help and personal responsibility' (Sonnet & Whelehan, 1995, p. 82).

## **RISKY BUSINESS: CHANGING THE PRACTICES OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

Sexuality education is not taught in a vacuum. What is taught and the ways in which it is taught reflect larger cultural norms and teachers (together with students) continually reconstruct these norms in the practices they engage in when *doing* sexuality education.

### **Risky content**

At a recent workshop we conducted which looked at "teacher values and sex education", a group of educators considered the risks of talking about sexual practices. They felt the risks for teachers were manifold, including those of personal involvement, professional vulnerability, public outcry, legal harassment and alienation. They also considered that there were risks for students in terms of loss of trust, possibility of manipulation, and the blurring of the personal/professional boundaries. However, as this group of educators noted, there are also consequences related to continued silences about certain types of information. Not addressing certain questions and refusing to give opinions gives double messages about taboos and behaviours which are undesirable. For example, homosexuality seems to be a problematic area for teachers to address and often the only viable model of sexuality that is offered to students is a limited form of heterosex. It is tempting to see homophobia in individualistic terms as a form of 'bigotry or psychopathology' (Sears, 1992, p. 145). However homophobic attitudes held by teachers and students need to be understood 'within a societal context in which ideological beliefs and cultural values prop up existing relations of power and control within society' (Sears, 1992, p. 145). Seen in this way the difficulties of challenging homophobia are apparent although this is not an excuse for inaction. An often heard complaint from teachers is 'My students (usually meaning boys) are so homophobic'. However, the culture of any school mirrors the values and norms that exist in wider society and teachers are not immune from this. It may be a more useful starting point for teachers to examine the ways in which they themselves may be complicit in perpetuating homophobic discourse.

### **TEACHERS' BODIES**

Erica McWilliam argues that in the bureaucratic push for demonstrable outcomes, measured increasingly by the production of curriculum materials, 'teachers' fleshly bodies have almost been totally ignored as a material resource in gender education' (forthcoming 1996). A focus on learning outcomes renders invisible, teaching as an

embodied process. McWilliam argues that cognitive science has contributed to the representation of the teacher as "both transcendental and instrumental, a figure floating above the learning process and a facilitator or conduit through which the learning process is monitored and learning enriched" (forthcoming, 1996, p. 2). In the case of sexuality education the much used values clarification approach (see Morris, 1994) exemplifies this representation in which the teacher avoids giving her/his opinion for fear of exerting 'undue influence' over students while at the same time *guiding* them towards informed decision-making. This representation of the teacher as transcendental and instrumental is also evidenced in the dominant scientific approach to sexuality education in which the endlessly malleable bio-medical body as opposed to the 'lived body' is the object of our gaze.

An emphasis on cognitive processes disguises the fact that sexuality education is an embodied activity and that values are imparted to students not only through spoken language but also through body language, silences, role modelling and the ways we choose to live our lives. In this context the common-sense understanding of teachers as 'value-neutral' facilitators whose job it is to enable students to clarify their own values is viewed as an unrealistic and less than ideal strategy. As we previously noted, all pedagogy is a form of activism and, in this instance, under the guise of value neutrality, dominant cultural norms around reproductive heterosex are reproduced because they remain unchallenged. Students need to be exposed to a range of positive and different role models and access to knowledge about different ways of being 'sexual', given that there is increasing evidence that many aspects of heterosexuality (as it is currently culturally constructed) are dangerous to health and well-being.

But where is the 'teacher's body' in all of this 'talk' about safer sex? It appears also to be missing or at least ignored and perhaps for good reasons. McWilliam points out that some feminist academics have framed the teaching body 'as the site of potential

oppression, given the power relationship of teacher over student' (forthcoming 1996, p, 4). In a much broader sense the potential for abuse within adult/child relationships is enshrined in law and we are reminded of it, sometimes daily, in media reports of child abuse. Teachers become even more aware of this potential when dealing with that most volatile of subject matter 'sexuality'. Teaching sexuality in purely instrumental terms, separating *body* from *mind*, can be seen as one attempt to negate the potential danger of admitting the corporeal body and its unruly desire into the classroom. In relation to the adult potential for abuse in adult/student relationships McWilliam states;

The idea that the relationship is eminently reversible - that a student may be more powerful than her/his teacher - gets denied through infantilising and feminising representations of all students (forthcoming 1996, p. 4).

In the course of our conversations with sexuality education teachers we have found this not to be the case. Whenever they consider the problems of teaching explicit or controversial material teachers often talk about having strategies for protecting themselves from students who ask provocative or 'personal' questions. Mariamne Whatley points to the concerns of teachers in training who see sexuality education as dangerous, wanting always to focus on '...developing strategies to avoid conflict and controversy' instead of working out the best ways '...to facilitate communication with students' (1992, p. 78). If anything there is a heightened recognition of the 'power' that students can exercise in the sexuality education classroom and, as Whatley points out, teachers tend to self-censor in relation to possible controversial subjects effectively and sometimes unwittingly reinforcing dominant constructions of (hetero)sexuality (1992, p. 79, see also Trudell, 1992, p. 215). Bonnie Trudell has found that defensive teaching often has the 'contradictory outcome of splitting teaching ideals from actual practice (1992, p. 219). She argues that perhaps teachers need to do more values clarification in terms of their own teaching in order to work

out what is needed 'in its ideal form' rather than simply teaching what they can 'get away with' (1992, p. 83).

This recognition of the power of students and the potential danger of sexuality education also manifests itself in teachers' quite consistent ideas about who should teach sexuality education. It is only 'certain' types of teachers' bodies that are considered acceptable in the sexuality education classroom and these are bodies that do not generate 'unhealthy' desires. These appropriate bodies are overwhelmingly heterosexual, not too old but definitely not too young, married or, as a concession, in a stable relationship, preferably with children. If they are male it is more important that they fit *all* of the previous criteria. In our experience students, perhaps not surprisingly, often consider these exact same teacher/teaching bodies as less than ideal in this context. However, this is of course dependent on individual personalities. Trudell, in her ethnography of a ninth grade sexuality education classroom, found that the teacher would 'interject personal experience' into her lessons and that this process was made easier because of her 'socially sanctioned status as heterosexual, wife, and mother' (1992, p. 219). In this context the power of this teacher's body looms large, as Trudell notes;

...most of Mrs. Warren's personal asides [about marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, parenting, and sterilization] implicitly conferred status on dominant cultural values, particularly since students liked her and the class (1992, p. 219)

## **RE-CONSTRUCTING SEXUALITY EDUCATION: POSSIBILITIES AND PROBLEMS**

Richard Johnson has pointed out that schools do not just reflect historically specific sexual norms but are '...one of the places where sexual identities are produced' (1996, p. 184, see also Mac an Ghail, 1996). The production of normative identities however

is not seamless and has to be continually worked on. As Deborah Britzman has pointed out, the language of sex itself is imprecise and open to interpretation. For her there is [a]...queer contradiction between the ambiguity of language itself and the dominant insistence upon the stability of meaning in sex practices'. She describes as fantasy this insistence on the 'stability of bodies' that is, 'that bodies say what they mean and mean what they say' (1996, p. 4).

The very instability of body/language leaves open the possibility of interpreting the meanings of sex in ways that challenge historically specific normative constructions. Having admitted this possibility however and acknowledging that the insistence on the stability of body/language in normative versions of sexuality education is a fiction, does not mean that this insistence is without practical consequences. So far we have fore-grounded some of the ways in which particular 'normative' sexual identities are continually worked on in both the formal and informal curricula of schools and how, as a consequence, many teaching bodies find it difficult, if not impossible '...to create conditions where women's and homosexual experiences are speakable' (Johnson, 1996, p. 182). Deborah Britzman has asked '...what can be the aim of sex education if the object of education is in the renunciation of sex?' (1996, p. 7). She sees similarities between normal and critical sex education in that, although the latter usually 'begins with the demands of those identified' both are dependent on '...the eugenic ideal that certain knowledge be affixed to certain identities' (1996, p. 8).

Following Foucault she urges us to think about sexuality in terms of 'historicity and relation' rather than 'development or identity'. Thought of in this way questions about sexuality education can be recast in terms of historically specific knowledge and particular forms of subjectivity. For Britzman

The unaccounted problem becomes how to imagine which knowledge will allow for new practices of the self when the dominant knowledge of

sexuality is caught up in and constituted by discourses of moral panic, protection of innocent children, the eugenics of normalcy, and the dangers of explicit representations of sexuality. More pointedly, when sex gets into the hands of politicians, social policy makers, religious fundamentalists - all of whom bear down upon the way education might imagine sexuality - what's a curriculum to do? If everything causes sexuality - or more interestingly, if anything can make sexuality (and therefore make sexuality perverse) - then what should be the subject of sex education? (1996, p. 8).

In this instance Britzman's 'subject' is not the curriculum but the form of personhood the curriculum pre-supposes. She wishes to problematise essentialist notions such as the body and even culture and identity and in this context she suggests that 'pedagogy might begin with the assumptions that identities are made and not received' (1996, p. 9). (We are reminded here of the new modes of subjectivity brought into being by the AIDS pandemic that have opened up the very possibility of thinking differently about sexuality education). The work of the curriculum could then be seen in terms of inciting 'identifications and critiques' rather than closing them down (1996, p. 9). If the work of the curriculum were to be seen in this way this would raise new questions about '...how ...educators and students'...are 'to engage ethically within a sex education viewed as indistinguishable from a practice of freedom and a care of selves' (Britzman, 1996, p. 9). Britzman warns, and no doubt you have already guessed, that this is not an easy task. Nevertheless she also warns that if the primary concern is to make a curriculum 'that does not incite curiosity, then sex education will continue to signify "our passion for ignorance" ' (1996, pp. 9-10).

Drawing on the work of Mariamne Whatley, Bonnie Trudell lists some goals for a "sex equitable" sexuality education which might facilitate speaking out about a more

diverse range of experiences. We acknowledge that these goals can be categorised under the rubric of a 'critical' sexuality education, therefore reflecting the limits placed on our current ways of thinking about the possibilities of school-based sexuality education. Nevertheless, they do represent what we consider to be a necessary point of departure. These goals include:

- Replacing biologically determined sex roles with more flexible, socially constructed gender roles
- Emphasizing female/male similarities rather than differences
- Recognising female sexual pleasure and desire
- Presenting intercourse as one of many possible forms of sexual expression
- Eliminating heterosexual assumptions
- Establishing common standards of sexual behaviour/responsibility for both sexes
- Providing education about violence that applies to both potential victims and perpetrators (1992, p. 223).

As we have tried to emphasise throughout this paper changes to sexuality education such as we have advocated here are not just the work of teachers. However, changes to the work of teaching are necessary if sexuality education is to become what Britzman describes as 'polymorphously perverse'; polymorphous in the sense of working with and for difference and perverse in the sense of a positive acknowledgement of the diversity of sexual experiences and pleasures.

In conclusion, let us return for a moment to where we began, with Linda Singer's call for an eroticisation of safe sex. Deborah Britzman maintains that '[t]he curriculum moves toward the polymorphously perverse and onto Bataille's notion of "erotism", when the problem becomes the making of questions that can unsettle the finitude

education and bodies that live there have become' (1996, p. 10). Let us be clear however that this is not on everyone's agenda and that the terrain of sexuality education is, and for the foreseeable future will be, a site of contestation. For those of us who want to unsettle this finitude and 'see sexual diversity as resources for making up some new possibilities' (Johnson, 1996, p. 184) it is obvious that there is still a lot of work to be done.

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