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**Policy Making about Relationships and Sex Education in
English Primary Schools**

Rachel Wilder

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, School for Policy Studies.

January 2019

Abstract

Relationships and sex education (RSE hereafter) is a fiercely political subject, and nowhere is it more contentious than at the primary school where, by some accounts, children's innocence is at risk and which is, by other accounts, an opportune moment for children to acquire important life skills and develop inclusive and informed attitudes about sexuality and relationships. Schools are tasked by the government with developing their own RSE policy, but there is a paucity of knowledge on how they navigate the landscape and what criteria inform their deliberations.

I used in-depth interviewing to gather data about RSE policy making from key decision makers – e.g. members of the senior leadership team, teachers, administrators and advisors – at three primary schools, all located in the same English city. Informed by a Critical Realist philosophical approach, my analysis draws on a number of theories to serve my research aims: Macmurray's writing about 'the personal' and 'the functional' and his typology of knowledge in education (1933, 1958, 2012); Social Realist theory about how cognitive norms and values contribute to curricula (Young, 2008; Moore, 2009); Morriss' conceptualisation of power as the capacity to affect outcomes (2008); and Goodnight's framework of argumentative strategies – technical, public or personal (2012). This research is a methodologically innovative approach, relevant for policy as well as scholarly work in the field.

This study offers persuasive evidence that in developing their school RSE policy, school decision makers draw significantly upon standards of knowledge, educational values and practices that are defined within the school itself. Decision making sometimes echoes wider public and political discourses – e.g. child protection, educational effectiveness – but local culture and leadership are dominant driving forces. This thesis confirms previous work suggesting that agents are more likely to make appropriate decisions about RSE when they possess epistemic knowledge in the subject, and deepens understanding of structure and agency by demonstrating that agents' capacities to make decisions about RSE are enhanced by collective knowledge of and commitment to the principles of RSE.

Acknowledgements

Heartfelt thanks to my supervisors, Ailsa Cameron and Debbie Watson. At each stage of this journey – including my actual doctoral research and the diverse avenues of academic learning and practice that I have explored – they have been there with enthusiasm, kindness and support. Their intelligence and mentorship have illuminated new ways of thinking and enabled me to find my own voice.

Thank you to the UK Economic and Social Research Council. I am grateful for the ESRC's financial support, without which I could not have undertaken this research.

Thank you to close friends who have been unfailing sources of laughter, love and escape: Jo Howard, Sarah Agarwal, Emma Smith, Lucy Jones, Kate Matheson, Pat Pinkowska and Kuba Jablonowski. To colleagues and peers at the School for Policy Studies and at 1 Priory Rd (the SWDTC), who have been the twin cores of my community for academic banter and provocation. To friends and family who have thoughtfully read parts of this thesis and helped me bring it to fruition, especially Brian Lander, Elizabeth Lord and Kathryn Stewart. And thank you to Devika Wasson who inspired me to pursue a PhD in the first place.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my family. Especially to my parents, Jean and Howard Lander, who have equipped and supported me in all kinds of ways to get to where I am now. And especially to my life partner and husband, James Wilder, who has shared me with this thesis for most of our relationship in the most generous and caring way possible, and who has never doubted my ability to accomplish it. And thank you Harvey for your light and joy, the perfect foil to my doctoral journey.

Author's Declaration

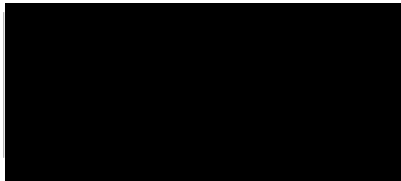
I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award.

Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work.

Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED:



DATE: 15 January 2019

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Questions about knowledge always take us back to some of our most basic assumptions about what it is to be educated or to educate someone; they are, in the broadest sense, philosophical and political questions about who we are and what we value. (Young, 2008:xvi)

Relationships and sex education (RSE hereafter) is a fiercely political subject. Nowhere is it more contentious than at the primary school where, by some accounts, children's innocence is at risk and which is, by other accounts, an opportune moment for children to acquire important life skills and develop inclusive, positive and informed attitudes and principles in relation to sexuality and relationships, in all their diversity, that may endure a lifetime. Although the government has sought to maintain its distance – compared to other areas of education – relationships and sex education is a continuously contested area of public policy that inspires spirited debates. Educators, parents, politicians, professional organisations, public health bodies, academics and special interest groups have weighed in with differing proposals regarding who should be responsible for children's learning about sexuality and relationships, what and how schools should address it, and when this learning should take place. These disagreements are not merely pragmatic: decisions about RSE reflect deep-seated practices and beliefs about what schools are for and what we value. I align knowledge with value and accordingly define the aim of this research as follows: to explore how primary school decision makers understand and (re)create value¹ in RSE policy making.

There is now persuasive evidence that comprehensive RSE in primary schools can be transformative: it can help children to make informed decisions in relationships, be confident about their development and their bodies from an early age, improve the health of future intimate relationships, and be more inclusive of diverse sexual and gender identities (Cullen and Sandy, 2009; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; Hester and Westmarland, 2005; Foshee et al. 2004; Wolfe et al. 2009). Some literature proposes that RSE could mitigate the effects of diverse sources of distress and danger in children's lives. Studies suggest that many children struggle with their body image, and even before they leave primary school many children experience gendered or sexualised peer aggression (Ringrose et al, 2012; Renold, 2000).

¹ I use 'value' to refer to the qualities or nature of the criteria that underpin decision making about RSE. I also use it to discuss what is considered important, i.e. 'what is valued'. However, my use of 'value' should not be mistaken with the use of 'value' in economic discourses, for instance 'value for money'.

School-based RSE is not a panacea for social problems and on its own it cannot deliver child wellbeing, but it could reach the vast majority of children and make a positive impact on their lives. In practice, however, many primary schools fail to deliver effective comprehensive RSE (House of Commons Education Committee, 2015; Ofsted, 2013), contrary to young people's desires (Forrest et al., 2004; Pound et al., 2015) and many parents' wishes (Alldred et al., 2016; Turnbull et al., 2008; Walker and Milton, 2006). Given what we now know about RSE and the current policy context, this is an important and timely study of how primary schools in England make decisions about RSE policy.

I came to this research with a professional background in advocacy and communications work in sexual and reproductive health and rights. My audiences had been high level politicians and policy makers, and my aim had almost always been to create the case for greater attention and funding for diverse sexual and reproductive health and rights issues, from FGM to contraceptives to comprehensive sexuality education. Key questions at the forefront of this work were, 'what arguments will work to persuade these policy makers?', 'what kinds of tactics or approaches should we use?', 'who holds the purse strings?' and 'what data will put into perspective the scale and urgency of this problem?'. I understood that policy makers were confronted by a barrage of voices and demands on a daily basis, and sympathized with their position while nevertheless feeling affronted by their repeated failures to pay heed to the urgent and worthwhile 'asks' we put forward. In my doctoral journey, my attention shifted to policy actors at the local level, those tasked with implementing policies adopted at a higher level, and negotiating very different social and professional worlds in their policy making. I had personally been persuaded of the lifelong potential offered by good quality RSE and this brought me to focus on RSE policy making in English schools. Whatever decisions were made at the highest levels, where – I wondered – did this leave educators who cared about children and young people, and wanted the best for them.

In the years that I have been working on my doctorate, debates about RSE in England have come to a head. After years of relentless campaigning on the part of non-governmental organisations, motion after motion to incorporate stronger language and commitments to RSE in legislation, and years of side-stepping on the part of government, finally in March 2017 the government adopted RSE² as a statutory component of the National Curriculum for all schools, including independent schools (see the *Children and Social Work Act 2017*, chapter 4).

² Or, as it is called in the legislation, 'relationships education' in primary schools, and 'relationships and sex education' in secondary schools.

While many groups met this announcement with celebration, others received it with trepidation. The government's draft guidance on statutory RSE was released for public consultation in July 2018 (DfE, 2018), assuaging some concerns and giving rise to new criticisms. A key complaint with regards to primary schools is the omission of clear, comprehensive guidance about sex education (Emmerson, 2018), which the literature suggests teachers need and want (Formby et al., 2011; Mason, 2010). The matter of schools' autonomy to tailor RSE as they see fit – a central issue in this study – continues to be contentious (e.g. 'Compulsory sex education: Human rights campaigners criticise government over faith school 'get-out' clause', Pells, 2018).

In this chapter, I set the scene for this research with an overview of recent policy developments in RSE, particularly in relation to the primary phase of education, and an introduction to the literature on RSE. I outline Critical Realism, my overarching theoretical orientation, and discuss how the pluralistic theoretical route I have chosen serves my research aims. I provide an overview of the significance of my findings. To begin with, a note on terminology.

1.1. Defining relationships and sex education

I use the term 'relationships and sex education' (RSE) to refer to this area of education because it is the term used by most of the participants in this study. I use this term throughout the thesis, except when referring to specific documents that use a different term. However, it is relevant to note that there are multiple terms in use to refer to RSE.

For example, 'sex and relationship education' is the term used in the UK government's 2000 guidance on the subject (DfEE, 2000), 'relationships education' is the term used in the most recent UK legislation and documentation for RSE in primary schools (Long, 2017), 'sexuality education' or 'comprehensive sexuality education' or 'life skills education' is used internationally (e.g. Breuner et al., 2016; Samuels, 2012; UNESCO, 2018), and in addition some countries use 'sex education' or 'sexual health education' (e.g. Byers et al., 2013; da Silva et al., 2013; Duffy et al., 2013; Milton, 2003).

While there is no universal term for the subject, there is a similar plurality about what RSE entails. Goldfarb and Constantine, for example, suggest that RSE refers to education that promotes children's learning "about themselves and others as sexual, gendered beings from biological, psychological and socio-cultural perspectives" (2011:3). Some suggest that RSE should address three learning domains: cognitive (information), affective (values, attitudes)

and behavioural (decision-making, communication) (e.g. Goldman, 2013; Breuner et al., 2016). Aggleton and Thomas elaborated on the behavioural learning domain to specify that RSE should equip young people with knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their behaviour, rather than to be prescriptive about what young people should do (2016:14). To achieve the full benefits that have been documented in relation to RSE, many experts promote programmes that represent a holistic, positive view of healthy sexuality and relationships, and which reflect human rights agreements and other international agreements, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (UNFPA, 2014). While terms such as ‘healthy’ and ‘positive’ allude to ideas about what is desirable in relationships and in society, the literature that defines RSE still appears to present RSE as a fairly value-neutral endeavour. It fails to address in any depth how RSE may be shaped by social norms, political discourses or policy frameworks, or how pupils and families who subscribe to divergent value structures may be supported in RSE.

The current UK Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (published by the Department for Education and Employment – since renamed the Department for Education – in 2000 and still in use) states:

[Sex and relationship education] is lifelong learning about physical, moral and emotional development. It is about the understanding of the importance of marriage for family life, stable and loving relationships, respect, love and care. It is also about the teaching of sex, sexuality, and sexual health. (DfEE, 2000:5)

The Guidance provides instruction on what RSE should and should not include. Although it has been justly critiqued for couching RSE as a public health concern (e.g. reducing teenage pregnancy) to the exclusion of other imperatives, for privileging marriage and heterosexuality over other types of relationships, for failing to legitimize sexual and gender diversity, and for promoting a limited understanding of sex and sexuality (e.g. Carabine, 2004; Sundaram and Stauntson, 2016), among other things, it does reflect some of the key principles of good RSE noted above, such as the recognition of cognitive, affective and behavioural learning domains. However, reviews of RSE in English schools demonstrate that the extent and content of RSE varies significantly from one school to another (Ofsted, 2013; Formby et al., 2011). This suggests that the policy is interpreted and applied in different ways by local authorities and by schools. The names given to RSE, including those mentioned above, are broadly applied to various forms and models, with the result that there is little clarity on what precisely qualifies a

programme to be named as such. This lack of consensus adds fuel to the rationale for this study.

1.2. Arguments for researching school policy making about relationships and sex education

Here, I set out the arguments for relationships and sex education in primary school and then focus on the arguments for researching how primary schools make decisions about their RSE policy.

Importance of relationships and sex education in primary school

There is a small but significant body of literature documenting the positive and transformative potential of relationships and sex education for primary school aged children. No Outsiders, a collaboration between researchers and schools, found that RSE can help children to become critical and supportive actors in recognizing and promoting gender equality and making schools inclusive of diverse sexual and gender identities (Cullen and Sandy, 2009; DePalma, 2013). Mason's study of two primary schools found that children became more informed and comfortable with both female and male bodily changes that happen during puberty as a result of RSE, and that children's knowledge of healthy relationships and the place of sex within relationships, was also improved (2010). Some literature also suggests that RSE can help promote positive body image and self-efficacy among children (Ringrose et al, 2012; Renold, 2000).

Support for primary school RSE is also motivated by studies with young people that suggest that the RSE they receive is too late and is inconsistent with their actual experiences of relationships and sex (Alldred and David, 2007; Pound et al., 2015, 2016; Torjesen, 2012; TPIAG, 2009). This work raises questions about what RSE is taught in primary school and how primary school educators understand and respond to children's developing sexuality and increasingly complex relationships. Mason's (2010) study of RSE in primary schools found that RSE is driven by adult beliefs and preferences rather than children's questions and expressed learning aims. The majority of studies looking at educators and decision makers who have responsibilities for RSE in primary schools have found that these staff have insufficient expertise, support and training (e.g. Formby et al., 2011; Macdonald, 2009; Ofsted, 2013).

While there is adequate literature to demonstrate the need for greater understanding of RSE in primary schools, existing studies focus predominantly on secondary schools, or address RSE

across the spectrum of schools. Issues that are unique to primary schools are often lost or confused. For example, there are differences of opinion about whether primary school RSE is too focused on the biological (External Steering Group for the DfE, 2008) or the social and emotional aspects of relationships (Ofsted, 2013).

Continued relevance of past recommendations for relationships and sex education

Over the past ten years, a number of independent and government-sponsored reviews have produced recommendations for improving RSE. Many of these recommendations remain relevant. Many of the reviews of RSE have addressed personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) more broadly, but most of them have recognized RSE as a special area within PSHE and have devoted particular attention to it. The relationship between PSHE and RSE will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Two, but for the purposes of this introduction it is important to understand that PSHE is the umbrella subject for a wide range of personal and social topics including RSE.

The latest public enquiry into RSE, entitled ‘Life Lessons: PSHE and RSE in schools’, was conducted and published by the House of Commons Education Committee (2015). As suggested by the title, the inquiry paid particular attention to RSE as an important subject within PSHE. The inquiry suggested that the delivery of PSHE and RSE were worsening over time, in part due to a deficit of qualified teachers, and called on the government to “incentivise schools to raise the quality of PSHE and RSE” (2015:27). The inquiry reported a dramatic drop in registrations for the national certified programme of PSHE Continuing Professional Development (CPD) since the government had ceased funding the programme in 2010. The inquiry also linked uptake of the course among teachers to the availability of local authority advisors specialising in PSHE and RSE, which were declining in all areas of England. The inquiry made a number of recommendations to government to ensure that all schools had trained specialists in PSHE and RSE, including by restoring funding for continued professional development in the subject (2015: 44). Drawing on government documentation and sources, the House of Commons Education Committee argued that the government had made insufficient efforts to improve PSHE and RSE, in line with previous studies and reviews of the subjects, and called for the Department for Education to develop a plan of work to introduce statutory PSHE and RSE in primary and secondary schools.

Prior to the House of Commons Education Committee inquiry, the Department for Education conducted a public consultation on PSHE. The report on this consultation (DfE, 2013a) supported more comprehensive, planned and effectively taught PSHE and RSE programmes.

In addition to statutory status for RSE, recommendations included: better guidance and expertise to develop and deliver programmes, better teacher training, and the articulation of expected knowledge outcomes. As suggested by the House of Commons Education Committee inquiry, these recommendations remained relevant two years later. The Department for Education decided not to make RSE statutory in response to this consultation due to the number of parent respondents who argued that parents should have primary responsibility for RSE. This decision was heavily criticized by a range of public and private bodies, including the Children's Commissioner for England (Horvath et al., 2013).

Earlier reviews and reports on PSHE and RSE included a national survey by the UK Youth Parliament, and two external reviews conducted at the request of the Department for Education (External Steering Group for the DfE, 2008; Macdonald, 2009). In 2007, the UK Youth Parliament surveyed 21,602 young people, who reported that "the SRE they receive in school is too little, too late, too biological, and doesn't provide enough (if any) information on relationships" (UK Youth Parliament, 2007:1). This suggests that secondary school may be too late to start talking about sex and relationships. In 2008, an external steering group appointed by the Department for Education recommended that "work on SRE should be within a clear and explicit values framework of mutual respect, rights and responsibilities, gender equality and acceptance of diversity" (2). This review was one of the few to challenge the idea that RSE is neutral, factual or 'value free', and, in connection with this, the group argued that RSE provision should take account of diversity, including religion, ethnicity, faith and sexuality.

In 2009, the Macdonald review recommended that all initial teacher training courses should include personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, and that public agencies responsible for teacher training should develop a dedicated career route to produce a critical mass of specialist PSHE educators (Macdonald, 2009:7). The Macdonald review also recommended that the government raise the profile of PSHE education among school senior leadership teams (p.8). Despite these expert reviews and guidance for improving PSHE (including RSE), in 2013 Ofsted reported a "lack of high-quality, age-appropriate sex and relationships education in more than a third of schools... it may leave children and young people vulnerable to inappropriate sexual behaviours and sexual exploitation" (2013:6).

Liminal position of relationships and sex education

As the preceding paragraphs imply, RSE occupies a liminal and tenuous position in public policy. A well-known historian of RSE, Lesley Hall, wrote that reading studies on sex education in the UK was like "the time-warp, déjà vu all over again, Groundhog Day... most of

the underlying issues still seem to be firmly in place” (2011:20). This resonated with me. The history of RSE and existing policy context emphasized the delicate ground upon which schools must tread around RSE.

As I discuss in Chapter Two, UK governments have situated RSE, at various times and sometimes at the same time, within a moral agenda, as a matter of public health pragmatism, to promote the reproduction of traditional (and heterosexual) couple and family structures, as a method of behaviour change to address social exclusion and inequality and as an instrument to promote children’s wellbeing and protect children from exploitation (DfEE, 2000; Thomson, 1994, 1997). These each reflect subtly different social constructions and value statements regarding what RSE should seek to achieve. In addition, public debates and political decisions about RSE have always been entwined with conflicting ideas about the distribution of responsibility and the ‘right’ to control children’s education as it pertains to sex, sexuality and relationships (i.e. parents or government?). Thus, political actions have always been invested with risk in terms of how they might affect constituents’ voting behaviour.

Moreover, RSE can never been extracted from mainstream education policies or curricula debates. These have evolved from liberal ideals regarding what it is to be educated – e.g. to be a critical thinker, self-reflective, a member of local and global communities – to neoliberal values, which measure educational success according to international ranking scales of academic outputs and support technical-instrumental models of curriculum, designed to serve the labour market. Neoliberal principles and neoconservative principles – aligned with the traditional canon of educational subjects, standards and respect for authority – dominate the education sector.

Current education policies intermingle with the legacies of the most prominent campaigns for RSE – notably, the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) and the safeguarding agenda (e.g. DfE, 2016). In the end, the government declared that RSE had been made statutory on the evidence of its utility to protect against child sexual abuse and the damaging effects of children’s use of digital technologies (DfE and Greening, 2017a).

De-centralised authority over relationships and sex education and pressure to prioritise other areas

Until the government approves statutory guidance for RSE, individual schools have discretion in this area of the curriculum. Since 1986, individual schools’ governing bodies have been

tasked with setting the school policy on SRE, including curriculum and organisation (*Education Act (no.2) 1986*). In practice, however, governors perform an oversight role, so it is senior leaders and/or delegated educators that develop RSE policy.

Recent research suggests that as a result of power and responsibility being devolved from central government to local levels, school leaders are being incentivised to develop business and management skills and leaders' value is based on their ability to make the school "intelligible and responsive as a cost-cutting, profit-making business" (Wilkins, 2015:12). Senior leadership teams are being held accountable for financial acumen and academic targets. As discussed in Chapter Two, state educational priorities and agendas have different measures of success compared to those that would most likely be aligned with RSE policy.

Links between the quality of relationships and sex education and strong leadership

There is limited literature on leadership around RSE, but existing research suggests that the quality of RSE is closely associated with strong leadership on the subject within the school (Allred and David, 2007; UNESCO, 2018). Strong leadership can create the conditions for good quality comprehensive sexuality education including: an inclusive curriculum; engagement with the local community; sufficient time allocated in the schedule; and training and structure for educators. Conversely, the prioritization of academic educational outcomes and lack of incentive to improve RSE limit improvements in RSE (Corteen, 2006). These findings are supported by studies with RSE educators (Abbott et al., 2016; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; Mason, 2010).

The House of Commons Education Committee inquiry reported that all schools that received a 'good' or 'outstanding' rating for PSHE and RSE from Ofsted had support for these subjects from the head and senior teachers (2015: 40). It suggested that the priority given to PSHE and RSE was related to the value that the schools placed on health and wellbeing in its school community. Further, in its 2013 report, Ofsted reported that the quality of leadership and management for PSHE required improvement, or was inadequate, in 44% of schools (2013:8). The review of PSHE conducted by the external steering group, at the request of the Department for Education, recommended that the government improve school leadership for RSE (DfE, 2008).

There is a particular paucity of research about leadership and decision making about RSE in primary schools. I found no studies focused on this precise aspect of RSE in primary schools, so my review of the literature focuses on studies looking at RSE in primary schools more

broadly, on decision making about RSE in secondary schools, and studies about children's gender and sexual identities. There are a few government or government-sponsored reviews of PSHE and RSE that address leadership and decision making in limited ways (e.g. Formby et al., 2011; Macdonald, 2009). The literature suggests that educators and others tasked with making decisions about RSE in primary schools lack guidance and support from senior management (Mason, 2010) and that because children's sexuality is a contested concept, educators and head teachers feel unable to address it (Renold, 2003). There is a sense that children's learning about sex, sexuality and relationships in primary schools has not been fully legitimised by the state and therefore many school decision makers feel unprepared and/or they take on substantial risk in doing so.

1.3. Theoretical approach and methodology

Critical Realism serves the aim of the research because while it takes agents' accounts as its starting point, it also seeks to explain how structures of social relations and enduring patterns act upon agents to produce the policies and practices that we do (Bhaskar, 1998; Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017). It recognizes that social life is emergent: events and behaviours take place through social combinations, power and constraints, webs of relationships and structured interests. Thus, Critical Realism is well-equipped to embrace the complexity of researching social situations, particularly where diverse voices and pressures are at work. This is certainly the case for decision making about RSE within primary schools. One of the ways that Critical Realists realise this aim is by weaving together complementary theoretical frameworks. I draw upon Macmurray's theory of educational knowledge (1950, 2012), upon Social Realist theory of knowledge in education (including work by Young and Moore), upon Morriss' theory of power (2002) and upon the argumentative approach (Dryzek, 1993; Goodnight, 2012).

Macmurray's writing on education, including his typology of educational knowledge, offers an aspirational vision of *what* knowledge in education should and can be. He proposes that there are three types of knowledge in education: technical knowledge, valuational knowledge, and knowledge about community. Technical knowledge is concerned with 'how' to do things, it is closely associated with the sciences. Valuational knowledge is concerned with how to establish or measure what has value in the world, what is worth doing. Knowledge about community (or intersubjective knowledge) is concerned with the things and aspects of life that are shared and take place with and between people. Macmurray prioritises intersubjective knowledge. He wrote, "the first priority in education... is learning to live in personal relation to other people...

learning to live in community” (2012: 662). Set against UK education policy, Macmurray broadens the scope for intersubjective knowledge in education.

The Social Realist theory of knowledge in education (Maton and Moore, 2014; Moore, 2000; Young, 2008) is an explanation for *how* knowledge is developed in education, and suggests that decisions about curriculum are driven by social or powerful interests, by cognitive goals and/or by cognitive norms. Young proposes that sociologies of knowledge must “take account of both the social (or power) relations and the epistemic relations of knowledge, thus allowing for the emergent properties of knowledge” (Young, 2013:196). As such, knowledge in the curriculum cannot be separated from the social and political context, including its historical evolution, and claims about the production of knowledge should consider the codes of practice, the social dynamics and institutions within which these processes occur.

Morriss’ theory of power complements Social Realism and Macmurray to explore how agents in primary schools wield power, both through forms of authorisation and their personal capacities, in decision making about RSE. Morriss defines power as “what [people] can do given the circumstances that they *do* find themselves in” (2002:80), and suggests that power is the capacity to realize one’s aims whether or not one chooses to do so. Power thus requires the ability to take action and cause intended outcomes. This approach to power is ideally suited to this study because it recognizes that the actors involved in making decisions are producers as well as products of open, multi-dimensional social systems.

While Macmurray, Social Realism and Morriss are most useful in the discussion stage of my analysis, I employed Goodnight’s argumentative approach, from the critical policy analysis literature, to analyse the data (Goodnight, 2012). The argumentative approach adds to the theoretical perspectives discussed above by recognizing that policy deliberations draw upon dominant discourses within which a policy problem has been situated. In addition, it situates policy deliberations within a ‘moment’ in the lifetime of a school’s RSE policy, one in which it is the actors present who use the resources available, balance current pressures they face, and resolve the ‘task’ of policy making in the context of their school (Goodnight, 2012:198).

In order to explore in depth the actors, the values, structures, interests and pressures that come together in decision making for RSE, I chose to use in-depth interviewing, focusing on the core group of people responsible for making decisions about RSE policy in three primary schools. The schools were in the same city, so shared some context beyond the national policy framework, but socio-economically, by size and by administrative structure they were diverse. I interviewed five or six people associated with each school, and identified by the head teacher

or subject lead for RSE. Respondents included RSE subject leads, other educators, members of the senior leadership team, parents, administrative staff, two pupils and one external consultant for RSE.

There were different layers to my data analysis: data immersion, coding using NVivo software, creative abduction and finally the writing process itself. As suggested by a number of empirical Critical Realist researchers, I applied multiple frames of interpretation to the data, based on the theories that I anticipated would be most useful in my analysis. I used inductive, thematic analysis techniques to draw out patterns across the data and to construct meaning, aided by theory. My in-depth reading and coding of the data influenced decisions to drop theories I started with and adopt others. This process helped to strengthen the analysis (Fletcher, 2017; Bhaskar, 1979). Creative abduction is “when a researcher observes something from a frame of interpretation that nobody has used before, or which at least opposes conventional interpretations” (Danermark et al., 2002:93). My research design and analytical strategy were coherent, credible, sincere and significant, in accordance with Critical Realism and complementary to the other theories I employed.

1.4. Significance of this research

In this thesis, I engage in a comprehensive discussion of knowledge production in RSE policy making in primary schools and offer productive, novel findings that contribute to scholarly knowledge about relationships and sex education – in primary schools in particular – to educational sociology and to critical policy analysis. My focus on how decision makers discern ‘value’ in RSE, how cognitive norms, goals and external, structured interests contribute to these understandings of value, and what this says about agents’ power to select and/or (re)produce knowledge(s) for RSE is novel. Methodologically, I demonstrate how a theoretically pluralistic analysis can aid in producing a multi-dimensional and complex story of decision making within primary schools, considering diverse spheres of influence as well as the balance, or interaction, between knowledge(s) related to curriculum content and knowledge(s) related to educational policy making practices.

In my findings and discussion, I assert that while there are common discourses and themes across all three schools that that decision makers have drawn from government policy and public arguments, each school demonstrated particular rules of logic, regimes for policy making and standards of knowledge that bore heavily upon the knowledge that was valued and (re)created in their RSE policies. I argue that educators lack power to affect outcomes in

RSE – in spite of official government authorisation. I re-conceptualise RSE as a socioscientific controversy (Stewart, 2009): a social issue that is characterised by strings of unresolved debates and communicative events, opinions about which are informed by discourses and texts associated with diverse spheres. Finally, I explore the utility of personal relations – about how individuals use their own, personal knowledge of their pupils, families and others implicated in RSE – to inform RSE policy making. I hope that this work will prove interesting and useful for both scholars and those working in policy, whether at schools or in government.

Chapter 2: Policy context and literature review

The aim of this chapter is to illuminate the educational and policy contexts of relationships and sex education (RSE), and to situate this study within the existing body of knowledge about RSE in English primary schools. The development of educational policy in recent decades has resulted in profound shifts in understandings about what education is for. The progression of education from a social institution underpinned by liberal democratic philosophy to one guided by neoliberal and neoconservative principles has also had major implications for RSE. Public policy interventions in public health, morality³, social change, social exclusion, safeguarding and equalities have served equally formative roles in defining the purpose and value of RSE. Current RSE policy – including statutory status – emerges from this history. Although many of the policies I discuss may have been or may still be relevant to the whole of the UK, devolved governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have distinct policies that relate to RSE. Thus, this policy context is focused on England.

I also discuss the knowledge base about the merits of RSE for primary-aged pupils and studies that suggest leadership for RSE – including policy making practices – should be strengthened to realise these benefits. My literature review suggests a paucity of scholarly knowledge about decision making about RSE policy at the school level, particularly in primary schools. The policy context and literature review together provide a strong mandate for investigating how primary schools make decisions about and understand the value of RSE. I conclude the chapter with my research questions.

2.1. Relationships and sex education in England

The somewhat precarious and multi-disciplinary status of RSE in public policy means that to account for its history and development I must explore diverse fields and policies. While government-sanctioned practice of RSE⁴ has almost always been situated within the English education system, it has always occupied a peripheral position. Schools have been recognized as potentially effective vehicles for delivering RSE in large part because they are educational institutions that have access to the vast majority of children and young people, but RSE has

³ Defining appropriate principles and behaviours related to sexuality, for example heterosexuality, sex within marriage.

⁴ I use relationships and sex education (RSE) throughout this policy context for consistency, however the subject was assigned a number of names over time.

always been considered secondary to academic learning. The government's approach to RSE policy – distinctly 'laissez-faire' – has been markedly different from that of other curriculum areas. Thus, dominant trends in education policy have not been consistently applied to RSE. Relationships and sex education has been pursued as an element of a number of other government strategies – e.g. public health, child protection – though rarely the central theme. It is due to the liminal quality of RSE that, historian Lesley Hall suggests, it has been neglected in the field of sexuality, compared to themes such as family planning and law reforms related to sexual identity and abortion (Hall, 2009). In the discussions that follow, I will demonstrate how RSE is implicated in diverse public policy initiatives.

UK governments have situated RSE, at various times and sometimes at the same time, within a moral agenda (e.g. to encourage specific values and principles), as a matter of public health pragmatism (e.g. to reduce incidence of sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy), to promote the reproduction of social structures (e.g. traditional family and relationship compositions), to address social exclusion and inequality (e.g. targeting communities with higher rates of teenage pregnancy) and as an instrument to protect children from sexual exploitation (DfEE, 2000; DfE, 2017a). These themes reflect different social constructions of what RSE should seek to achieve. Dryzek, a proponent of the argumentative approach to policy analysis, wrote "each frame treats some topics as more salient than others, defines social problems in a unique fashion, commits itself to particular value judgments" (1993:222). The development of policy frames for RSE has not occurred in a linear fashion, they gain interest in public debate, only to fade into the background as other arguments emerge, and then re-emerge again. As Hall wrote, "it is like doing the time-warp, *deja-vu* all over again, Groundhog Day. Reading modern studies on the state of sex education in the UK... most of the underlying issues still seem to be firmly in place" (2009:20). This may explain, to some extent, persistent uncertainty around RSE in primary schools.

Foundations of relationships and sex education

Here I offer a brief overview some of the key themes and developments that emerged from the late nineteenth century until the 1970s. This history defined the questions that have been revisited again and again: what should RSE set out to achieve; what children should learn; and who should deliver RSE.

'Sex education' as it was first called, came on the government agenda in the late nineteenth century, when concerns about poor public health and immoral behaviour rose to prominence as potential obstacles to what was perceived as the nation's destined position, as a global

leader of economy prosperity and physical health (Pilcher, 2004). At the time, working class children were posited as the problem: they were the ones spoiling otherwise good national standards through their poor sexual health and poor sexual morality (Egan and Hawkes, 2009). While recognizing the important role that parents serve in educating their children on issues of hygiene and social decency, as early as 1870 the government called for school-based RSE as a means of producing physical and social hygiene (i.e. morally acceptable sexual behaviour) (Hall, 2004; Pilcher, 2005). The government thus defined RSE as an area of intervention that could produce a healthy, productive population, in part by reducing inequalities by ensuring that working class pupils received adequate health and social education.

The moral agenda underpinning RSE is an important but challenging one, which can also be understood as the desire to reproduce social values (Pilcher, 2004). Hottois and Milner (1975) suggest that moral leaders in the early 20th century thought that schools were teaching fundamental principles about how to make decisions (e.g. rationality), and there should be no question that education should be based on moral principles. Within religious groups, there was division on how morality should be taught: for some, RSE should teach children to deny the sexual impulse altogether, education should address only sexual matters that are legitimate; versus, education should be open about sexual impulses so that children are able to understand them and therefore to control and repress them (Hottois and Milner, 1975; Thomson, 1994). These conceptions differ significantly from modern conceptions of morality, such as “the fundamental principle of care and respect for persons” (Steutel and Spiecker, 1996: 402). However, the tension between being more open with children and schooling them in appropriate and healthy behaviours, vs seeking to shield them from information that they ‘should not’, by some accounts, have knowledge of, persists.

Another interpretation of the social values agenda is that there was a double motivation behind these concerns: beyond promoting what was seen as acceptable social behaviour, some historians suggest that those in power recognized that what was really at stake was their own social status (Hottois and Milner, 1975). That is, political actors were in fact acting on concerns that alternative conceptualisations of sexuality and sex in society threatened their way of life. Thus, it could be argued, that RSE deliberately served those in positions of power, rather than serving the needs of children and young people.

The discourse on public health and evidence – notably, a focus on ‘damage limitation’ (Littleton, 2012) – gained importance, but morality, social reproduction and health education have remained entwined in public policy and opinion on RSE (Hall, 2004).

The question of what RSE should strive to achieve has been, and remains, inextricably linked to the question of what children should be taught in RSE lessons. Stemming from the imperatives discussed above, the content of RSE has ranged from animal as well as human physiology and biology; to physical hygiene and health, including sexual health; to ‘appropriate’ – that is, socially acceptable – behaviour in romantic or sexual relationships, including, for example, monogamy and exclusively intra-marital sex; to health promoting choices, including contraception.

As noted above, the framing, assumptions and tone of government guidance, handbooks and recommendations have varied considerably over the course of the history of RSE. Pilcher, for example, suggests that the government guidance of 1943 acknowledged that young people were “appropriate persons through which to implement social policies to improve... sexual-moral health” (2004:193), but the mode was to warn pupils from indulging in risky, illegitimate sexual urges, without much detail (Pilcher, 2004). There was a clear social agenda behind this guidance. By 1968, the government health education handbook was much more explicit about human reproduction and explained the function of hormonal contraception, a recent technological innovation (Pilcher, 2005). This handbook was more closely aligned with the scientific discourse. It continued to warn pupils against ‘close sexual contact’ and elicit sexual behaviour, but did so by providing graphic descriptions of the unpleasant symptoms associated with STIs.

I noted above that the framing and content of RSE has not followed a linear progression. In particular, it is worth drawing attention to two significant windows of opportunity: the first was in the period immediately following WWII and the second was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, during the ‘sexual revolution’. These periods are recognized as ‘policy windows’, defined by policy analysts as moments in time when a number of ideas, actors and/or solutions come together to create space and focus attention on a particular policy issue (Kingdon, 2011).

After WWII, the conditions of war were seen to have affected the morality of the British people and RSE was seen as a matter of urgency (Thomson, 1994). Pilcher wrote, “children and young people had now become identified as appropriate persons through which to implement social policies to improve... sexual-moral health” (2004:193). The government’s 1943 guidance, ‘Sex Education’ hereafter, contained remarkably more explicit content on relationships and

sex compared to previous health education handbooks. It suggested to teachers that RSE lessons should be age appropriate: it should focus on physiology among younger children and prepare older adolescents for mutually respectful relationships and sex in the context of marriage (Board of Education, 1943). In 1947, however, a Labour government reprinted the 1939 health education handbook – a step backwards for RSE – and the Central Council for Health Education, a key actor in RSE, was dissolved as the *National Health Act 1948* was implemented.

The second policy window for RSE was the ‘Sexual Revolution’ of the 1960s. It de-stigmatised pre-marital sex and it became broadly accepted, as did unmarried parenthood. Public opinion shifted: people began to see that the state did have a role in sexual matters, it was no longer the domain of the private household alone (Carabine, 2004). Hawkes (1999) suggested that decisive shifts were taking place regarding public and accepted constructions of sexuality, indicated in part by new legislation on abortion, homosexuality, divorce and the distribution of contraception, and that they signified state legitimization of sex outside of marriage and reproduction. Alongside explicit language about sex and reproduction, the 1968 health education handbook suggested that lessons should talk about the emotional implications of sex, and situate it within realistic human relationships (Pilcher, 2005:163). Moore calls the late 1960s a "watershed moment in the teaching of sex education" (2012:29) and Thomson suggests that pockets of progressive practice in RSE emerged around the country (1994:45). Nevertheless, by the 1980s, conservative groups were gaining political traction and succeeded in turning back the progressive trajectory that RSE had embarked upon.

The literature suggests that every time the government has taken a stand on school-based RSE, the question of who is best placed to deliver RSE to children has become a core facet of public debate. The proffered alternatives to schools have included parents and churches, but there have been rigorous arguments that these groups are uncomfortable and/or ill-suited to deliver RSE (Hall, 2004). Within schools, over the years RSE has been delivered by teachers, nurses and other health professionals, clergy, sanitary product manufacturers, NGOs and others (Hampshire, 2005; Pilcher, 2004; Thomson, 1994). The diversity of personnel involved in delivering RSE reflects, in part, disagreement among politicians and tension among government departments about which body should take responsibility for RSE (e.g. the Ministry of Health or the Department of Education) (Hampshire, 2005).

In the absence of a resolution to the problem, and in consideration of their own constituents, governments have most often offered guidance and recommendations on how schools should

deliver RSE, rather than firm directives. Early guidance took the form of handbooks on health or hygiene education, which have included RSE (e.g. 1928, 1933, 1939 and 1943 (see Pilcher, 2005)). These formed part of a suite of handbooks on subjects taught in schools, before there was a centrally prescribed curriculum.

Another measure that governments have taken to distance themselves from RSE is to subcontract it. In the 1930s, the government provided a grant to the National Council for Combatting Venereal Diseases (NCCVD), a voluntary organization, to deliver information and education on sexual health and relationships in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (Hall, 2004). Subsequently, the Central Council for Health Education was responsible for RSE. In the late 1960s and 70s, the government commissioned the UK Family Planning Association (FPA) and other non-governmental organizations to deliver RSE to schools (Hall, 2004; Carabine, 2004). Although funding to the FPA ceased in 1976, while it lasted this approach enabled the government to avoid questions about RSE and as such, approaches to RSE were not open to public debate (Meredith, 1989).

A third approach that governments have taken, to limit the political impact of those who object to school-based RSE, is to permit parents to remove their children from RSE lessons. Initially, parents had to provide a reason for removing their children; this requirement was removed in the 1990s (Denman et al., 1994). The government continues to require that educational authorities and schools inform parents of what RSE they are planning to deliver to pupils and when (e.g. *Educational (Schools and Further Education) Regulations 1981*), unlike other areas of the curriculum.

Inconsistent support for RSE from one government to the next has resulted in unreliable funding for RSE across the country as well as variable funding from one region to another, given that some local authorities have opted to invest more heavily in the subject than others (Hall, 2004; Thomson, 1994). These challenges have arguably been one of the most consistent features of RSE in England since the subject was first introduced in schools.

Contesting the content and utility of an English education

In the 1970s, debates about the content and utility of education in England – often called ‘the curriculum debates’ – dominated political rhetoric and decision making about education policy. This period marked a decisive shift away from liberal philosophy about education in favour of a political discourse that incorporated international competitiveness and commercial success as indicators of educational success. These shifts had profound implications for RSE.

In the early 1970s, a small number of educators gained significant attention with their enthusiastic support of new, experimental methods – termed ‘child-centred education’ – which recognized play and experimentation as important learning methods, and made activities – not outcomes – the focus (Hartley, 2009). Advocates for child-centred education situated it in opposition to knowledge-centred curricula, represented by grammar school education, where content was delivered through formal instruction. Champions for the grammar school model, notably a number of Conservative MPs, felt that education should transmit cultural heritage (including class and social divisions) through classic texts and history. A second and increasingly dominant theory about education within the Conservative party was that it should service the labour market (Lawton, 1994:15).

By the mid-1970s, Conservatives were blaming child-centred pedagogies for problems such as inefficiency, low academic attainment and lack of innovation (Whitty and Wisby, 2016). The Conservatives published a series of pamphlets called *The Black Papers* (a reference to government ‘White Papers’), which claimed that schools were failing to equip school leavers with practical skills. Industrialists added to the debate, saying that the education system was failing to produce a diversified working populace that would maintain Britain’s international economic competitiveness (Dunford, 1999; Tomlinson, 2001). Conservative MP Sir Rhodes Boyson, co-author of one of the Black Papers, blamed schools for a breakdown in ‘moral standards’, apparently indicated by changes in family structure and familial relationships. He later became an advocate for Section 28 of the *Local Government Act 1988*, which prohibited local authorities from ‘promoting homosexuality’ (Chitty, 2009; Ross, 2000).

Following the Party’s election victory in 1976, Labour made education a priority issue. In his first year as Prime Minister, James Callaghan started what is called ‘The Great Debate’ when he criticised the school curriculum and innovative pedagogies and positioned education as a strategy for producing citizens who would provide economic gains and financial security (Ross, 2000). The Great Debate resulted in increasing government involvement in school administration and curriculum, and schools became increasingly accountable to government for educational performance. This accountability related foremost to core academic subjects (i.e. English, math, science), and did not address pupils’ personal, emotional or social development.

The grip of neoliberalism

The influence of industry in education was indicative of a widespread paradigm shift towards neoliberalism across the whole of government, so it is important to contextualise RSE policy

within neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a prominent concept used widely in critical texts about all matters of policy and government, to the extent that some suggest it has become a “sloppy synonym for capitalism” (Ferguson, 2009:171). However, contemporary educationalists (e.g. Ball, 2000, 2013; Wilkins, 2015, 2018) maintain that neoliberal theory is a significant framework for exploring the corporate logic and enterprise form that increasingly dominate schools’ internal operations. I agree and anticipate that this includes decision making about RSE.

Neoliberalism is a macro-economic doctrine that has been adopted around the world since the 1970s in the pursuit of economic growth (Maskovsky and Kingfisher, 2001). Neoliberal approaches commonly introduce market dynamics to welfare services through the introduction of business principles, such as deregulation and increased competition, with the rationale that these sectors will thrive by self-monitoring and will naturally re-distribute resources to accommodate the ‘market’ effectively (Whitty, 2002). Contemporary social science scholarship has suggested four distinct understandings of neoliberalism:

(1) neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project; (2) neoliberalism as policy and programme (e.g. policies enacted under the banner of privatization, deregulation, liberalization, etc.); (3) neoliberalism as state form – i.e. the ‘rolling back’ and ‘rolling out’ of state formations in the name of reform; and (4) neoliberalism as governmentality... relations among and between peoples and things are... reinterpreted and reassembled to affect governing at a distance. (Bell and Green, 2016:240)

These models exist alongside each other, and all four are relevant to UK education policy.

Scholars suggest that throughout the 1970s there was growing discontent with what was seen as an exorbitant level of public expenditure (e.g. Whitty and Wisby, 2016), which paved the way for state actors to introduce market mechanisms in public service management.

Thatcher’s leadership marked a “departure from consensus about welfare provision for those who were assumed to be disadvantaged or vulnerable to a more individualistic and meritocratic set of principles” (Loxley and Thomas, 2001:293).

For example, the 1988 *Education Reform Act*, a landmark piece of legislation, shifted control over school financing from Local Education Authorities to school governors and head teachers. It was designed to give the impression of granting schools greater choice and freedom. However, the same *Act* included the mandatory adoption of the National Curriculum in state-maintained schools, it established a national system of pupil assessment (Standard Assessment Tasks) and introduced league tables to make schools more easily comparable. The *Act* removed school autonomy over the curriculum, introduced surveillance to assess schools’ accountability to the National Curriculum, introduced competition among state schools (by enabling parents to compare schools using league tables) and imposed responsibilities for

financial decision making upon educators. The *Act* reconfigured the relationship between the state and state schools, a theme that has been developed substantively by Stephen Ball (e.g. 2009). The *Act* fostered neoliberalism as governmentality (as defined above) – deriving from Foucault’s theorizing of governmentality.

Neoliberalism as a form of governmentality refers to the technologies, attitudes and mechanisms put in place by government in order to govern from a distance, such that agencies and actors are self-monitoring and activating, disciplining themselves and focusing on calculability in their work. Davies and Bansel (2007) suggest that three management technologies have promoted neoliberalism in schools: increased exposure to competition; increased accountability measures; and the implementation of performance measures in management contracts. These have been called ‘assembled technologies’ that shape how individuals conduct themselves and engage with people they encounter in educational contexts. The *1988 Education Reform Act*, for example, created financial actors out of educators, requiring them to place a financial value on different aspects of schooling. More recently, in 2010 Education Secretary Michael Gove, a member of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, created ‘Free Schools’, which have been described as “state-funded but private-run schools” (Hatcher, 2011:485), excused from democratic oversight and representing the most market-oriented education policy at the time.

While it is beyond the scope of this policy overview to discuss the significance of neoliberal principles in education reforms up to the present day, prominent educationalists have put forward persuasive arguments that neoliberalism has transformed the education sector, from when Thatcher was in government up to contemporary times (Ball 2000, 2013; Connell, 2013; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Wilkins, 2015). In other fields, scholars have argued that neoliberal ideology has shifted public and personal identities, actions and understandings in relation to sexuality, gender and relationships, in and out of schools (Bay-Cheng, 2003, 2015; Grzanka et al., 2016; Lamb and Randazzo, 2016; Ringrose, 2007). This literature suggests that neoliberalism is an important consideration in relation to decision making about RSE.

Because educators are called upon less and less to make judgments about education, and encouraged to employ financial criteria when they do, there is a strong case for exploring what does happen when they are put in a position that they have significant autonomy to make decisions about the curriculum, as appears to be the case with RSE.

The ‘Moral Panic’

Blackman and Walkerdine define 'moral panics' as an accumulation of public anxiety that particular behaviours, and types of behaviour, are 'deviant' and threaten the proper social order (2000). The landscape of RSE throughout the 1980s was transformed by the emergence of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that attacks the immune system and can lead to AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). HIV was initially identified among gay men and was perceived for many years not only as life-threatening virus, but also a consequence of depravity and perversion. Concerns about moral standards, as well as increasing awareness of correlations between RSE and low rates of teenage pregnancy and STIs (e.g. Jones and Institute AG, 1986), contributed to public pressure for better RSE. However, this was countered by emphatic calls for preserving 'family values' and accusations that RSE encouraged promiscuity (Hall, 2004). This period was characterised by public anxiety about the messages that children and young people were receiving about family, sexuality and relationships (Lewis and Knijn, 2002). Campaigns and legislative struggles around the rights of minors to access contraception without parental consent, artificial insemination, age of consent for gay men, and attempts to gain compensation for sexual harassment took place over the late 1980s and 1990s (Epstein and Johnson, 1998:48). These all contributed to a heightened sensitivity over matters of sexuality in the public sphere. Lobby groups campaigned for the right of parents to withdraw their children from RSE, while more progressive groups argued for more comprehensive, statutory RSE. It was during this time that a number of non-government organizations banded together to form the Sex Education Forum to strengthen their collective voice for better RSE. However, the Thatcher government remained unwilling to adopt a moral authoritarian position. Thomson suggests:

the ideological tensions between economic liberalism and moral authoritarianism in fact served to temper the practice of the administration... Thatcherism employed moral politics in an instrumental way, in order to rally populist fears (1994:46)

The Thatcher government was in the midst of reformulating the role of state from one that was driven by the political processes of representative democracy to promote the public good, to one that would promote and facilitate economic self-sufficiency through managerial techniques (Green, 2005; Davies and Bansel, 2007:248).

The *Education Act 1986* tasked individual schools' governing bodies with deciding the school policy on RSE, including the curriculum and organisation, including whether it would be offered at all (*Education Act (no.2) 1986*, s.18, s.46). The *Education Act 1986* did not distinguish separate responsibilities for RSE for primary or secondary schools, so this legislation officially made RSE a concern for primary schools. The freedom with which schools were directed to

approach RSE contrasted with the *Education Reform Act 1988's* mandatory adoption of the National Curriculum in state-maintained schools. The *Education Reform Act 1988* did specify, however, that the whole curriculum should promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school and of society (*Education Reform Act 1988*, Chapter 1, 2a). While school governing bodies were in theory supported to make autonomous decisions about RSE, the legislation notes that where a governor and head teacher decide to deliver RSE, they must do so "in such a manner as to encourage those pupils to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life" (*Education Act 1986*, s.46). Furthermore, Clause 28 of the *Local Government Act 1988* prohibited local authorities from 'promoting' homosexuality or same-sex relationships as any form of family relationship. While the clause did not relate to schools, it caused anxiety and confusion among professionals delivering sex education (Hall, 2004; Lewis and Knijn, 2002). Epstein and Johnson wrote, "Centralization has produced much tighter relays between the hegemonic state definitions and school practices... school policies are shaped by the hopes, fears and expectations set up by the dominant terms of discourse" (1998:30).

In effect, moral lobbies had succeeded in persuading the government to place restrictions on how sexual orientation could be taught. Given the public tension around RSE at the time, it is likely that school leaders would have felt apprehensive about adopting a progressive RSE policy.

Estranged bedfellows: Health and Education

While much of the literature around the development of RSE argues that Thatcher's politics were responsible for the regression of RSE in this period, some scholars suggest that increasing awareness and alarm about young people's health concerns – specifically high rates of teenage pregnancy – served to re-direct accountability towards the role of public health bodies (Moore, 2012). Throughout the 1990s, government health agencies played an increasingly important role in RSE, and the government departments of health and education negotiated a difficult relationship in relation to RSE. In her analysis of the politics of 'sex education' in this period, Thomson distinguishes their positions as 'moral authoritarianism', on the part of the Department of Education and Employment, and 'public health pragmatism, on the part of the Department of Health (1994).

In 1990, the official guidance for health education, issued by the National Curriculum Council, stated "individuals are in charge of and responsible for their own bodies... [sex education] encourages the acquisition of skills and attitudes which allow pupils to manage their

relationships in a responsible and healthy manner” (National Curriculum Council, 1990). The stress on individual responsibility and healthy behaviour is unmistakable. Nonetheless, this advice was situated within the guidance for the whole of health education, a cross-curricular and non-statutory subject that was not prioritised by the Department of Education. Following a tradition established years before, the Department of Education outsourced the provision of more substantial advice on RSE by funding the Sex Education Forum in 1990. A study carried out by the Sex Education Forum at the time concluded that there was widespread confusion among schools about how RSE should fit within the prescribed National Curriculum, inconsistency across schools with regards to their RSE policies, and ongoing anxiety and uncertainty about RSE (Scott and Thomson, 1992). In their comparison of RSE in the Netherlands and in England and Wales, Lewis and Knijn found that “the adversarial nature of the politics of sex education in the UK... results in a message that lacks coherence, which is in turn reflected... in the classroom” (2002:671).

The Department of Health placed a much higher priority on RSE than the Department for Education and Employment: it was committed to promoting preventative sexual health interventions. The government’s 1992 health strategy, entitled ‘Health of the Nation’ (DoH, 1992), included reducing teenage pregnancy and STIs as one of five priority areas. However, the policy was criticised for making little impact due to an excessive focus on individual responsibility, while ignoring social conditions that affect people’s behaviours, and due to a lack of government coordination and commitment (Radical Statistics Health Group, 1991). Another important limitation was that the Department of Health failed to specify strategies or allocate additional funding to achieve the sexual health targets (Ingham, 2005).

In a 1993 Conservative party conference speech that set the tone for government rhetoric for several years, Prime Minister John Major called for a return to Conservative roots, using the phrase ‘back to basics’, and invoking neoconservative values such as loyalty to the state and ‘family values’, together with neoliberal principles such as individual responsibility (Epstein and Johnson, 1998:74). In doing so, Major appealed to the moral traditionalist wing of the party and foreshadowed a retrenchment of RSE. The Education Acts of 1993 and 1996 stated that the only parts of RSE that were part of the National Curriculum were biological aspects of human development and sexual behaviour. They therefore reinforced the public health approach to RSE and made some of the same errors for which the 1992 health strategy was critiqued, notably the failure to address social determinants of health and to work in collaboration with different parts of government. The *Education Act 1993* (c.35) appeared to conflict with the government’s priorities for health (and thus supported the argument that the

health strategy lacked cross-departmental commitment), as it removed STIs, including HIV, and AIDS from science in the National Curriculum. The *Act* also gave parents the right to withdraw their children from RSE without providing a reason (previously, schools could reject the request for children to be withdrawn if they were not convinced by the parent's reasoning) (Denman et al., 1994), in keeping with the neoliberal rhetoric peddling parental choice in education. Although specific teaching about HIV and AIDS was again made statutory in the *Education Act 1996* – as part of RSE, now, rather than science, and in effect made RSE statutory for the first time (Moore, 2012:30) – the *Education Acts* of 1993 (c.35) and 1996 (c.56) significantly narrowed the scope of RSE, compared to what had been permitted throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This suggests that the moral traditionalists had, throughout the 1980s, successfully shifted the debate on RSE, and the perspective on what was 'acceptable', to the right. Finally, the 1999 White Paper on health, 'Our Healthier Nation' (DoH, 1999), dropped sexual health and HIV from its core priorities, although it maintained the other four priorities articulated in the 1992 strategy.

The shifts observed in RSE cannot be seen in isolation, but as part of the broader momentum and visibility of sexism, LGBT issues, sexual and gender pluralism, as well as, importantly, counter-movements to re-assert dominant, traditional forms of social reproduction.

The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and social exclusion

The Labour party – rebranded 'New Labour' – came into power in 1997. While their educational policies, I argue, did little to support RSE, they did create a showcase project, their Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, which directed much-needed attention and resources to RSE. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy is recognized internationally for its impact on teenage pregnancy. Its legacy is evident in resources that remain in place in some regions and ongoing efforts to build upon it.

Whitty (2002) suggested that the New Labour government recognised a decline in public trust in government and, in the education sector, its response was to expand upon the previous Conservative administration's efforts to take control at the central level. New Labour's *Excellence in Schools* White Paper (DfEE, 1997), and the subsequent *School Standards and Framework Act 1998* (c.31) laid out measures to increase emphasis on educational attainments and monitoring (e.g. more rigorous Ofsted inspections, more detailed school performance tables), and to make teacher training more competency-based (e.g. a greater proportion of training time spent in service, a smaller proportion of time spent learning educational theory and pedagogy) (DfEE, 1997, DfEE, 1998). These policies effectively de-professionalised

educators, arguably making them technicians tasked with implementing the national curriculum rather than responsible for making important, informed decisions about their pupils' education (Ball, 2003). A number of scholars have suggested that these policies demoralised and demotivated educators as accountability shifted from pupils to central government, and in some cases inadvertently diverted attention away from pupils' learning and wellbeing (Claxton, 2008; Watson et al., 2012). In the absence of leadership for RSE at the central level, educators were not incentivised to prioritise RSE.

At the same time, however, the New Labour administration was strengthening collaboration across the departments of health and education. The government created a special Social Exclusion Unit, which delivered a landmark report on teenage pregnancy (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) as well as a comprehensive teenage pregnancy strategy at the request of Prime Minister Tony Blair, and it also established the national Healthy School programme (see Health Development Agency, 2002), part of New Labour's 'promoting health schools' agenda. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy set out a 10-year national strategy and established targets for reducing teenage pregnancies, with focused funding on electoral wards with the highest rates of teenage pregnancy (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). To operationalise the strategy and maintain high-level oversight and political will, the government established a cross-departmental Teenage Pregnancy Unit, a high-level ministerial group, a separate, independent advisory group, and teenage pregnancy coordinators in each of the 140 local authorities (Ingham, 2005). The Strategy identified school-based RSE, linked to contraceptive services, as one of four interventions where evidence of effectiveness in reducing teenage pregnancy was found to be strong, and specific interventions were implemented to improve RSE: new guidance for schools (DfEE, 2000), a new accredited training programme for teachers, the establishment of new units within Ofsted, and renewed efforts to link RSE with sexual health services (Ingham, 2005). The Teenage Pregnancy strategy had high level commitment and was fully funded and supported by multiple ministries across government. One area where the government's educational policies and the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy overlapped and complemented each other was in the renewed focus on local authority guidance and support: dedicated Teenage Pregnancy Strategy advisors were available to all schools and the government also strengthened the role of local authorities to guide schools in their development and achievement of educational objectives (*School Standards and Frameworks Act, 1998, s.13A*). One evaluation suggested that as a result of the Strategy, under-18 conceptions decreased in 80% of local authority areas (Office of National Statistics, 2005). Vocal family rights campaigners did not fail to critique the Strategy for the lack of family

values and morality, but Blair's New Labour government sidelined these arguments by instrumentalising RSE and other interventions.

The infrastructure, discourse and resources established by the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy have endured beyond the lifetime of the Strategy. For example, Littleton (2012) gives the example of RSE in Hertfordshire, where, at the time of research, it was still the Teenage Pregnancy Board that supplied schools with most of their resources on RSE.

In parallel with the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, in 1999 the government established the National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) programme. While the NHSS covered a range of health and safety concerns, the personal, social and health education⁵ (PSHE) component of the curriculum, including RSE, was a key strand. In 2001 the Health Development Agency published a stand-alone guide on how NHSS programme co-ordinators should implement RSE, including criteria for assessing school achievement in relation to RSE (Health Development Agency, 2001). While claims for promoting social equality were used to advance the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, the health discourse of the NHSS was utilised as a mechanism for academic achievement. In a Health Development Agency report on the outcomes of the NHSS, Caroline Ashton, then Minister for School Standards, is quoted as saying, "A healthy school is one that succeeds in helping pupils to do their best and build on their achievements" (Health Development Agency, 2002:1), and the report includes a section called 'Raising educational attainment' that links the NHSS to improved academic outcomes (Health Development Agency, 2002). Aldred and David suggested that by situating PSHE within the discourse of health the government made this area of the curriculum appear more concrete and more objective to schools, and more palatable to inspection bodies, than the objectives of self-esteem and emotional literacy, though many value these aspects of social development on par with health outcomes (2007:101). While situating RSE within the NHSS standard was likely a strategic move to increase uptake, the 2002 report on the NHSS (Health Development Agency, 2002), failed to include any outcomes related to RSE, or to discuss any of its shortcomings, which is indicative of the subject dropping in priority once again.

Official guidance on 'sex and relationship education': risk, self-discipline and prevention

The 2000 'Sex and Relationship Education Guidance' represented the government's first official statement on RSE over a ten-year period when it was published, and it has remained

⁵ At this time, 'economic education' was not included in PSHE.

the government's official guidance for the last 18 years. Until the government adopted RSE as a statutory subject in March 2017, RSE was a non-statutory subject, and until the government confirms details of the statutory programme schools are required only to deliver specific biological aspects of the subject through the science curriculum, anything else is up to their discretion. Couched within the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, within personal, social and health education (PSHE), and the National Healthy Schools Standard, the government's 2000 guidance (DfEE, 2000) is strongly flavoured with the discourses of health, prevention and risk. The guidance references the revised National Curriculum, the new PSHE framework and the Social Exclusion Unit's report on teenage pregnancy in the introduction. The first article of the content states, "Effective sex and relationships education is essential if young people are to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives" (DfEE, 2000:2). The guidance recommends that all primary schools deliver RSE that is tailored to the age and maturity of the pupils, and it sets out a range of topics and themes that should be delivered at primary and secondary schools. At primary school, this includes learning about puberty, human reproduction and the importance of marriage and stable relationships. It notes that "effective sex and relationships education is best achieved through a whole school approach" (2000:9), which involves including parents and carers; providing staff with appropriate training and support; and ensuring that the programme is responsive to pupils' views. The guidance also recognises that children come from diverse families and backgrounds and schools may need to adapt their programmes to accommodate children and state "it is therefore important for policies to be culturally appropriate and inclusive for all children" (2000:12). While the overt message is one about inclusivity and sensitivity to diverse values among school communities, this language may also be read as a government's reluctance to take on moral traditionalists and adopt a firm stance on precisely what children should learn. The Health Development Agency's guide to implementing RSE, as part of the NHSS, provided examples and suggestions on how to engage parents, community groups and religious interests in developing their RSE policy (Health Development Agency, 2001). Innovative aspects of the guidance, relative to earlier guidance, included its inclusion of special educational needs, abortion, sexual orientation, confidentiality and child protection.

In keeping with the increasingly neoliberal principles that informed government policy, including the emphasis on individual responsibility, the 2000 guidance ignores how sexuality and sexual choices are socially structured and impose limitations on young people's agency and identities (Sundaram and Sauntson, 2016). Risk and self-discipline have been, at least, a backdrop of formal RSE since the nineteenth century, and for many – in 2000 and today – it is

a 'common sense' approach to RSE. However, Ringrose argued that the principles of sexual risk and prevention are heterosexual and highly gendered, placing the burden of protection and risk on girls, and as such suggesting they should delay sex as long as possible, while constructing sexual activity as natural for boys (2013:43). Further, Moore (2012) draws attention to the uncritical imposition of the term 'risk', she notes that it makes sexual behaviours inherently problematic, and imbues sexuality with moral undertones. The primary objective identified in the guidance is to "help and support young people through their physical, emotional and moral development" (DfEE, 2000:2), and marriage, family life and bringing up children are at the forefront of the document, presented as lynchpins to a well-ordered society. By privileging traditional and heterosexual forms of partnership and intimacy, the guidance appears to have been designed to appeal to moral traditionalists.

Since the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy was introduced and subsequently closed, many new teachers have started teaching and they will be unfamiliar with the original context for the official guidance on RSE (DfEE, 2000). The guidance has been oft criticised for being out of touch with today's social reality. For example, proposing marriage as the normative relationship within which sex and children occur, and positioning same-sex relationships as exceptional – tolerable but still 'othered' – in a society where gay marriage is now legal and commonplace.

Child safeguarding

While the UK government did not publish any specific guidance on RSE between 2000 and 2018, in this time a number of other legislative and policy developments affected schools' treatment of RSE. Child safeguarding, and the broader promotion of child wellbeing and flourishing, for example. Child safeguarding policies and initiatives have not specifically addressed RSE, but they have heightened awareness and knowledge about child abuse, including sexual abuse, and have enhanced the social construction of child sexuality, and the combination of 'child + sex' more broadly, as an issue of safety and protection. As a result of government legislation, schools are held to account for specific responsibilities and duties related to safeguarding, which, in combination with the lack of statutory status for RSE, and ambiguous direction about what RSE they should offer, has arguably made schools more vigilant about delivering safeguarding and protection messages through their RSE programmes.

The *Education Act 2002* (c.32, sections 157, 175) began building the momentum and scale of schools' responsibilities for school safeguarding when it made all schools – including

independent, academies and free schools – responsible for ensuring that their functions and activities reflected a commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The *Education Act 2002* recognized that teachers and school staff are well placed to identify and support children who are vulnerable or have been victimised (Baginsky et al., 2015). Building on this foundation, the government initiated a number of strategies and policies to protect children and promote their development. In 2003, the government published the 'Every Child Matters' green paper (Chief Secretary to the Treasury, 2003), which was translated into an official government strategy in 2004. These were accompanied by the *Children Act 2004* (c.31), which provides the legal framework to deliver 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003), including widespread reform of children's services across national and local institutions. The *Children Act 2004* (c.31) identified five key entitlements for children, which – like the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy – have left a legacy through diverse policies and strategies, although the Every Child Matters agenda has also been retired. The *Children Act 2004* (c.31), 'The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures' (DCSF, 2007) and the *Education and Inspections Act* (DfE, 2006) expanded and formalised the responsibility of schools to safeguard children, to promote their rights and welfare, and also to partner with a range of local agencies to achieve these ends. The *Children Act 2004* (c.31), for example, made local authorities responsible for promoting cooperation between the local authority and relevant partners (e.g. district councils, policing bodies, probation boards, youth offending teams, National Health Service Commissioning Boards, governing bodies and proprietors of local schools) (section 10.1). A key theme running through the above-mentioned acts of government was the idea that children's needs could not be fully met by individual agencies working in isolation, but that schools must 'extend' and collaborate to provide a networked and holistic service for children (Ainsley et al., 2010; Harris, 2006). These new expectations posed significant demands upon schools, and evaluations and studies suggest that schools' efforts to implement the Every Child Matters agenda put pressure on resources and added to educators' workloads (Ainsley et al., 2010; Baginsky et al., 2015).

Another notable development in 2003 was that the government repealed Clause 28 of the *Local Government Act 1988*, thus removing the requirement that local government refrain from 'promoting homosexuality'. While this legislation did not directly apply to schools, as discussed above, it did affect the public and educational environments, for example causing anxiety among educators, so for many it was a welcome change. Shortly thereafter, in 2004 the government updated Circular 10/99 (DfES, 2004), guidance for schools on responding to antisocial behaviour and promoting social inclusion. While the original Circular addressed

sexual harassment, the revised guidance acknowledged that children experience bullying related to sexual orientation, that bullying causes emotional distress and, in extreme cases, suicide (section 3.27). The guidance placed a legal duty upon head teachers to prevent all forms of bullying (section 3.28). While this guidance represented a welcome shift in relation to sexual orientation, it still 'othered' those who do not identify as heterosexual. The Circular states that bullying must not be 'tolerated' but missed the opportunity to connect with RSE to foster education about diverse gender and sexual identities.

More recently, increased decentralisation (whereby academies and free schools have no direct relationship with local authorities) has led to Ofsted placing an even greater focus on safeguarding in school inspections than previously. The Department for Education's statutory guidance on safeguarding, 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (DfE, 2016), consolidates previous guidance, it clearly stipulates that everyone is responsible for safeguarding children and it "encourages an ethos where child protection is discussed" (Baginsky et al., 2015). Baginsky et al. note that these recommendations may be welcome, but they raise concerns that the type of ethos imagined in the guidance, and the types of actions and relationships it describes, may not "fit easily in an educational system in which the focus on attainment can feel relentless to pupils and teachers alike" (2015:358). Given the priority assigned to the safeguarding agenda, and the comparative lack of priority on RSE, it is foreseeable that schools could interpret or simply utilise RSE as a vehicle to implement safeguarding requirements. The safeguarding agenda has had a major impact on schools' duties and perspective on child protection which has almost undoubtedly influenced their delivery of RSE and will continue to do so.

The Department for Education's press release announcing that RSE – now called 'relationships and sex education' in secondary schools and simply 'relationships education' in primary schools – would be statutory, through its inclusion in the *Children and Social Work Act (c.16)* noted "The focus in primary school will be on building healthy relationships and staying safe" (DfE and Greening, 2017).

Child wellbeing and emotional literacy

Childhood wellbeing became a pertinent political and educational issue in 2007 when UNICEF ranked the UK last overall, among 21 wealthy western countries, in a UNICEF report card about child wellbeing (UNICEF, 2007:2). The UNICEF index, upon which the annual report card is based, employs 40 internationally comparable social and material indicators on child welfare to rank countries' levels of child wellbeing (UNICEF, 2007). In response, the Children's

Society established the 'Good Childhood Index' for the UK, in collaboration with the University of York, which conducts subjective surveys among children to assess how children feel about their lives. These data are analysed and published annually, alongside statistical data about child outcomes, in the Good Childhood Report (e.g. The Children's Society, 2017).

As part of its efforts to improve children's quality of life, the government has agreed that children should receive Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education.⁶ PSHE has become the depository for education about a vast array of social issues that, the government has agreed, children should learn about. In addition to RSE, topics include: careers, mortgages, democracy, racism, multiculturalism, environmental sustainability, industrialisation, fairly traded products, drugs, alcohol, healthy eating and physical exercise, first aid, emotions, peer pressure and bullying. Moore writes, "the emphasis on 'emotional intelligence', confidence and decision-making abilities in Personal, Social, Health and Economic education is seen here as a direct response to the distinctive risks of the risk society" (2012:35). In contrast to safeguarding initiatives, however, while the government published guidance and recommendations on what should be done to promote childhood wellbeing, it did not make these recommendations obligatory and did not make any public bodies or persons accountable. Watson et al. (2012) argue that child wellbeing is often imprecisely defined and understood in education, and, further, "rests on everyone's (and no one's) knowledge and sense of responsibility" (2012:38).

Thus, while no person or party is responsible for the specific content or curriculum on wellbeing (which might include emotions, self-esteem and decision making in relationships), responsibility for relationships, for sexual health outcomes and emotional resilience falls to the individual, harking back to neoliberal principles now endemic in education.

One specific intervention the government did introduce was the 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' (SEAL) programme for primary schools, piloted across 25 schools in 2004 and made available to all primary schools in 2005 (DfES, 2005; Hallam, 2009). The SEAL programme guidance states that where children have good social and emotional skills, they will be motivated to be effective learners, to resolve conflict with others, to manage strong feelings such as anger, to promote calm and optimistic states that promote the achievement of goals, to recover from setbacks, and to respect others, for example (DfES, 2005:7). The emphasis here is not exclusively on emotional or social development, but on the instrumental

⁶ Renamed as such in 2008, from its original title of 'Personal, Social and Health' education.

contribution of appropriate behaviours to ‘effective learning’, such as good attendance and emotional regulation. SEAL includes a ‘whole school’ component, designed to foster a school ethos within which emotional and social skills can flourish, as well as targeted approaches for children thought to be ‘at risk’ of developing social and emotional problems (DfES, 2005). The scheme has been praised in some evaluations (e.g. Hallam, 2009; Weare, 2007) and educators have reported that the SEAL framework has been helpful in raising the priority of PSHE (Formby et al., 2011:21). However, it has also been soundly critiqued, with some authors arguing that it does no more than reinforce socially acceptable behaviours and dominant cultures (e.g. Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009; Watson et al., 2012; Wood and Warin, 2014). While a number of head teachers and deputy heads, interviewed by Formby et al., identified PSHE and/or SEAL primarily as strategies to raise academic standards (2011:22). This is perhaps an unsurprising finding given SEAL’s explicit instrumentalist aims, rather than supporting children to engage critically with emotions, self-awareness and complex social situations.

Moore (2012) suggests that the ‘progressive’ strand of advocates for RSE almost universally support the inclusion of emotional awareness, sometimes called ‘emotional literacy’, in RSE, and she argues that this is posited as common sense. The Sex Education Forum, for example, defines RSE as, “learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health” (2015:1), but does not detail how emotions should be taught or why. Critiques of the SEAL programme suggest that in order to genuinely help children navigate social situations, including conflict and emotional responses, educators must have specialist training and expertise. However, to date there is no required training or directions for educators delivering RSE.

While the SEAL programme, including curriculum resources, are still used by schools and available through some local authorities, the Department for Education stopped funding and actively promoting the programme in 2011 (National Children’s Bureau, 2014). In its place, the government promoted a Character Education scheme and award, which had similar aims to SEAL (e.g. DfE, 2014a; DfE, 2017a). In 2012, Conservative Education Secretary Michael Gove personally spearheaded an initiative that sent a King James Bible to every school in the country with the aim of instilling in pupils an appreciation of Christian values, which he suggested were fundamental to England’s heritage and culture (e.g. Press Association, 2012). The Character Education scheme was cancelled in 2017 and Schools Minister Nick Gibb announced that the scheme would be replaced by the ‘Essential Life Skills Programme’, which would be delivered in 12 areas identified as limited in terms of social mobility (George, 2017; DfE and Greening, 2017b). Another scheme that many schools have taken up is UNICEF’s

Rights Respecting Schools programme (UNICEF, nd), which focuses on human rights education.

The sexualisation debate

The decade following the turn of the millennium was punctuated by another moral panic, this time about the sexualisation of young people, and especially girls. In the media, in public spheres and among politicians, there was alarm about the sexual and eroticised messages that children and young people were exposed to through images, texts and consumer products, and corresponding concern about the disruption of ‘natural’ childhoods and the promotion of early sexual behaviour. In her book *Postfeminist Education*, Ringrose (2013) maps out the volume of interest in ‘sexualisation’ between 2001 and 2010, including 18 books on the topic, and a selection of articles and broadcast programmes. As demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, young people’s sexuality had long been viewed as a negative thing – more or less inseparable from ‘over-sexualisation’ (without defining what this means) and the loss of childhood innocence (Alldred and David, 2007). The debates on sexualisation did not diverge from this narrative on the whole. The separation of ‘childhood’ from all things ‘sexual’ was constructed, and is continually re-constructed, as common sense, to the extent that ‘child’ + ‘sex’ can only be equated with one of two things: adult – hence the use of ‘young adult’ in relation to under-age sex, regardless of age – or child abuse (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001). In the case of the sexualisation debates, the key arguments suggested that ‘sexualisation’ was akin to child abuse. Together with public awareness of the prevalence of actual child abuse (to be discussed below), the moral panic about child sexualisation also contributed to debates about RSE.

In 2010, the Coalition Government’s Programme of Government stated, “We will crack down on irresponsible advertising and marketing, especially to children. We will also take steps to tackle the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood” (HM Government, 2010). The Home Office commissioned a report, entitled ‘Sexualisation of Young People Review’ (2010), by a well-known psychologist, Papadopoulos (2010). This was followed by an independent review of the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood, known as the Bailey Review (after Reg Bailey who led the review) and entitled ‘Letting Children be Children’ (Bailey, 2011). The Bailey Review recommended a number of interventions to reduce children’s exposure to sexualised images and messages, such as introducing age ratings on music videos and requiring retailers to cover up sexual images on media products they sell.

The reception of these reviews was mixed and polarised advocates and politicians, largely into one of two groups: those who argue children should not be exposed to sexual content and called for greater regulation and censorship of media and manufacturers; and those who call for recognition of children’s sexual rights and agency. Scholarly critiques argued that the reviews were uncritical in their use of ‘sexualisation’, and that instead of focusing on what some felt was the more fundamental problem – a hyper-capitalist society that had turned young children into consumers and markets – they succeeded in advocating behaviours and guidelines, mainly for parents, to avoid the ‘risks’ of sexualisation (Ringrose, 2013:44). Thus, a large part of the conversation about RSE perpetuated the focus on ‘damage limitation’, which scholars, activists and practitioners had argued, for many years, was now inappropriate (e.g. Littleton, 2011).

Throughout these debates, reports and government statements, language regarding children’s developing sexuality and gendered and sexualised relationships with peers is lacking, in spite of research (e.g. Allan et al., 2008; Ringrose et al., 2012) showing that children show agency and interest in these issues. Ringrose wrote: “the sexualisation debates have neither offered a platform to critically engage with the dominant trends around risk and protection in RSE, nor addressed wider issues of sexism and gendered power dynamics in school” (2013:43). She suggests that the educational debates perpetuate binary representations of girls, in particular, as one of two things: empowered consumers and achievers, or vulnerable, potential/actual victims of sexualised society. The Bailey Review, for instance, did not mention RSE or discuss its potential for supporting young people to critically analyse sexual images and messages (Bailey, 2011).

Equalities Act 2010

In October 2010, the *Equalities Act 2010* came into force, although in practice much of the *Act* had already been in force because it unified over 116 separate pieces of legislation to provide a single legal framework to protect people’s human rights (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017). The *Equalities Act 2010* requires that public services – including all schools in England, Wales and Scotland – exercise their functions in ways that will reduce socio-economic inequalities and seek to eliminate discrimination and victimisation on the basis of protected characteristics. The Department for Education guidance for schools on the *Equalities Act 2010* suggests that because the *Act* consolidates a number of pieces of

legislation, the effect on schools is fairly minimal⁷ (DfE, 2014b), however the guidance is the first explicit, consolidated instruction from government on how schools should interpret and apply legislation related to human rights.

The guidance states that schools must not discriminate against, harass or victimise a pupil or potential pupil “in the way it provides education for the pupils... in the way it provides pupils access to any benefit, facility or service” (DfE, 2014b:7), which can be applied to RSE. Section 3.24 of the guidance states that schools must not discriminate against pupils who identify as gay, lesbian or bi-sexual, or who have parents or carers who are gay, lesbian or bi-sexual, including “[schools] should check that there are no practices which could result in unfair, less favourable treatment of such pupils” (DfE, 2014b:22). One reading of this statement is that schools must ensure that RSE is inclusive with regards to sexual orientation, for example by ensuring that teaching about human reproduction reflects heterosexual methods of conception as well as methods that same-sex couples might choose, including medically assisted reproduction. Further, the guidance suggests that schools must accurately teach what the UK law says about marriage for same-sex couples (Section 3.25). However, there is some tension between these claims and another statement, which reads: “no school, or individual teacher, is under a duty to support, promote or endorse marriage of same sex couples” (Section 3.27). This text diminishes previous statements (e.g. cited above), in effect validating any choices that individual schools or staff may make that exclude content on same-sex relationships or sexual relations. It also does not improve upon the current Sex and Relationship Education Guidance, which reads “[Sex and relationship education] is not about the promotion of sexual orientation” (DfEE, 2000:9). If anything, it succeeds in further ‘othering’ same-sex relationships and those who identify as LGBT.

The *Equalities Act 2010* guidance includes an additional five paragraphs on the relationship between protection of religion and belief, and protection of sexual orientation, centring on the opposition of faith schools and religious teachers to express positive views about same-sex relationships. These paragraphs are unsatisfactory because while they recognize the opposition to teaching about same-sex relationships, they accept that teachers can express their personal views about sexual orientation and that it would only be considered unlawful if

⁷ The main change is that schools must now protect pupils who are pregnant or have recently given birth, or who are undergoing gender reassignment, from discrimination, whereas schools were already required to protect pupils or potential pupils from discrimination on the basis of sex, race, disability, religion or belief, and sexual orientation (DfE, 2014b).

the school could be seen to be “haranguing, harassing or berating a particular pupil or group of pupils” (Section 3.31). This exceptional circumstance under which the *Equalities Act 2010* would be considered relevant is inconsistent with the definition of discrimination offered by the guidance: “Direct discrimination occurs when one person treats another less favourably, because of a protected characteristic” (DfE, 2014b, Section 1.17) and in consideration of the guidance’s assertion that it applies to “way [schools] provides education for the pupils... in the way it provides pupils access to any benefit, facility or service” (DfE, 2014b:7).

Campaigns for statutory status

In March 2017, the UK government made ‘relationships and sex education’ compulsory for all secondary school students in England, and ‘relationships education’ compulsory for all primary school students in England, effective as of September 2019, as part of the *Children and Social Work Act 2017*. This development may be seen as the culmination of years of campaigning, as the result of a policy window (Kingdon, 2011), and/or as a situation where finally the most persuasive arguments came to the fore to make non-action a non-option. Specifically, the argument that government has an obligation to protect children from sexual abuse and predation, accompanied with evidence that RSE can provide this protection. In the Department for Education’s official policy statement about the statutory status for RSE, it stated,

Given the increasing concerns around child sexual abuse and exploitation and the growing risks associated with growing up in a digital world, there is a particularly compelling case to act in relation to pupil safety. That is why the amendment places a duty now on the Secretary of State to make Relationships and Sex Education statutory (DfE, 2017b:2)

The language of ‘duty’ could be considered be a discursive strategy that seeks to extinguish the interpretation that statutory RSE is a choice on the part of government. It could be argued that not acting – in the context of the information about pupil safety and exploitation – carried a heavier risk than taking action and making RSE statutory. For the purpose of putting this study in context, I now offer a brief, chronological account of the principal policy developments in relation to RSE. This account is based on my reviews of literature and policy, as well as media monitoring over the course of my doctoral work and builds on the historical accounts already covered in this chapter.

Since the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy was implemented, campaigners for RSE have couched their ask for statutory status for RSE within demands for statutory personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) – the umbrella subject – which was deemed more politically

palatable. In October 2008, the External Steering Group for the Children's Plan published its 'Review of Sex and Relationships Education in Schools' (External Steering Group for the Department for Education, 2008), which had making RSE statutory – with clear, expected learning outcomes – as its principle recommendation, coupled with recommendations to make RSE more inclusive, more focused on 'relationships', and more explicit about values. Subsequently, the government announced its intention to make PSHE education statutory and requested Sir Alastair Macdonald to lead a consultative review on how best to implement it. The resultant report recommended that PSHE, including RSE, should become statutory, and that schools should be supported to develop programmes that are sensitive to their communities and to improve their provision (Macdonald, 2009). While the government welcomed the report, it did not make PSHE statutory.

In 2011, the Department for Education commissioned a mapping exercise of PSHE to identify models of good practice (Formby et al., 2011). This study demonstrated inconsistency in the delivery of PSHE (including RSE) and a lack of shared understanding across schools about the purpose of PSHE. The authors noted that educators and school administrators often articulated that emotional wellbeing could contribute to Ofsted indicators, and noted that PSHE is a “dumping ground for concerns not dealt with elsewhere” (Formby et al., 2011:98).

Early in 2013, Conservative MP Elizabeth Truss, Children's Minister, stated that the government would not be making PSHE statutory, saying “teachers are best placed to understand the needs of their pupils and do not need additional central prescription” – contrasting sharply with the government's general approach to curricula and teacher's judgements. A number of esteemed reports published before the end of the year conflicted with the MP's assertions...

The Department for Education conducted a public consultation on personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) in 2013 and the results supported more comprehensive, planned and effectively taught RSE programmes (DfE, 2013a). In addition to statutory status for RSE, recommendations included: better guidance and expertise to develop and deliver programmes, better teacher training, and the articulation of expected knowledge outcomes (DfE, 2013a). These interventions had been suggested previously, however the Department for Education decided not to make RSE statutory due to the number of parent respondents who argued that parents should have primary responsibility for RSE. The Children's Commissioner for England report on the effects of pornography in children's lives criticised the Department for Education's decision to value each contribution to the consultation equally, whether they

represented the views of one parent or an organisation representing thousands of educators and argued that it was a missed opportunity (Horvath et al., 2013:65).

The Children Commissioner's report about pornography, entitled 'Rapid Evidence Assessment on the Effects that Access and Exposure to Pornography has on Young People', included six key recommendations to the government, three of which centred on strengthening RSE, including a stronger focus on healthy relationships, greater relevance to young people's actual experiences and the safe use of the internet (Horvath et al., 2013:66-67). Also published in 2013, the Children Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups reported "child sexual exploitation is primarily a child protection issue... every educational institution has to provide effective sex and relationships education embedded in a whole-school approach to child protection" (Berelowitz et al., 2013:25). Also in 2013, Ofsted published a report entitled 'Not Yet Good Enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools', which found that RSE:

required improvement in over a third of schools, leaving some children and young people unprepared for the physical and emotional changes they will experience... failure to provide high quality, age-appropriate sex and relationships education may leave young people vulnerable to inappropriate sexual behaviours and exploitation. (2013:4)

A Labour amendment was introduced to the Children and Families Bill in early 2013 to make PSHE statutory. This amendment was voted down by the Coalition government in June, but later in the year another amendment was tabled to the same Bill and this one made it through the House of Commons, only to be defeated in the House of Lords in January 2014. The government's decision not to make PSHE a statutory subject was heavily criticised by expert, independent agencies. However, campaigners and supportive politicians rallied again and convened a troupe in support of statutory PSHE and RSE that exceeded any previous effort at unity.

In autumn of 2014, the Home Affairs Committee called for PSHE to be made compulsory due to concerns about the high prevalence of female genital mutilation in some parts of England. In January 2015, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, acting primarily on concerns about violence against women, called for statutory PSHE (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2015). In February 2015, the House of Commons Education Committee published its own inquiry into PSHE and RSE, which suggested that the delivery of PSHE and RSE were worsening over time and called on the government to "incentivise schools to raise the quality of PSHE and RSE" (House of Commons Education Committee, 2015:27). The inquiry reported the drop in registrations for the national certified programme of PSHE Continuing Professional

Development (CPD) since the government had ceased funding the programme in 2010: in the 2007-08 calendar year, there were 1723 registrations when the programme was free to participants, compared to 175 registrations in 2013-14, when the course cost participants £700 (House of Commons Education Committee, 2015:37). The inquiry also linked uptake of the course among teachers to the availability of local authority advisors specialising in PSHE and RSE, which were declining in all areas of England: schools in regions that still had local authority experts in RSE were more likely to have trained PSHE and RSE specialists. The inquiry consequently recommended to government that it restore funding to the certified programme of PSHE CPD, and other recommendations to ensure that all schools have trained teachers for RSE and PSHE (House of Commons Education Committee, 2015:44).

Drawing on evidence provided to the inquiry from Minister of State for School Reform, MP Nick Gibb, and government documents such as the statutory guidance on safeguarding, the House of Commons Education Committee argued that the government had made insufficient efforts to improve PSHE and RSE, in line with previous studies and reviews of the subjects. Gibb informed the House of Commons Education Committee that the government had made PSHE “a huge priority” (House of Commons Education Committee, 2015:33). However, measures taken to improve PSHE and RSE included requiring schools to publish their PSHE/RSE curricula online (as a method of promoting parental choice, which, they presumed, would drive improvements), introducing destination measures (e.g. how many pupils progress to higher education) as a method for assessing the quality of PSHE/RSE, and referencing PSHE/RSE – in a single sentence – in the revised statutory guidance to schools on safeguarding. As noted by the inquiry, these measures are deeply problematic as efforts for improving PSHE and RSE. Accordingly, the report stated, “The Government’s current strategy for improving PSHE and RSE in schools is weak, and the recent actions taken by the Government are insufficient to make much difference” (2015: 34). The House of Commons Education Committee called on the Department for Education to develop a plan of work to introduce statutory PSHE and RSE in primary and secondary schools. In sum, four parliamentary committees, five teaching unions, six medical colleges, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, the Children’s Commissioner for England, the Chief Medical Officer and two royal societies were all putting pressure on the government to make PSHE, and within it RSE, statutory (PSHE Association Strategic Partners Group, 2018).

For some time, silence emanated from the government on the issue, although confidence was high that the overwhelming demonstration of support for statutory status was enough to make it happen. But by February 2016, Prime Minister David Cameron had unilaterally

blocked the proposal. One government official was quoted by The Telegraph as having said, “it’s largely to do with this notion that if we start focusing on PSHE we’re moving away from the rigour agenda” (Newman, 2016), which, presumably, refers to rigour around disciplinary subjects. The Prime Minister’s actions effectively closed down the debate, and it was nearly a year before another move towards statutory PSHE was made in parliament, in the form of a private member’s bill. However, a general election was called so the bill fell.

Statutory status for relationships and sex education

For some, it came as something of a surprise that RSE was adopted as a statutory subject on its own, apart from PSHE, in the *Children and Social Work Act 2017* (c.16) in March 2017.

However, the specific location of statutory RSE, within an Act of government about child protection and social work, is highly indicative of the persuasion tactics that succeeded in gaining high level support for statutory RSE. It was claims that RSE could help protect children from sexual abuse that tipped the majority opinion in parliament towards statutory status for RSE. Campaigning strategies had, in recent years, shifted towards this narrative. For example, in response to the government’s White Paper on education in 2016, ‘Education Excellence Everywhere’ (DfE, 2016), the Sex Education Forum issued a statement which said:

There is nothing in the White Paper to guarantee that SRE is taught in any school in England... Despite evidence that half of young people do not learn how to get help if they are abused, the government has done little to ensure children get vital information to protect their safety and wellbeing. (Sex Education Forum, 2016)

New demands for statutory RSE from the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) campaign, the Everyday Sexism project and others similarly focused on children’s protection and safety (Bates, 2018; Bates and Green, 2016), inspired by public and political concern about child abuse and sexual exploitation cases. Child sexual exploitation had become an urgent priority: sexual exploitations scandals had been made public by the media and public agencies had initiated a number of special investigations, such as Operation Yew Tree (which began in 2012, following evidence of systemic child abuse by the late celebrity Jimmy Savile and others) and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (in response to the publicization that an estimated 1400 children had been sexually exploited in the area between 1997 and 2013). Earlier advocacy, focusing on children’s rights to information and education about sexuality and relationships, and wellbeing discourses, had failed, but calls to protect children, invoking responsibility and appealing to existing obligations to safeguard children, succeeded in bringing about statutory RSE.

From July to November 2018, the government conducted a public consultation on draft statutory guidance for RSE. RSE will not be statutory in practice until 2019, in order to allow schools time to plan and implement the guidance when it is approved.

2.2. Academic debates and evidence about relationships and sex education

The policy context above suggests that although there has been mounting support for statutory and improved RSE in recent years, among educationalists, professional associations, child protection agencies, non-profit service providers, campaigners, many parliamentarians and others, until recently the government has failed to provide leadership on the subject. Therefore, more knowledge is needed about how primary schools conceptualise the value and purpose of RSE, and how they make decisions about it. Studies focused on the effectiveness and/or impact of RSE, and on teachers', pupils' and parents' views and experiences of RSE, suggest that greater leadership is needed in order to improve RSE. Some studies are more pointed in their findings, suggesting that good quality RSE is closely associated with strong leadership on the subject within the school, including appropriate decision making about RSE policy (Aldred and David, 2007; Thomson 1997; Ofsted, 2013; UNESCO, 2018). The literature suggests that strong RSE policies can create the conditions for sensitive and safe RSE that is supportive to all pupils, including: an inclusive, comprehensive curriculum; engagement with parents and the local community; sufficient time allocated in the schedule; and training and structure for educators. However, we know little about how schools navigate the field of RSE – including national policy, local authority guidance, training, curricula and resources available, and their own past experiences – to inform their RSE policies.

My literature search strategy aimed to identify empirical research about relationships and sex education in English primary schools in the English language. Using the Social Sciences Citation Index of Web of Science database and the International Bibliography of Social Science (IBSS) database, I used the search terms 'sex and relationships education', 'relationships and sex education' and 'sexuality education', in combination with 'England OR UK'. In initial searches, I did not use a date range, I later selected the year 2000 as the starting year for my literature search because this was the year that the official guidance on RSE was published (DfEE, 2000), and it signalled a policy shift in this field. This is significant because I wanted to include literature that related to RSE policies and provision that related to what one might call a common 'policy era' for RSE. I understood that research related to previous years could be published after 2000, but did not find this to be problematic in my review. The geographical

focus eliminated a significant number of studies, but I felt this was necessary given the centrality of official policy prescriptions and the national context.

I narrowed my focus to primary schools early on in my doctoral studies while reading broadly about RSE in my aim to identify a research focus. It became clear that the literature was dominated by a focus on secondary schools. My literature review emphasized this bias. I introduced the search term 'primary' (adding it to the terms noted above), but I found so few studies focused on primary schools that I decided it was necessary to selectively include some literature about RSE in secondary schools. Specifically, I included studies focused on secondary schools in England that addressed decision making about RSE, either at the management level (e.g. leadership team) or by teachers responsible for delivering RSE lessons. Secondary schools face some different issues compared to primaries, but the policy environment and national context are the same, and my reading of studies about secondary schools suggested that some findings were relevant to primary schools. I did not eliminate any papers for being poor quality, I found the standards of the research methodologies and implementation to be quite strong. However, I did eliminate one paper about RSE in primary school on the basis that it focused on the experiences of a single pupil, one with learning difficulties, because it was not sufficiently relevant to my research aims. In addition to peer-reviewed materials, I included a number of reports and studies that were commissioned by government bodies because they provided a valuable perspective and further analysis on RSE, including provision in primary schools. These have been discussed in the academic literature, which suggests they are broadly accepted as sufficiently rigorous and methodical to be of interest to scholarly audiences, and while not peer-reviewed, some of them were authored by known academics in the field. However, I did find that some were not particularly critical (e.g. Papadopoulos, 2010), so while I may mention these as part of the policy context, I excluded them from my review of current knowledge and literature.

The benefits of good quality relationships and sex education at primary school

The literature suggests that primary school children would benefit, both immediately and in future, from good quality RSE.

One of the most noteworthy studies in this area was the 'No Outsiders' project, a collaboration between researchers and child educators that involved introducing strategies and materials to address lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality in primary schools (e.g. DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; DePalma and Jennett, 2010). Publications resulting from this study suggested that schools can be places where non-normative sexual and gender identities become visible

and available to children, and where important learning about gender and sexuality takes place (Allan et al., 2008; Cullen and Sandy, 2009). DePalma (2013) suggested that the project enabled children to become aware of their own roles in gendering, in perpetuating ideas of essential 'boyiness' or 'girliness' and supporting children to become active participants in transforming gender norms. The No Outsiders project built upon earlier work exploring gender in primary school, such as Renold's primary school ethnography (2000). Renold suggested that children are "subject to the pressures of a compulsory heterosexuality.... [they] struggle in the constitution and conflation of their gendered and sexual identities" (2000:323). She suggested that progressive RSE, which recognizes sexuality in its broadest sense and values diversity, is a promising, protective intervention against misogyny, heterosexism and homophobia.

Ringrose et al.'s (2012) study on young people's (ages 12/13 and 15/16 years) use of digital technologies, including sexting, suggests that young people's peer relationships and cultures were at least as gendered and even more sexist than Renold had found in her primary school study. The authors found that sexism was completely normalised in all peer relationships (online and offline), and girls were subjected to regular sexist abuse and violence. Ringrose et al. recommended that PSHE (including RSE) should address sexual messaging in relation to digital technologies, masculinities and femininities, and sexism. They proposed that "in whatever part of the curriculum addresses teenagers' developing sexual identity and activity, the role played by today's technology... should be explicitly included" (2012:54). They proposed, therefore, that diverse teachers – not only those delivering sex education – should be responsible for teaching pupils about rights, safety and privacy. This relates to arguments that a whole-school approach should be adopted to deliver and reinforce RSE.

Reports about young adolescents' sexual behaviour and knowledge suggest that they are often unprepared for sexual relationships when they do begin to have them, and that RSE could help prepare young people for intimate encounters and relationships (see Torjesen, 2012; TPIAG, 2009). Hadley et al. (2016) suggested that RSE, a central prong of the UK government's 10-year Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, was a key factor in the country's success in bringing down the incidence of teenage pregnancies, and it continues to be promoted to local authorities as a key strategy for reducing teenage pregnancy (Public Health England, 2018). The final report from the Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group (2009) noted, however, that looked after children and young people, and those who lack stable family environments, remain more likely to have teenage pregnancies than others, and that early intervention is vital.

Some academics have suggested that RSE, and more specific programmes about gender equality, power and healthy relationships, can help to prevent peer violence and harassment among young people, and domestic violence in future adult relationships (e.g. Fox et al., 2013; Hester and Westmarland, 2005; Stanley et al., 2011). In their guidance to schools on preventing and dealing with sexual harassment, the Department for Education recommends that RSE and domestic abuse prevention programmes should be integrated as part of a whole-school approach to healthy relationships, wellbeing and safeguarding, which articulate a “clear set of values and standards, and these will be upheld and demonstrated throughout all aspects of school life” (DfE, 2017c:13). This further develops the proposal, offered by Ringrose et al., that it is not the sole responsibility of the RSE teacher to promote gender equality and healthy relationships. The Department for Education report (2017c) also suggests that these programmes must be supported by the school leadership (and the wider staff team) and implemented by a ‘trained and confident’ team of educators. This literature situates education about relationships, values and wellbeing as a central objective of state schools.

There is also a collection of studies that document the range of impacts and outcomes of a variety of models of RSE, which include not only preventing possible negative outcomes, but outcomes related to child agency, confidence and health. Several studies suggest that primary school RSE can help children and young people to make positive, informed decisions in their relationships, to understand sex within the context of relationships (and not merely its biological implications), to be more confident about their bodies and their development, and to ensure good sexual health when they do have sex (e.g. Berelowitz et al., 2013; Macdonald, 2009). Mason (2010) noted, however, that RSE programmes that offer impartial information can be confusing for children. She gave the example of a male pupil who was confused about the purpose of erections because RSE had covered puberty and bodily changes, but not sexual intercourse. This points to problems associated with adults deciding what children *need* to know, rather than be guided by children’s interests.

Many of these studies are qualitative and small in scale, looking in depth at what a small selection of schools are doing. Collectively, they provide a persuasive argument about the value of RSE and help to facilitate a complex understanding of the range of approaches and applications, but they leave us with questions about the quality of RSE across the spectrum of English schools.

Inadequate and poor relationships and sex education

Despite the potential positive benefits of RSE, there is considerable evidence that RSE in English primary schools is often inadequate. Ofsted reported that

Sex and relationships education required improvement in over a third of schools. In primary schools this was because too much emphasis was placed on friendships and relationships, leaving pupils ill-prepared for physical and emotional changes during puberty (2013:6)

Ofsted also noted that in two-fifths of schools (both primary and secondary), where PSHE learning was weak, pupils most commonly had poor knowledge and skills in “the serious safeguarding areas of personal safety in relation to sex and relationships” (2013:4) and found that homophobic language was commonplace in these schools. Echoing Mason’s (2010) observations, above, the Ofsted report notes that many children have not been taught the appropriate language or developed the confidence to talk about sexual behaviours and seek support to resolve concerns or questions (2013:7).

While an earlier External Steering Group (2008) report, commissioned by the Department for Education, had previously suggested that RSE was inadequate, in contrast to Ofsted it suggested that the subject focused too much on the biological and that there should be a renewed focus on relationships. While the External Steering Group aimed to review RSE in primary and secondary schools, their methodology seemed to represent a bias towards secondary schools (e.g. involving young people in the review, including data about young people’s opinions), and they did not differentiate their findings between primary and secondary schools. I therefore wonder whether it is secondary schools that are focused too much on the biological, and not primaries, particularly as other literatures emphasize the focus on relationships in primary schools. This point underlines the importance of distinct research into RSE at primary schools.

In their mapping study of PSHE, commissioned by the Department for Education, Formby et al. (2011) examined PSHE delivery and effectiveness, including eight primary school case studies and surveys from 923 primary schools. The authors reported the following findings: 72% of primary schools had no staff members with a recognized national PSHE qualification; between 60 and 74% of primary schools only taught RSE once a year or less; only one in ten primary schools offered the subject lead for PSHE extra pay; and only 72% of primary schools stated that senior management supported PSHE. These data indicate the low status of RSE, both within PSHE and within the school more broadly, which was supported by respondents’ views of PSHE as instrumental (that is, its value lay in its contribution to academic achievement). These findings are supported by an earlier review of PSHE, which found that

PSHE was implemented inconsistently and with variable quality across schools, in part due to the poor training and expertise of educators tasked with leading and delivering the subject (Macdonald, 2009:24).

Ofsted, Formby et al., External Steering Group and Macdonald reviews all recommend that RSE (singularly or as part of PSHE) should be planned and delivered by specialist teachers. Ofsted noted that in one-third of primary schools, the subject leader was inadequately trained for the role and was not provided with enough time to meet with their team (2013:8). The suggestion that those tasked with managing RSE were not trained or supported adequately brings attention to the broader issue of leadership and oversight for RSE in schools.

More knowledge is needed about RSE leadership

Research with RSE educators and practitioners, as well as young people's and parent's opinions about RSE further strengthens the rationale for more research into leadership for RSE within schools.

In 2013, Ofsted noted that the quality of leadership and management in PSHE required improvement or was inadequate in 44% of schools, and found that those schools requiring improvement in leadership and management also required improvement in PSHE (2013:8). In their 2015 inquiry on PSHE and RSE, the Educational Select Committee suggested that the quality of PSHE and RSE provision was associated with the value that the school's senior leadership team placed on health and wellbeing within the whole school community (2015:39-40). These reports suggest that strong school leadership overall, and one which focuses on pupil wellbeing and not merely academic outcomes, is associated with good quality PSHE and RSE.

Findings from studies with young people revealed that RSE in practice often does not meet their needs or expectations, which reflects poor decision making and leadership on the subject. Young people feel RSE should be taught earlier, should occupy a larger amount of classroom teaching and should include a broader range of topics (Allen, 2008; Forrest et al., 2004; Pound et al., 2015, 2016). In their qualitative synthesis of young people's view of RSE, Pound et al. reported that "Young people reported receiving negative, gendered, and heterosexist content that ignored the fact and diversity of their sexual activity and failed to provide information they wanted." (2015:65). In her paper, reporting on an in-depth study with 16 young people aged 15-16 years in the North of England, Hirst (2004) illustrated how RSE lessons diverged from young people's actual experience and interest in sex, which supports

Mason's (2010) study in primary schools, discussed above, which found that RSE content was driven by adult decision making rather than children's questions. Hirst (2004) noted that in interviews, young people lacked familiarity and/or confidence to use the correct terminology for sexual anatomy. She suggested that their lack of vocabulary and communication skills related to sexuality might translate into problems communicating with intimate partners. Halstead and Waite (2001), Hirst (2004) and Measor (2004) also supported Pound et al.'s observations about social exclusion in RSE, noting that children and young people were excluded due to educators' failures to address ethnic diversity and gender differences in RSE pedagogies and content. These studies suggest that leaders and decision makers responsible for RSE have not solicited or responded to young people's experiences, opinions and desires for learning about sexuality and relationships.

Research with RSE educators and practitioners suggests that while they often recognize the importance of RSE for pupils' development, they report a number of barriers to delivering high quality RSE, including: having received insufficient training and support, pressure to prioritise other subjects and duties, a lack of clarity on what they should teach in RSE and how, and a personal lack of comfort and/or interest in RSE (Hayter et al., 2008; Suter et al., 2009). Some studies suggest that RSE provision is influenced by educators' concerns about parental objections (e.g. Mason, 2010). Those who are trained and comfortable with the material have found that their judgements and autonomy in this area of the curriculum are compromised because they are provided with little guidance and leadership on appropriate content and pedagogy, with the result that they often have anxiety and fears that they may face negative consequences if school administrators and/or parents are unhappy with what and how they choose to teach RSE (see Hayter et al., 2008; Suter et al., 2009). Research with parents and carers suggests, conversely, that these groups largely supported RSE (Frankham, 2006; Turnbull et al., 2011; Walker, 2004; Walker and Milton, 2006). Alldred et al., in their study of parent consultation in the RSE program of an English primary school, found that parent participation can "generate greater acceptance and openness of attitude in regard to SRE, in turn benefiting SRE among children by reducing withdrawals from SRE classes" (2016:863).

A paucity of literature about decision making for RSE

I found no studies focused on how primary schools in England and Wales make decisions about RSE, so the literature on school decision making about RSE is limited to five studies looking at RSE more broadly, RSE in secondary schools, or children's gender and sexual identities.

Mason (2010) addressed school RSE policies and decisions taken by educators, in the process of implementing RSE, in her evaluation of RSE in two rural primary schools. Mason suggested that the schools had substantially different RSE policies – one quite basic and the other more substantial – but also suggested that the schools’ practices of RSE differed substantially from the written policy. Mason accounted for this, in part, by RSE educators adapting and accommodating the RSE programme in line with the cohort they were teaching at the time of the study, which teachers at one school suggested was less mature than usual.

Renold (2000, 2003) made some astute observations about leadership for RSE, which stemmed from an ethnography about children and gender in primary school. Renold notes that RSE, and children’s sexuality, is contested and contentious, to the extent that “headteachers and teachers are thus placed in a difficult position to openly discuss children’s emerging gender and sexual identities and knowledges” (2003:190). Thus, she recognizes, they are constrained in their freedom to formulate and implement the policies needed to challenge children’s “oppressive practices of gender-based and sexualised forms of harassment” (2003:190).

Allred and David’s *Get Real About Sex* (2007) is a much-cited work about a two-year study of sex education in all secondary schools of one local authority in England. Decision making about RSE was addressed primarily from the perspective of teachers and practitioners, many of whom were implementing decisions made by others. A key theme was the frustration teachers felt by the low status of PSHE and RSE – a variable perceived to be beyond their control – but the authors did not clearly articulate what choices were within their control. The authors suggested that RSE is seen as one of a gamut of special interests and initiatives, which gain interest for a short time, replete with training and funding opportunities provided by government. Allred and David suggested that head teachers are exhausted by “cycles of bidding and lamented the lack of stability, continuity and cumulative learning” (2007:64). Decision makers’ failures to act to champion and/or to change RSE was largely attributed to lack of incentive, lack of time, lack of expertise and confidence, and more pressing priorities (namely statutory subjects), though not lack of interest. These were cogent findings and the authors furnished these analyses with an insightful discussion about the role and purpose of teachers and schools in young people’s lives, questioning the ‘effectiveness’ of academic goals (education policy priorities) in facilitating affective dimensions of pupils’ learning.

Abbott, Ellis and Abbott (2015, 2016) wrote about how secondary school teachers understood RSE and made decisions about RSE provision, based on interviews with eight teachers in Yorkshire, England. Abbott et al. suggest that “the meanings and priorities teachers ascribe to

RSE remain a contributory factor in determining the nature of in-school provision, preventing it from becoming more inclusive” (2016:679). Both the 2015 and the 2016 papers suggest that teachers’ accounts of and preferences for RSE are constrained by government policy frameworks, such as the official guidance on sex and relationship education (DfEE, 2000), and public health imperatives (e.g. reducing STIs, teenage pregnancy). The authors suggest that the teachers presume pupils are heterosexual and use the rhetoric of young people’s vulnerability to justify their approach to RSE. While Abbott et al. (2015, 2016) bring attention to the formative influence of government and public discourses on teachers’ decisions, they fail to situate teachers and their actions within the complex dynamics of their role and school, by accounting for other pressures such as prioritising core subjects, their lack of expertise and lack of support.

Conducting research in three secondary schools, Corteen (2006) explored whether the schools fulfilled their legislative requirements in relation to RSE. She carried out semi-structured interviews with nine individuals and examined the ‘micropolitics’ of secondary schools: the actors involved, the influence of local and national policies, and other contextual issues. Corteen found that despite interviewing those actors responsible for RSE, only one respondent was aware of a school policy for RSE. At one school, respondents took the programme of work – the curriculum – as their guide for delivering lessons. Corteen suggested that as a result of existing and repealed government legislation and guidance (including Section 28, which did not apply to schools), all three schools’ programmes reflected a ‘damage limitation’ model (e.g. pregnancy prevention, STIs). Sexual and gender diversity were absent. Corteen argued persuasively that RSE is constrained by academic educational priorities, and that government guidance does not foster improvement in RSE, particularly in relation to the inclusion agenda. While Corteen offers a more in-depth and nuanced discussion of the institutional and contextual dynamics affecting RSE compared to Abbott et al. (2015, 2016), above, I found the agents involved at the school were lost in her analysis. For example, she often conflated an excerpt from one respondent with the school as a whole, and the reader does not get a sense of respondents’ capacities or understanding of RSE. The paper would also have benefitted by a discussion of how the subject related to other aspects of the schools’ practice and ethos.

2.3. Research questions

The policy contexts of RSE – including but beyond the education and health sectors – demonstrates that the subject has a complex and conflicted history in English schools. Although public health imperatives and the safeguarding agenda have dominated in recent

years, there has never been consensus on what RSE should seek to achieve, what its place is within schools and what its value is for pupils themselves. The academic literature on RSE is, in comparison, far more closely aligned in terms of the purpose of RSE and what it should entail. In particular, RSE should support children to think critically, to be reflective of their own assumptions and beliefs, and to appreciate and consider their role within their community. Empirical research demonstrates, however, that the apparent gap between policy context and expert knowledge on RSE is echoed in practice.

Based on my review and discussion of the policy contexts and scholarly literature, I argue that there is an important need to learn more about how primary school decision makers and leaders negotiate the field of RSE to make their own decisions about RSE. Greater understanding of how school decision makers balance diverse policy directives, educational priorities, their understanding of their own pupils, and the demands and interests of their board members, supervisors, staff and parents to produce RSE policy is an elementary part of improving leadership and, in turn, practice. Critically, the crux of the debate centres on values and purpose, and so – aligning value with knowledge – I focus my research on the selection and production of knowledge in decision-making practices. The aim of this research is, therefore, to explore how primary school decision makers understand and (re)create value in RSE policy making.

My research questions are:

1. What kinds of, and whose, knowledge influences policy deliberations about relationships and sex education?
2. How do structures, such as institutional, hierarchical or cultural discourses, exert influence and authority to legitimise, or dismiss, knowledge(s) in the policy-making process?
3. How are decision makers' personal values, attitudes, emotions and beliefs expressed and addressed in the policy-making process?
4. How are knowledge(s), and social relations that affect the legitimisation of knowledge, embedded in the written relationships and sex education policy in the school?

In the next chapter, I explore the theoretical approach and conceptual frameworks that enable me to research these questions.

Chapter 3: Policy, power and knowledge

I employ a number of diverse theories and conceptual frameworks in my research. This chapter begins by introducing Critical Realism, the overarching meta-theory serving my research aims. I then go on to discuss why I have selected the theories I have, and how they have enabled me to explore and respond to my research questions.

3.1. Critical realism: A meta theory

Critical Realism serves the aims of this research because it recognizes that social life takes place in an open, multi-dimensional system. It seeks to identify enduring patterns and structures that can be said to be ‘real’ (albeit socially constructed) but recognizes that subjective experiences and interpretations are equally worthy of attention. Critical Realism guides not only my theoretical approach, but also my methodology.

Critical Realism seeks to answer the ontological question of how structures of social relations work in order to understand why we have the policies and practices that we do (Bhaskar, 1998; Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017). The ‘social relations’ in question are those within and around the school, including the wider policy context, and the ‘policies and practices’ are those connected with selecting, negotiating and producing knowledge in decisions about relationships and sex education policies. Critical Realists propose that if we can observe the effects of social constructions and mechanisms, then we can infer that they exist (Archer et al., 1998). However, social life takes place within a dynamic and multi-layered system. Emergence⁸ is key: entities come into being through social combinations, webs of relationships, regularities of social events and behaviours, powers and constraints, and it is by stratifying and analysing the different domains, which have different characteristics, that insights may emerge (Archer, 1998; Bhaskar, 1998; Priestley, 2011). These domains, according to Critical Realists, are the ‘real’ (mechanisms, tendencies, structures), the ‘actual’ (the events that occur when the ‘real’ is activated), and the ‘empirical’, what people experience (Bhaskar and Lawson, 1998).

While empirical experiences are the starting point for the practical application of Critical Realism, in seeking to provide any account of reality, research must adopt theoretical

⁸ As defined by Archer: “emergent properties... [refers] to those entities which come into being through social combination. They exist by virtue of interrelations (although not usually interpersonal ones) and not all social relations give rise to them” (1998:192).

approaches that aid in constructing explanations of how mechanisms or structures affect events (Bhaskar, 1989; Fletcher, 2017). Proponents of Critical Realism (CR) accept that “communities of knowers produce knowledge in particular ways, but this does not... rule out the possibility of... relatively unchanging objects (Scott, 2000:22). In other words, while different communities may produce knowledge in different ways, not all knowledge is tentative: each community’s (e.g. educational sector) methods and conditions for producing knowledge may be relatively static across comparable sites (e.g. schools) and over time. The causal affects of structure on individual actions are embedded and expressed in particular structured interests, resources, powers, constraints and predicaments that are maintained by webs of relationships (Porpora, 1998).

In recognition of the complexity of decision making about RSE within primary schools, I engage a diverse range of theories and conceptual frameworks in this research. They each respond to different aspects of my research questions. To support my analysis and theorising about the value and purpose of RSE, I pair Macmurray’s typology of educational knowledge with the Social Realist theory of knowledge in education (Maton, 2014; Moore, 2009; Young, 2008). Macmurray’s theory offers an aspirational vision of *what* knowledge in education should and could be, including instrumental, valuational and intersubjective knowledges. Macmurray’s writing about the self in the school and his typology of educational knowledge – set against actual curricula debates and policy – broaden the scope of what education could look like (Macmurray, 2012; Fielding, 2012; Stern, 2012). Young offers a sensitive approach to conceptualise *how* knowledge, and how curriculum, is developed in education, and articulates how social or powerful interests, cognitive goals and cognitive norms may be articulated and advanced (2008, 2013).

I then situate this theory and this research in relation to core concepts in the field of policy analysis, addressing how the concepts of policy, power and policy analysis are pertinent to school-based decision making about RSE policy. Existing literature about RSE is traditionally situated in other disciplines, such as childhood studies, education studies, gender and sexuality, so the application of critical policy analysis to RSE – and the conceptualization of primary schools as sites of political processes – is an original and under-explored approach to this research agenda.

The argumentative approach, and notably Goodnight’s typology of argumentative strategies and spheres (Goodnight, 2012; Stewart, 2009), from the field of critical policy analysis, will support me to carry out a systematic analysis of the data I collect in this study. The

argumentative approach focuses on the values, criteria and arguments used to advance policy preferences in policy deliberation. It further embeds policy and decision making about policy within the unique codes, norms and ethos of the particular context, giving attention to how individual actors engage with the resources, people and rules that surround them to solve emerging problems.

3.2. The purpose of education

Macmurray's vision of knowledge in education

Macmurray is a Scottish philosopher who wrote extensively on education from the 1930s until the 1960s. For my reading of Macmurray, I am indebted to Fielding, who has analysed and written extensively about Macmurray's writing on education (e.g. 2007, 2012) and calls him "one of the great unsung figures of twentieth century British philosophy" (2000:397).

Responding to the horrors of the war and rejecting the government's agenda of international competitiveness, whereby educational performance was held up as a measure of state effectiveness, Macmurray sought to strengthen the personal and community dimensions of knowledge in education. Fielding wrote that central to Macmurray's writing

is the necessity of grounding one's view of education in a view of what it means to be and become a human being. Unless we ask fundamental questions of this kind then the education system we develop, the schools we encourage... will persistently and pervasively fail to grasp what is important. (2012:661)

Thus, Macmurray helps us to explore the relationship between school effectiveness and transformative education, for example, between teaching as a personal encounter and a technical task. Macmurray aids a re-imagining of knowledge and personal relations in education that opens opportunities and recognition for RSE that have never emerged at a policy level. His conceptualisation of education is far more closely aligned with contemporary definitions of RSE, which value children's learning and critical reflection about issues such as identity, relationships and diversity in society, and which include affective and behavioural learning (Breuner et al., 2016; Goldfarb and Constantine, 2011), compared to dominant debates about the purpose of schooling, for example as an institution to serve industry or to uphold traditional English values (Chitty, 2009; Delanty and Strydom, 2003).

To begin with, it is helpful to understand Macmurray's conceptualisation of self. For him, the most defining feature of the human condition is mutuality. He suggested that individuals are

inevitably and always defined in relation to those around him or herself, both through dependence upon others and resistance from others (Facer, 2012:5). He wrote, “we need one another to be ourselves. This complete and unlimited dependence of each of us upon the others is the central and crucial fact of personal existence” (Macmurray, 1933:137). It is thus through personal relationships that we experience and understand our self. Further, it is through our empirical perceptions – through the senses – that we perceive others around us, contemplate differences and in doing so better understand ourselves in the world. He wrote, “Contemplation... centres our emotional capacities upon the object in a search for its uniqueness and reality” (2012:672). Macmurray’s interest in contemplation, and his understanding that an individual’s engagement with the world, and contemplation with what she/he sees and perceives, is transformative. The importance that Macmurray placed on contemplation, and the idea that knowledge is individually transformative, recalls neoconservative ideas of education, but is also echoed in child-centred pedagogies that advocate learning through experience and self-driven activity (Hartley, 2009; Wood, 2007). Research about the impact of RSE in primary school similarly highlights the transformative potential of RSE. For example, DePalma (2013) argues that critical education about gender can enable children to understand their own role in transforming gender stereotypes and Hester and Westmarland (2005) suggest that education that supports children to develop relationships based on mutual respect and understanding can interrupt intergenerational patterns of domestic violence. For Macmurray, and a number of RSE advocates and scholars, while we are born human, we only develop our humanity through learning to appreciate and care for each other.

Central to Macmurray’s theory of knowledge in education is his distinction between functional and personal human relations. Functional relations support the functioning of society, they are transactions that serve a purpose. For example, one might purchase an orange at a store: the communications and relation between oneself and the cashier is purely functional, you are not seeking a relationship with that person, to know about them on any deeper level. Whereas, personal (or communal) relations have no purpose beyond themselves, they are expressive of who we are. Macmurray often used the example of friendship to illustrate the concept of personal relationships: friendships are about freedom and love; it is through friendship that people see others’ vulnerability and expose their own vulnerabilities; it is through friendship that individuals flourish and learn about themselves and others. The principles of freedom (e.g. to be and express oneself) and equality (e.g. each person has equal worth) are critical features of personal relations (Macmurray, 1950:74). Functional relations do

not possess any of these features, but they do facilitate the functions of society. Both functional and personal relations are essential, and necessary to each other, but personal, or community relations are the most important, they are what enable us to 'learn to be human', and it is only in expressing ourselves through personal relations that we are completely ourselves. Macmurray wrote:

One of the greatest mistakes we make... is to separate, or attempt to separate, the personal life from the functional. The result is a series of false contrasts... (that) rest of the failure to recognise that the personal life must be through the functional. (1945:11, qtd in Fielding, 2007)

Macmurray's position, therefore, was that "all functional, that is to say, social, political and economic activity must be brought within the compass of human well-being and not the other way around" (Fielding, 2000:402). Fielding suggests that it is in articulating the balance and respective contribution of functional and personal relations that Macmurray contributed a satisfactory vision of knowledge in education. Macmurray's advocacy of personal relations in education diverges significantly from contemporary education policy, which seeks to incorporate managerialist principles in education, including by treating parents (if not pupils) as clients (Ball, 2000), but is arguably more supportive of the core values of RSE.

For Macmurray, there are three types of knowledge in education: technical knowledge, valuational knowledge, and knowledge about community. Technical knowledge is concerned with 'how' to do things, it is closely associated with the sciences. Valuational knowledge is concerned with how to establish or measure what has value in the world, what is worth doing. It is about emotions but is also related to the arts. Knowledge about community is intersubjective knowledge, it is concerned with the things and aspects of life that are shared and take place with and between people. In line with the emphasis that Macmurray placed on personal relations, as discussed above, Macmurray wrote, "the first priority in education... is learning to live in personal relation to other people... learning to live in community" (2012: 662). Fielding suggests that Macmurray's focus on knowledge about community, or intersubjective knowledge, is not sentimental or utopian. He suggests that while Macmurray constructs community as the core network of humans and personal relationships that give one's life meaning and value, sharing common values, having empathy and compassion is equally necessary for the functioning of society: intersubjective knowledge enables people to jointly deal with and find solutions to problems and disasters, and to agree strategies for living together well (2012:662). Macmurray's typology of knowledge in education can be applied across different conceptions of what knowledge should be valued in schools, including

progressive and traditional ideas about education, which makes it a useful tool for analysing policy making about RSE.

Thus, in education intersubjective knowledge should not merely be prioritized as a learning objective, but it should inform *how* schools are organised and decisions made; the relationship between the pupils and the educator is paramount. In a public lecture in 1958, Macmurray reflected on his own teaching practice and said, “I ask myself almost automatically whether I have fallen into the trap of teaching my subject instead of my pupils” (2012:665). As mentioned above, it is the transformation of the pupil, the individual’s learning, that indicates the value of the teaching. It is not, as in the case of the orange purchase at the shop, whether it was an effective transaction, an effective ‘delivery’ of the content.

Macmurray’s prioritisation of knowledge about community and valuational knowledge in school curriculum is a radical break from models of curriculum we have seen to date, and even models of curriculum that have been previously proposed. He re-imagines schools as sites of human flourishing, friendship, care and transformation. Knowledge in education is, accordingly, about personal relations, individual difference and commonality, emotions and also taking action through knowledge.

Social Realist theory of knowledge in education

In contrast to Macmurray, Social Realists do not advocate for specific types or a distribution of types of knowledge in education, but they theorise the criteria and types of knowledge upon which decisions about the curriculum are based. Social Realists are interested in the theory of knowledge (or absence of one) underpinning the curriculum and educational policy. Social Realism is a valuable tool for this study because the literature suggests that much RSE practice and policy in England does not appear to be informed by the substantial body of evidence about what good quality RSE entails and what young people want to learn and engage with in RSE (e.g. Formby et al., 2011; Ofsted, 2013; Pound et al., 2015, 2016). The most important Social Realist theorists include Young (2008), Maton and Moore (2014; Moore, 2000). Their work builds on Young’s earlier theory, the New Sociology of Education (1971), and Basil Bernstein’s work on forms of discourse and knowledge structures (1999). Social Realism is built upon critique and observations of the development, and practice, of curriculum in state-maintained schools in the UK. As such, I introduce and develop my discussion of Social Realist theory in relation to these curriculum debates.

Debates about knowledge in the English curriculum have largely centred around two positions: neoconservative and technical-instrumentalist approaches. Neoconservatives advocate for a model of education that descends from the monastic tradition, whereby the curriculum was divided into subjects – bodies of knowledge – that adhered to three specific criteria. Young suggests that these criteria were: first, that the knowledge in the curriculum was interpreted from traditional university subjects, which gives it the term ‘disciplinary knowledge’; second, that knowledge learned in school was distinct from knowledge learned in everyday life, ‘everyday knowledge’, because it would not be learned in everyday life; and third, that knowledge learned in school was cognitively superior from everyday knowledge (2008: 20). In line with the monastic tradition, learning is a contemplative, transformative process; one submits to the discipline and becomes a different sort of person, an educated person (Young, 2008). This disciplinary knowledge has been critiqued for not reflecting an epistemology, that there is, in fact, no grounding theory that guides how we determine what it is that is certain in the world, and subsequently what should be taught (Hartley, 2009, Moore, 2013). Whenever this model of education is challenged, neoconservatives appeal to tradition and respect for authority, they suggest that disciplinary knowledge transcends time, and in addition that it provides, in part due to its longevity, standards in education, in particular a measure of excellence, that cannot be determined or achieved by other models of curriculum. However, there is increasing consensus among sociologists in education that the very idea of epistemology as a precise theory for determining what is real in the world is defunct in education, that there is no process for determining truth. Toulmin offered the term ‘post-empiricist epistemology’ to refer to ideas about what knowledge is valued and reflected in education (Delanty and Strydom, 2003). Rather than an epistemology, then, one might interpret neoconservative and technical-instrumentalist approaches as educational discourses. Hajer, a renowned critical policy analyst, defines discourse as “an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena... they distinguish some aspects of a situation rather than others” (Hajer, 1993:46).

The technical-instrumentalist approach to curriculum emerged around the 1930s, when industrialists argued that education should prepare pupils to participate in the labour force and therefore teach them in the skills required by the market, and it has become the dominant perspective not only regarding what is taught, but how education is done (Ball, 2000, 2013; Wilkins, 2015). In contrast to the neoconservatives, according to technical-instrumentalists education did not aim to make a certain kind of person, it was rather an instrumental process designed to equip a person to work (Young, 2008). Initially, this perspective of education was

applied only to vocational training and post-16 education, but it gained prominence and in the 1980s it came to the fore as a common-sense approach to education. As discussed in Chapter Two, there is an ever-increasing drive towards employable skills, being able to apply theory and abstract learning towards 'real world' applications and demonstrating the utility of learning. Knowledge and critique about theories of knowledge in curricula decision making highlight that while there are a few dominant trends, or discourses, there is no uniform, guiding framework to guide school decision makers with regards to what really matters in education, which might underpin decision making for their RSE policies.

The technical-instrumental approach has been applauded for drawing attention to the rationale that knowledge in education should relate to people's experiences in the world around them and acknowledge that people want to be employable following education, but has been critiqued for failing to appreciate the historical canon of knowledge represented by disciplinary knowledge, its value in promoting an appreciation of fine art as well as abstract reasoning (Moore and Young, 2001). Furthermore, the nature of knowledge has been redefined by technical-instrumentalists as much more empirical, more positivist, than previously. That is, the idea that knowledge of the world is certain and universal, observable, static and also knowable. Elliott wrote that concepts in the National Curriculum, originally devised in 1988, have "unambiguous and precise meanings... children either understand or misunderstand a concept" (1997:28). Thus, it denies the possibility that knowledge is socially constructed, and narrows the scope for nuanced teaching and discussion of topics such as 'gender', 'consent' and 'sexuality'. Education scholars have suggested that with what Giroux (1983) calls 'industrial trainers' at the helm, drives to improve education over the few decades have "assumed that 'educational problems' can be fixed by technical means... easily remedied as long as teachers and pupils alike adhere to the common-sense truisms proffered by the school effectiveness movement" (Willmott, 1999:254). These 'common-sense truisms' include things like standardized testing, to assess how well pupils (and, by proxy, schools) are performing in comparison to others, and setting targets for academic outcomes. Willmott suggests that the movement towards greater effectiveness and efficiency in education has been unable (or unwilling) to step back and ask *what* education is supposed to accomplish anyway, to seriously reconsider the epistemological framework underpinning the curriculum (1999). More recently, the increasing involvement of business, and business interests, in the delivery of education has shaped knowledge and knowledge products in particular ways. Ball suggests that educational reforms that have promoted private sector involvement in education has produced what he calls a 'knowledge economy'. That is, "the idea that knowledge and education can be treated as

a business product, and that educational and innovative intellectual products and services, as productive assets, can be exported for high value return” (Ball, 2013:19). Thus, knowledge no longer exists for its own sake, for intellectual curiosity and personal development, it is now a product; the end is not education, but profit. This turn towards effectiveness, efficiency and private sector involvement is problematic for RSE because it draws attention away from the core purpose of education, which is a key point of tension when it comes to RSE. Critiques of neoliberal educational policies nevertheless helps to sensitive me to criteria and values that may emerge in the research data.

In the 1970s, the New Sociology of Education (NSOE) brought a new focus to knowledge in education and successfully argued that there was a causal relationship between the organization of knowledge in education and relationships between inequality and power (Young, 1971). Drawing on evidence of the distribution of pupils from different class groups in England across Grammar, Technical and Secondary Modern schools, scholars argued that both neoconservative and technical-instrumentalist models of curricula serve the interests of privileged groups in society – the upper, wealthy classes – by representing in education the knowledges that are most useful to them, and therefore reproducing social segregation and cultural norms and, importantly, their own position as the elite (Apple, 1993; Giroux, 1983; Moore, 2013). This initial argument focused on class interests, but scholars in diverse disciplines have elaborated upon it to reflect the experiences of other marginalized and repressed groups through patriarchal, post-colonial and multicultural analyses. The NSOE critique – named a ‘paradigm’ by Moore (2013) – has also named the ‘voice discourse’ perspective (referring to the ‘voices’ of the powerful), standpoint theory (in feminist critiques, drawing attention to the unique perspective of women) and reproduction theory (focusing on the reproductive function of controlling knowledge).

Proponents in the field of education suggests that curricula should reflect diverse, subjective experiences and cultural production, including those of marginalised groups (Moore and Muller, 1999). However, Giroux argues that the NSOE is merely critical and fails to be productive. He wrote:

Reproduction theorists have overemphasized the idea of domination in their analyses and have failed to provide any major insights into how teachers, students, and other human agents come together within specific historical and social contexts in order to both make and reproduce the conditions of their existence. (1983:259)

If no group’s knowledge, and no historical concepts of knowledge, are prioritised, then there is no way of distinguishing value in knowledge for curricula. This overdependence on relativism

is one of the strongest critiques of the NSOE. In addition, voice discourses were critiqued for presenting epistemology and the sociology of knowledge as antithetical and thus strengthening dichotomies by positing members – the privileged and the disadvantaged – with opposing views. Further, it precludes the possibility of any other theory of knowledge in education. In response, Giroux and other scholars have drawn attention to resistance in education and the capacity for pupils and others to reflect on their experiences and engage with the world around them. Arguments about the interests and agendas of those responsible for educational decision making align with some literature from critical policy analysis (which will be discussed in greater detail below), and importantly recall the diverse voices of religious, family rights and special interest groups which have – over time – had more or less influence over government RSE policy. Thus, Social Realism supports analysis that recognizes that decisions about RSE may be driven by privileged or hegemonic positions, and/or by other perspectives.

While Young was one of the original thinkers behind the New Sociology of Education (e.g. 1971), his more recent work critiques the position he once held and he argues that many educationalists are obstructing the possibility of a new theory of knowledge by continuing to polarise neoconservatives and techno-instrumentalists. He also suggests that postmodernist critiques fail by focusing exclusively on critiques of the latter two models, and thus neglect to articulate a more precise and realistic theory of what educational curricula should be. In his book *Bringing Knowledge in Again*, Young proposes a return to a knowledge-based model of curriculum, but a new, situated alternative to the neoconservative model. He argues that the application of Critical Realism in education – which he named Social Realism – provides a way forward for situating curricula knowledge in context. He suggests that sociologies of knowledge must “take account of both the social (or power) relations and the epistemic relations of knowledge, thus allowing for the emergent properties of knowledge” (Young, 2008).

Moore (2000) argues that an understanding of *how* knowledge is socially and historically constructed can avoid the reductionism and relativism of voice discourses, including the view that positivist or empirical epistemological perspectives and the sociology of knowledge are inherently oppositional. Young supports this argument and suggests that the way that knowledge is conceptualised, and the rationality of procedures guiding the curriculum, cannot be considered in isolation from the historical evolution of the discipline, and must be embedded in the social and cultural context. Furthermore, he suggests that by identifying the specific codes, procedures and practices through which knowledge is produced, it is possible

to make claims that knowledge is objective, that it is truth (2008). The argument that “the objectivity of knowledge is in part located in social networks, institutions and codes of practice built up by knowledge producers over time” (Young, 2008:31), builds upon the work of writers such as Ward (1996:97), Barnes and Shapin (1977) and Alexander (1995). A Social Realist approach to knowledge is thus linked to social interests, but should recognize that some knowledge transcends historical (or present) conditions of productions.

Young proposes that the Social Realist approach to knowledge should distinguish between two types of social interests: first, external or contextual interests, such as specific conditions promoted and supported by elite groups in society, and second, internal cognitive interests that influence the production or acquisition of knowledge itself. In the first case, the approach recognizes the possibility that social interests and inequalities in society – whether on the basis of sex, gender, race or economic characteristics – may introduce bias in knowledge and in doing so can promote or reinforce discrimination and disadvantage. However, this is not inevitable. Quoting Walter Schmaus, Young suggests that internal cognitive interests have been completely disregarded by most critiques of knowledge in education, particularly voice discourse critiques. Voice discourse critiques have failed to recognize that intellectual motivations and aims for education or curricula may have a role in shaping knowledge (2008:29). Building on the writing of Walter Schmaus, Young further suggests that cognitive values and goals are not always associated with one or another social group. Instead, social collectives in society come up with their own unique ways of producing knowledge, which do not simply replicate other social or power relations.

Furthermore, cognitive interests can be distinguished as cognitive *goals* and cognitive *norms*. Schmaus wrote:

Cognitive values specify the aims of science, while cognitive norms specify the means to achieve these goals. Both cognitive values and norms range widely. Cognitive values may include everything from a scientist's position regarding the ontological status of unobservable entities to the desire to solve a specific set of problems or to explain a particular set of facts. Cognitive norms may range from rules governing the forms of persuasive argument that can be brought in defence of one's theory in a journal article to procedures for manipulating 'inscription devices' in the laboratory. (1994:263, quoted in Young, 2008)

With regards to curriculum, cognitive values may refer to how the aim of education is conceptualised and understood, or what oneself – as a teacher or school administrator – is striving to achieve. Cognitive norms invoke practice: the ways things are done, procedures for teaching or decision making in education, the criteria that justify action, and standards for determining appropriate arguments.

One aspect of a given school that, one could argue, may manifest both cognitive norms and aims is the school culture. The literature on RSE also suggests that a school's ethos – its values and mission – can have an impact on how decision makers and educators understand and incorporate RSE in the curriculum (Abbott et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2011; Gardener et al., 2000). School culture, which includes ethos, can be developed through educators' development of three categories: first, beliefs – a vision of an educational ideal, second, attitudes and values, a mission statement of aims and purpose, and third, behaviour – the choice of strategies and actions to achieve the mission (Lawton, 1994). While school culture is distinct from curriculum, this concept of school culture can be aligned with Social Realist ideas about how decisions about knowledge in the curriculum are made. Educational ideals, mission statement and values may be articulated through cognitive aims – what education sets out to achieve – while behaviour, or choice of strategies, relate to cognitive norms – how a school sets out to achieve its cognitive aims. Macmurray's concept of the school as community can be considered one vision of an educational ideal, and his typology of knowledge in education also helps to delineate the aims and purpose of education.

Social Realism recognizes both social and cognitive interests, and acknowledges the possibility that one or the other may dominate curricula. The critical point is not to reduce knowledge to either social or cognitive interests from the outset, but equally Social Realism is not primarily concerned with demarcating the social from the non-social criteria underpinning knowledge claims. To understand the development of knowledge in a specific context, Social Realism is concerned with “investigating the distinctive forms of social organization whereby powerful codes and procedures for the production and acquisition of knowledge have been developed” (Young, 2008:30).

3.3. Primary schools as political sites

Young wrote:

Questions about knowledge always take us back to some of our most basic assumptions about what it is to be educated or to educate someone; they are, in the broadest sense, philosophical and political questions about who we are and what we value. (2008:xvi)

Political disagreement and differing proposals around what the school curriculum should consist of – and more broadly what knowledge pupils should learn – exposes education as a continuously contested area of public policy. My literature review demonstrates that RSE – specifically – is a fiercely political subject, and nowhere greater than at the primary school

where, by some accounts, children's innocence is at risk and which is, by other accounts, an opportune moment for children to develop inclusive, positive and informed attitudes and values in relation to sexuality and relationships, in all their diversity, that may endure a lifetime.

In this section, I contextualise my approach to policy analysis and situate primary schools as political sites. Power, as a theoretical concept, is a close ally, sometimes a foe, of policy (depending on your position). Thus, this discussion of policy analysis foregrounds my discussion of my approach to power.

What is policy

Across academic disciplines, there are numerous conceptualisations of what 'policy' refers to, including: a label for a field of activity (e.g. social policy), an expression of purpose or desired ends, a specific proposal (e.g. election manifestos), a formal authorisation (e.g. legislation), a practice of power, a programme of work (e.g. Sure Start), a theory or model, an outcome and a process (Bochel and Duncan, 2007; Levinson et al., 2009). Dryzek (1993) conceptualises policy as a constant and unstable process, the movement of people and programmes around social problems, and this process includes policy development, documentation, translation and implementation. These definitions are not mutually exclusive, and several of these definitions may apply to one policy at any given time. The UK government's RSE policy is at once an expression of purpose, a programme of work and a theory, in addition its implementation demands a process of interpretation. It must be noted that different manifestations of a single policy – for example, the documentation of a policy and its implementation – are not necessarily coherent. Policy is interpreted and recontextualised by the actors involved as it moved from design and production through to implementation (Bernstein, 2000), and at this point alternative possibilities of meaning may emerge, influenced by individuals' own moral, professional and experiential frameworks (Singh et al., 2013). Diem et al. emphasize that the analytical toolkit used for policy analysis must be based on the specific, contextualised policy problem being explored (2014:1070).

The policy making practice for RSE at primary schools may be viewed from diverse angles. Diem et al. (2014:1072) suggest that critical approaches to educational policy studies have tended to focus on any of five areas: the disparity between policy rhetoric and education in practice; the roots and development of policy; the distribution of knowledge, resources and power in educational policy making; the affect of policy on social inequalities; and finally, how minority groups resist policies that they perceive as instruments of domination and

repression. The first area – disparity between policy rhetoric and education in practice – was one motivating factor for this research, as I was interested in how primary schools interpret, contextualise and implement national government policy, including but beyond the official Sex and Relationship Education guidance (DfEE, 2000). However, the story is far more complex than that, including a focus on the resources, choices and actions of those responsible for making decisions about RSE, the system and environment in which they found themselves in, and also how decision makers made use of diverse knowledge and skills in RSE policy making processes. Schools may envision themselves as creating a fairly autonomous, self-driven policy and programme for RSE, drawing on multiple sources. Even where schools are compelled to have a policy, the capacity and willingness of school decision makers (or policy makers) to invest in it may vary. Decision makers' willingness to engage is complicated by the complexity and difficulty of the problem, its urgency, competing demands for their time and attention, the ease with which it may be solved or addressed, and their own agendas (Considine, 2005).

The idea that public policy is discursive – subjective, context-specific and contingent on the actors and the process – and not objective and positivist is a relatively modern one (Levinson et al., 2009). Classical depictions of policy suggest that it is based on verifiable facts and universal laws, free of values, and that policy change occurs through rational choice theory, whereby policy makers make logical and informed decisions to optimise results (Bulmer, 1986; Parsons, 1995). However, objective approaches to policy change have largely been discredited because it assumes that policy makers experience a knowable and static reality, and make decisions unbiased by perceptions, beliefs or social dynamics (Kay, 2009). In addition, new theoretical developments, for example in critical theory, feminism and post-structuralism, have made comparatively more convincing arguments. Contemporary approaches to policy analysis recognize that policy is socially situated, pragmatic and instrumental. In *The Education Debate*, Stephen Ball wrote:

Policies are very specific and practical regimes of truth and value, and the way in which policies are spoken and spoken about, their vocabularies, are part of the creation of their conditions of acceptance and enactment. They construct the problematic, the inevitable and the necessary. (2013:7)

Drawing on Foucault, Ball and others make persuasive claims that policy makers use specific language in policy deliberations and policy texts to evoke the frame within which they want the social problem(s) to be understood, and which in many cases will influence the range of policy solutions to be considered (Considine, 2005). Not all contemporary approaches to policy analysis emphasise language and social construction, but they are increasingly attuned

to the open-ended, pluralistic and moral-political character of interactions in politics and policy making.

My understanding of political, and policy, analysis concurs with that offered by Hay:

politics and the political [are] concerned with the distribution, exercise and consequences of power. A political analysis is, then, one which draws attention to the power relations implicated in social relations. In this sense, politics is not defined by the *locus* of its operation but by its nature as a *process*. (2002:3)

Hay recognises that the site of a process is not what defines it as political; rather, it is the characteristics of the process. Thus, a primary school's decision-making process for RSE is a process rich with subjects for policy analysis.

Policy analysis

The field of policy analysis emerged in the first half of the 20th century (e.g. Lasswell, 1950; Lippmann, 1925; Lynd, 1939) and has developed into a multi-faceted area of inquiry across diverse disciplines. The field started with studies that might be characterised as technocratic analyses – concerned with the mechanics of policy change – but today policy analysts are just as likely to investigate policy as an expression of values or power, or as a vehicle of repression, or the discourse or ideology that underpins policy, as it is concerned with the procedural development of policy. Policy making processes, policy statements, implementation and impacts are all of interest, and analyses may include not only politicians but others who are affected and involved, including service providers and users, pressure groups and civil servants, particularly with the growth of interest in networked policy making and policy communities (Davies, 2011). The range of research questions in policy analysis has flourished, and accordingly theoretical and methodological approaches have proliferated.

Early studies in policy analysis utilised the rational agent approach, which suggests that policy makers have perfect, objective information and make rational, outcome-optimising choices (Hay, 2002:38). Critics have more or less dismissed this approach by arguing that a causal explanation of action must trace how a person actually arrives at a conclusion (Ferejohn, 2002) and highlighting policy makers' strategic capabilities and the malleability of information (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991). A bounded rationality version emerged, suggesting that policy makers make the most rational decisions possible, given the limits of knowledge and their cognitive abilities (Ouimet et al., 2009), but this still does not account for policy makers' strategic actions. Contemporary theorists have largely discounted rational agent approaches as unrealistic and over simplified.

While policy makers' cognitive processes continued to be of interest, theorists began to place more emphasis on context and timing, and the particular features of the policy issue (Considine, 2005). The disjointed incrementalist (or 'muddling through') approach, championed by Lindblom (1979), recognises the plurality of interests and forces coming together to influence policy in incrementally responsive ways, and the 'mixed scanning approach' is a differentiated option, proposing that solutions to major policy problems may be adopted using a carefully planned and justified approach, while less important adjustments could be made incrementally (Davies et al., 2000). Policy analyses that focus attention on moments in time – 'policy windows' – is a version of the mixed scanning approach. Policy windows were defined as moments when a number of streams come together to create space and focus attention on a particular policy issue (Kingdon, 2011). In a variation, Baumgartner and Jones (1991) argue that policies may gain favour when they are compatible with the specific interests of powerful interest groups, and therefore become attractive not as a result of timing but of finding the appropriate audience (what Baumgartner and Jones called 'institutional venue'). The 'garbage can' theory of decision making suggests policy choices are the somewhat arbitrary results that emerge from a more or less random convergence of actors, opportunities, current issues, public opinion, cultural values and research (Foy et al., 2013). While these approaches to policy analysis were developed with government policy making in mind, it is feasible that they could be applied to a setting such as a primary school.

Since the 1990s, in parallel with the UK government's increased interest in evidence, policy analysts have focused more intently on research utilisation and evidence-based policy making (Davies et al., 2000; Parsons, 1995). These theories are relevant for analysing not only how scientific evidence, but how different kinds of knowledge, expertise, attitudes, emotions and values may be included in policy-making deliberations, and how they interact with policy makers' motivations and interests (Nutley et al., 2007; Sanderson, 2009). For example, the problem-solving model suggests: "research provides empirical evidence and conclusions that help solve a policy problem" (Weiss, 1979:427). This model, also called the consensual approach, assumes that research is compatible with policy makers' values and goals, and assumes that the research is aligned with policy makers' desired goals for the policy change or decision (Clarke, 2001). Clarke (2001) and Weiss (1979) discussed different ways that policy makers select or obtain evidence, such as the interpretivist approach (interpreting evidence from diverse stakeholders), the political approach (power and influence affect the evidence that is considered) and legitimacy approach (selecting evidence to support a pre-determined policy solution). Theories regarding evidence-based policy making have been criticised for not

paying sufficient attention to the social context, including the complexity of the policy process, and returning to a simplistic rational model (Duncan and Harrop, 2006). While I use the term 'knowledge' in my research questions, my methodology chapter will discuss how my research design creates opportunities for decision makers to discuss the 'evidence' (however defined) that they consulted in their decision making.

In the last three decades, a range of hermeneutic and discursive perspectives have emerged – under the banner 'critical policy studies' – that are more appreciative of the dynamic social and political environments in which policies develop and are implemented. These approaches include the argumentative approach, the democratic approach, critical discourse analysis, interpretive policy analysis, poststructuralist discourse theory, practice theory, narrative analysis, queer policy analysis and critical pragmatism (Fairclough, 2010; Fischer et al., 2015; Howarth, 2010; Lugg and Murphy, 2014; Mayer et al., 2004; Wodak and Meyer, 2009; Yanow, 2007). They tend to be more critical of political bias and pursue different assumptions and premises about what matter in policy. For example, democratic and participatory approaches are concerned with who takes part in policy making and often focus on questions about transparency, representation and equality (e.g. Barnes et al., 2003), whereas interpretive policy analysis is focused on how meaning is created by analysing language, acts and artifacts (Yanow, 2007). These approaches share an appreciation for deliberation in which actors weigh up beliefs, principles and actions in contexts where there is often a hegemony of practice and ideas, although actors may also introduce divergent frames of interpretation (Dryzek, 1993; Howarth, 2010).

In the following section, I discuss the argumentative approach, from the field of critical policy analysis. First, however, I discuss power as a theoretical concept, including the model of power that I employ in this study.

3.4. Power

I did not embark on this research anticipating that power would represent a central theme in my findings, although power is arguably, inevitably implicated in policy making. Once engaged in data analysis it became clear that a concept of power would help to situate actors within the action, the decision making. As Held and Leftwich offer: "Politics is about power; about the forces which influence and reflect its distribution and use... it is about the transformatory capacity of social agents, agencies and institutions." (1984:144, qtd in Hay 2002:73-4). They recognize that the power wielded by agents is a potent part of policy making.

In this section, I will explain why I selected Morriss' concept of power to aid my analysis and I will situate it within broader ideas and debates about power. Morriss' concept of power is situated within the 'power to' interpretation of power, which proposes that power is emancipatory and takes account of ability (Arendt, 1958, 1969; Parsons, 1963; Morriss, 2002; Haugaard, 2012). This interpretation of power stands in opposition to the other dominant view of power, 'power over', which focuses on power as a coercive, dominating or repressive force (Dahl, 1957; Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 1974, 2005). Alternatively, Giddens proposed that power has at once transformative capacity, where the power of agents is favoured, as well as a dominating capacity, where structural rigidity restricts agency (Gaventa, 2003). Scholars have suggested that Foucault, too, embraced 'power to' and 'power over' in his discussion of modern power and sovereign, coercive power, respectively (Haugaard, 2012). In addition, there have been efforts to define power as an inherently imprecise phenomenon, comprising a cluster of concepts (Haugaard, 2012), and in a similar vein, others have suggested that power is meaningless, lacking explanatory potential (Latour, 1984). However, conceptualisations of power as ubiquitous – everywhere but nowhere, not held by any person, are not useful for this study as they divert attention away from asymmetrical patterns of power and fail to acknowledge individuals' abilities.

Morriss' theory of power: a dispositional concept

Morriss suggests that power is a dispositional concept: it refers to a conditional or hypothetical situation in which some action or change would occur if and when power is exercised, under a range of circumstances. He is interested in "what [people] can do given the circumstances that they *do* find themselves in" (2002:80), and further that power is the capacity to realize one's aims whether or not one chooses to do so. As such, Morriss' concept of power is more precise than that proposed by Hay, who wrote, "we can define power... as the ability of actors (whether individual or collective) to 'have an effect' upon the context which defines the range of possibilities of others." (1997:50). Morriss and others have critiqued this position as being too broad: to merely cause an *affect*, to influence, is not power, because affects may be unintentional, for example (Morriss, 2008). Power requires the ability to take action and cause intended outcomes.

Morriss' theory of power is ideally suited to this study because it recognizes that the actors involved in making decisions and trying to affect change are producers as well as products of social systems. This recognition aligns Morriss' theory of power with Critical Realism's assertion that social reality takes place in open, multi-dimensional systems, and takes an

agentic perspective by examining the skills, motivations and temperament of the actors involved. This complex approach to power is also consistent with critical approaches to policy analysis. These symmetries help strengthen my research design, while each theoretical perspective offers a distinct prospect of insight in relation to my research aims.

Capacity to affect outcomes, Morriss writes, is determined by one's 'ableness'. 'Ableness' is the combination of ability and being 'able'. Ability is "the quality *in an agent* which makes an action possible; suitable or sufficient power (generally); faculty, capacity (to do or of doing something)" (2002:81). Abilities include both epistemic ability and non-epistemic ability. "Epistemic abilities include all your basic actions, and all your actions, and the consequences of them, that you know how to do or bring about" (2002:53). Thus, in order to exercise power, agents require knowledge about the subject in order to choose appropriately. 'Appropriately' means being able to predict that an action is likely to result in a specific outcome (whether or not it does in fact do so), and therefore epistemic abilities require not only greater knowledge, but a sense of intention. The ability to exercise power also requires non-epistemic ability, which refers to "all the basic actions you can do, all the actions made up from, and level-generated by, these actions, and all the consequences of these actions" (2002:53). Thus, non-epistemic abilities relate to actions that have outcomes that the agent is unable to anticipate.

In this study, epistemic ability could refer to an educator's decision to include, in the RSE policy, a series of regular parents evenings to inform parents about the RSE programme and policy because they know, from past experience, that offering these opportunities will make parents more likely to express interest and support for RSE, and also equip parents to provide better support and follow-up for their child(ren) participating in RSE. A decision based on non-epistemic ability might be to have mixed gender classes for all RSE lessons. This decision might be based on the belief that both boys and girls should learn how puberty affects different sexes, for example, but without being informed about the implications of this decision for how boys and girls might respond and participate differently in the class.

Morriss proposes a flexible understanding of abilities, they are not necessarily exercised at all times, or in appropriate ways, even when an agent has epistemic ability. And abilities can also be acquired and developed – which offers potential in situations where agents may not yet have the necessary abilities. One limitation that Pansardi, among others, has taken issue with is Morriss' assertion that power can be exercised independently of the social situation. Pansardi argues that the concept of power should only be applied to abilities which are based on social relations (2012:494). For Morriss, being able to perform a cartwheel could be

considered a form of power, for example, whereas for Pansardi an ability should only be considered part of a capacity to affect outcomes if at least one other person is implicated. Thus, for Pansardi – and for me, in relation to this study – power is about interdependencies.

In addition to ability, Morriss suggests that ‘ableness’ involves being ‘able’. ‘Able’ means “having the means, authority and qualifications for doing something, making a decision (of whatever kind is needed); in such a position that one can do [it]” (Morriss, 2002:81). Being able therefore refers to the opportunities that the environment affords the agent to exercise power. It includes formal authority to exercise power – e.g. being in a job or post that has, within its remit, the authority to take action to bring about outcomes – and also the support and resources required to act. An actor can therefore be more or less able, and this has an impact on the agent’s capacity to exercise power that is distinct, though related to their abilities. Morriss’ ‘able’ can be more clearly understood placed alongside his understanding of context.

Morriss argues that there are three contexts in which power is relevant: practical, moral and evaluative concepts. The practical context is most relevant here. By *practical*, Morriss means that we must have a sense of our own power, and of the various actors around us, in order to assess what you need to do to get things done (2002). Actors have a sense of their power, in relation to others, in their heads, often as tacit knowledge but sometimes also as formalised hierarchy. As such, individuals are able to predict, to some extent, what others might do for them, or to them, under different circumstances, and this also can enable individuals to control different situations. Further, in her discussion of Morriss, Pansardi points out that whereas some exceptional and/or unanticipated events may occur that disrupt the normal state of affairs, analyses of power should aim to focus on usual conditions (2012:495). This is a circumstantial concern that Morriss fails to address himself but is nevertheless worth taking note of.

While the practical context is most relevant, Morriss’ ‘evaluative context’ is his answer to theories of power that focus on domination, on ‘power over’. For Morriss, evaluative analyses considers the capacity of citizens and ordinary agents to affect change alongside the limitations and opportunities imposed by structures such as government, regulation, authority. Thus, Morriss suggests that all research into social relations of power, including situations of domination, can be analysed using his theory of power and that theories about domination – e.g. Steven Lukes’ third dimension of power – are superfluous (2002). In the second edition of *Power: A Radical View*, Lukes responds to Morriss and redefines his understanding of power:

power should not be conceived narrowly as requiring intention, actual foresight and position actions... the power of the powerful consists in their being capable of and responsible for affecting (negatively or positively) the (subjective and/or objective) interests of others. (2005:68)

In doing so, Lukes adopted Morriss' proposal that power is not necessarily realised, it also implies potential, and he also acknowledges the positive, productive potential of power. However, Lukes does not significantly alter his original typology and conceptualisation of power, which is important given that his theory of power, particularly his 'third dimension of power' remains an influential framework.

'Power over'

Steven Lukes' well-known work, *Power: A Radical View* (1974, 2005) illustrates with clarity the key arguments behind what have subsequently become known as the first, second and third dimensions of power, which focus, respectively, on decision making, structural bias (or agenda control) and dominant ideology. While Morriss' theory of power is the most compelling for this study, because it situates agents at the centre and seeks to explain how they do what they do, given the circumstances they find themselves in, Lukes' analyses of power offer a useful way of deepening Morriss' concept of 'able', of what agents are formally authorised and in a position to do, by closely examining the limitations and constraints of the environment.

The first dimension of power, first advanced by Dahl (1957), comprises the ability of 'A' to make 'B' do something that B would not otherwise do. This model of power may well be relevant to my study and is not incompatible with Morriss' model of power. It has been criticised as being a model of domination because it is possible that A might persuade B to do something that promote B's own best interests (e.g. Parsons, 1963).

The so-called second dimension of power suggests that the less powerful are excluded from decision making and authority because 'A' is able to set the agenda by establishing or reinforcing social and political values and practices (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962). As such, the scope of the political process is limited to issues that are innocuous to 'A'. Haugaard wrote,

what makes two dimensional power... normatively reprehensible is not simply that issues are organised out. It is that they are organised out to the *systematic disadvantage* of B. (2012:39)

Again, I would suggest that Morriss' concept of power is dynamic enough to visualise this scenario, which is a possibility in decision making about RSE. In contrast to 'power over', Morriss' concept of power is receptive to agents acting in ways that are dominating or emancipatory. Giddens critiqued this model of power by arguing that while structure creates

limitation by forcing out some issues, it also enables by creating predictability and social order, so that actors know how to act to advance their own interests and concerns (Giddens, 1984). For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, throughout the history of RSE in England the argument that schools are not the place for educating children about sexuality and relationships has persevered. The various parties that have made this argument (different groups at different times) have sought to exclude RSE from the realm of public policy. They are arguably acting to advance their own interests: for example, to reproduce within their families and communities the social norms and values that they are familiar with. Chapter Two demonstrates that there is a structural bias towards education that promotes academic accomplishment.

The third dimension of power, advanced by Lukes (1974, 2005), suggests that those in positions of relative power exercise control by securing compliance to their domination. He writes,

To speak of power as domination is to suggest the imposition of some significant constraint upon an agent or agents' desires, purposes or interests, which it frustrates, prevents from fulfilment or even from being formulated. (2005:113)

Some critics, and Lukes himself, express concern about how to distinguish domination from socialization. For example, governments enable certain types of trade – imports and exports – and this has an impact on the availability of food products and services, and therefore on people's diets and, to an extent, food culture. Is this, Luke asks, domination? Lukes suggests that there are many such ways that a government, or another party, might exert influence over people's lives. As Haugaard wrote, "once power is theorized in its most subtle forms, in terms of received structures and tacit knowledge, there is a danger that power becomes co-extensive with socialization itself" (2012). Drawing on Spinoza, Lukes therefore suggests that the third dimension of power – domination – involves an attribution of agency, aimed at limiting freedom, and this distinguishes it from social life at large (2005). Utilising Spinoza's definition of freedom as autonomy – in particular the ideas of authenticity (being true to one's 'nature') and the ability to think for oneself – Lukes suggests

Power can be deployed to block or impair its subjects' capacity to reason well, not least by instilling and sustaining misleading or illusory ideas of what is 'natural' and what sort of life their distinctive 'nature' dictates, and, in general, by stunting or blunting their capacity for rational judgment. (2005:115)

Lukes recognizes that this raises another host of questions – not least among them, 'how do we understand 'rational judgment'?' Lukes does not attempt a thorough explanation but offers that judgment involves the application of a set of principles to particular circumstances, and

that when one is persuaded by any arguments not underpinned by these principles would entail a stunted rational judgment. While I concur with Morriss' suggestion that Lukes' concept of domination can be explained using his concept of power, I think it is valuable here to articulate Lukes' 'third dimension of power' because it offers a distinct understanding of how power works and in particular how hegemonic narratives, ideas and frames can determine the set of principles that are to be deployed in specific decision-making spheres. Apple further explored the mechanism through which hegemonic ideas served to define truth in educational contexts. He wrote, "[hegemony] acts to 'saturate' our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic and social world we see and interact with, and the commonsense interpretations we put on it, becomes the world" (Apple, 1990:5). Thus, while RSE – as a kind of values education – may not easily fit within the dominant frameworks for planning, delivering and assessing education, the power of the state in promoting and maintaining these frameworks may nonetheless work to 'impair its subjects' capacity to reason well', and this could be intentional.

While Lukes' three dimensions of power are useful constructs for interpreting and understanding how powerful bodies in society can limit and exclude ideas and concepts in education, Lukes himself has conceded that his theory "offers a very partial and one-sided account of the topic... focuses entirely on the *exercise* of power and, for another, it deals only with... the power of some *over* others" (2005:64). He later suggests that there are "manifold ways in which power over others can be productive, transformative, authoritative and compatible with dignity" (2005:109). Lukes' three dimensions of power are therefore usefully employed as a dimension of power, but in the context of this study, Morriss' philosophy of power offers the more valuable, overarching theory because it considers what agents *do* have the capacity to do, what power they do wield.

3.5. The argumentative approach

While I was convinced that Macmurray's theory of knowledge in education, the Social Realist approach to knowledge in education and Morriss' theory of power together offered an adequately sensitive and complex analytical toolbox for analysing the emergent themes and ideas that my data would present, I still needed a precise conceptual framework to isolate and analyse the rhetoric and actions that comprise policy making about knowledge in primary schools' RSE policies. I used the argumentative approach to break down the data into distinct structures, codes and arguments. This enabled me to mobilise the theoretical perspectives discussed above and answer my research questions.

The argumentative approach, also called the argumentative turn (in addition to Goodnight, 2012, see Fischer and Forester, 1993; Fischer and Gottweis, 2012), recognizes diverse ways, forms and contexts in which policies are argued and agreed. The argumentative approach focuses on the criteria, values and arguments advanced to secure policy preference(s), and also enables the analysis to situate actors' arguments in their ways of working and in social context.

A key thinker behind the argumentative approach to critical policy analysis, Goodnight suggests that policy deliberations offer

a momentary pause in the flow of events, an opportunity to look down the present road as well as the paths untaken. As deliberations raises expectations that are feared or hoped for, public argument is a way to share in the construction in the future. (2012:198)

He therefore suggests that policy deliberations are moments of uncertainty that actors attempt to resolve by first imagining, and then selecting, specific resolutions. This understanding of policy deliberations, and conception of actors' roles, responds to my first and third research questions: 'how do decision makers in primary schools negotiate what 'knowledge', and whose knowledge, contributes to their school sex and relationships education policy?', and 'how are decision makers' personal values, attitudes, emotions and beliefs expressed and addressed in the policy-making process?'. It does so by identifying their proposals and ideas for resolution.

The argumentative approach adds to the theoretical perspectives discussed above by recognizing that policy deliberations represent a specific 'moment' in the lifetime of, in this case, a school's RSE policy. It is a pivotal window in which those who are present have opportunities to influence the path of RSE and suggests that these policy deliberations are unique. At another point in time, other resolutions may have been reached, depending on who is involved, what pressures they feel, and what other events and activities might be happening concurrently. Thus, it recognizes that social reality is an open and emergent system, in line with Critical Realist theory.

The argumentative approach is particularly suitable to policy deliberations in primary schools because it can be applied to examine the different ways that knowledge is introduced to the deliberative process:

the argumentative turn led to appreciation of the variety of forms of communication that could play their parts... not just argument narrowly conceived, but also rhetoric, testimony, and the telling of stories, narratives, performances, humor, and ceremonial speech. (Dryzek and Hendriks, 2012:32)

Talk about personal values, school ethos, professional expertise and government guidance, for example, could therefore be considered on an equal footing in policy deliberation processes, while still maintaining the authenticity and specific character of the political community's debate (Hoppe, 1993). 'Political community', in the context of this research, refers not only to each school community, but the broader educational and political context. Recalling Foucault, multiples fields of influence could create limitations or opportunities for knowledge production. The argumentative approach focuses attention on how arguments are constructed and advanced, and, in this process, how knowledge claims are made. This involves declaring, implicitly or explicitly, what criteria are relevant to ascribe value to different kinds of knowledge. Hoppe writes, "values comprise a reservoir from which policy makers can draw upon – they are a pool of criteria – that can be drawn from to provide a justification for political judgements" (1993:81). However, it may be argued that not all standards and criteria are equally defensible. Dryzek wrote,

The conditions of consensus formation might well be distorted by the influence of hierarchies based on prestige, professional status or argumentative ability ... Technical jargon, slanted rules of admissibility of evidence and argument, and the deliberate stigmatization of unconventional proposals can all affect the outcome of the debate. (1993:227)

Goodnight advanced a typology for different types of arguments – including personal, technical and public arguments – that are distinguished by the authorities that arguers appeal to and the grounds upon which arguments are built (2012:200). I have selected Goodnight's typology as a framework for analysing the arguments used by school decision makers because it helps to draw out the dominant sources of authority, and therefore helps identify larger structures that shape RSE. Goodnight's three types of argumentative approaches are: technical arguments, personal arguments and public arguments (2012).

Technical arguments reflect the hierarchy of evidence, prioritising scientific, positivist knowledge, and these arguments generally comply with agreed conventions for reasoning within a community of experts (Goodnight, 2012; Paliewicz, 2012). This does not necessarily mean that the evidence and arguments comply with academic standards of rigour and validity. In *Democracy and Expertise* (2009), Fischer notes that what a given community or group of policy makers/practitioners considers scientific knowledge is influenced by social and political factors. He notes that what is considered good science is often defined by those who offer technical resources, and the credibility of these 'technical resources' is reinforced through a process of consensus whereby a large number of practitioners agree that these resources are useful. I would suggest, therefore, that 'technical arguments' may be identified by the

deference with which decision makers spoke of certain resources and knowledge that they drew upon, and which were distinguishable from public and personal argumentative approaches.

Goodnight refers to public arguments as those that refer to wider discourses and conventions, traditions and assumptions, however Fischer, another major thinker advancing the argumentative approach, talks about them in terms of 'cultural reasoning'. He wrote, "Drawing heavily on traditional social and peer groups – family, church groups, labor unions, political associations, etc – cultural reason... trusts process over predicted outcomes" (2009:153). Unlike Goodnight, Fischer does not separate personal beliefs and experiences from broader social and public conventions and traditions. While there are overlaps and ambiguities between these two spheres of argumentation, the separation that Goodnight makes between the personal and the public supports a more nuanced analysis of the social and political tensions in policy deliberation, particularly regarding sensitive issues. For example, Whidden (2012) argues that a pharmaceutical company – a commercial body – colonised the public sphere by using personal arguments – invoking maternal responsibility and the mother-daughter relationship – to promote its vaccine against human papillomavirus in mass media outlets. She suggests that decisions about vaccination should instead be formed on the basis of technical arguments. Appealing to mothers' feelings about their daughters, and their responsibility to their daughters, the personal arguments discussed in this example presented more accurately the quality of the argument than could have been done if it was presented as a 'public argument'. Schiappa (2012) compares the arguments put forward in the courts to those put forward in mass media outlets and public spaces to advance policy preferences in relation to Proposition 22, which led to the legalisation of same-sex marriage in California. Schiappa demonstrates that ultimately, the formal procedures, allowable evidence and codified language of the courts, which had jurisdiction for making the decision on Proposition 22, defined acceptable arguments and influenced the decision. In this case, the 'public argument' – as one example, the value of the institution of the family to society – is recognisably distinct from a personal argument and more useful in this study. These examples suggest that the distinctions that Goodnight put forward between different types of arguments, in particular, are useful for my analysis. Nevertheless, I anticipate that intersections and ambiguities will emerge from the analysis and they will be discussed where relevant. In addition to Goodnight's typology of argumentation, Schiappa drew on Goodnight's later work on argument 'spheres', which elaborated upon argument types to define categories of context (i.e. technical, personal and public *spheres*). Goodnight wrote,

“argument spheres are symbolic constructions that shape the expectations of interlocutors who engage in the activities of theoretical and practical reasoning” (2012:198). ‘Spheres’ denotes that there are specific rules of logic and conventions associated with specific contexts in which an argument or claim is put forward, and participants not only anticipate that arguments made in these contexts will adhere to their logic and conventions, but they make meaning of them through the lens of these norms. Thus, Schiappa’s courts were categorised as technical spheres, as any arguments put forward in them had to adhere to specific, specialised standards and rules, while media outlets and other public spaces were occupied with populist arguments and claims. It is difficult to categorize primary schools according to Goodnight’s spheres; one might suggest that they are both public – at least those that are public, or state institutions, providing a public service – and also technical – in that they are led and facilitated by individuals that belong to a certain profession, with particular codes and practices that inform how and what things are done. However, the argument sphere concept brings attention to the specific context and supports analysis of each school site: each one a potentially distinct sphere with its own “logic (pragmatic, purposeful), its own standards of knowing (interpretive, holistic, more know-how than know-that), its orientation towards the world... and its own image of society” (Wagenaar and Cook, 2003:141).

Stewart further suggests that the argumentative approach can be especially helpful for analysing what he calls ‘socioscientific controversies’ – that is, “extended argumentative engagements over socially significant issues comprising communicative events and practices in and from both scientific and non-scientific spheres” (2009:125) – because it recognises that deliberations take place through chains of communicative events, not a single exchange. Socioscientific controversies are, in addition, intertextual – comprising snatches of text and ideas across different spheres of influence, different discourses, which may contradict each other, assimilate, etc – and also interdiscursive – that is, combining conventions, forms and orders from different discourses. Stewart draws on Fairclough’s definition of controversy as ‘chains of communicative events’ that occur within “relatively stable configurations of discursive practices” (2009:126). In Chapter Two, my review of the development of RSE policy reflects Stewart’s definition of a socioscientific controversy. For example, public and political debates about RSE have been populated by all three types of arguments: statistical and public health data about teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, together with evidence about the impact of RSE, have been presented as technical arguments for statutory RSE, alongside public arguments about keeping children safe and promoting their wellbeing, together with personal arguments about the family domain, religious beliefs and individual

parents' rights to educate their children in matters pertaining to sexuality. Due to this ongoing, conflicted debate about RSE, it was my expectation that my data about RSE in primary schools would be both intertextual and interdiscursive, and this underlined the appropriateness of the argumentative approach.

Additional elements that suggest the argumentative approach is an appropriate framework for this research are that it is appreciative of the wide range of fora in which policy deliberations take place, such as collaborative mechanisms, consensus conferences and citizens' juries (Dryzek and Hendriks, 2012; Fischer and Gottweiss, 2012), and can incorporate dynamics among policy actors, as well as long-term strategies and relationships that affect policy deliberations (Fischer and Forester, 1993). Prior to beginning my field work, preliminary investigations had suggested that school policy deliberation processes about RSE did not always follow a standardised, formal procedure, that decisions were sometimes made in casual meetings, following casual conversations, and even by individuals acting alone. The argumentative approach supports a focus on organisational culture, including ingrained values, codes and standards that can influence the use of knowledge in argumentation. The argumentative approach offers a powerful conceptual tool for analysing the data in this study.

3.6. Summary

This chapter has illustrated the main theoretical ideas within which my research subject is situated and discusses the conceptual frameworks that I engage with throughout this thesis. I demonstrate that the Critical Realist approach to research serves the aims of this study because it envisions social life within an open, multi-dimensional system, where actors accounts are the starting point but are understood through the exploration of enduring patterns, structures and mechanisms. I argue that we can gain better understanding of how RSE policies are deliberated and produced by looking at social relations, practices and values in education, and that although our knowledge is constrained by social constructions, it is nevertheless true.

In accordance with Critical Realist methods, a complementary grouping of theories related to knowledge, action and policy in education provide an analytical palette for this study. Macmurray's conceptualisation of self – his theory that individuals define themselves in relation to those around him or herself – centres the school decision makers as the subjects in policy making about RSE and his typology of knowledge in education – technical, valuational

and intersubjective – revitalises an understanding of knowledge in the curriculum as always and inevitably value-rich.

Social Realist theory brings attention to how knowledge is produced in the curriculum, suggesting that sociologies of knowledge must allow for knowledge to be emergent and dynamic, in part by taking account of social and political relations, as well as the historical development of the curriculum (Young, 2008). Social Realism distinguishes between social interests – such as the concerns and interests of powerful groups in society; cognitive goals – which specify the aims of the curriculum; and cognitive norms – which relate to traditions, conventions and acceptable criteria or standards to guide decisions about the curriculum. These concepts are all valuable for understanding how primary schools make RSE policy decisions.

Morriss' concept of power enables a nuanced analysis of decision makers' agency and capacity to make policy about RSE. He defines power as the capacity of an individual to take actions to bring about intended outcomes, whether or not they choose to do so. His concept of power distinguishes between agents' authorised power and the knowledge required to anticipate what a given action (or decision) will produce. It also puts decision making in context by drawing attention to what resources agents may require to get things done, and reasons why they may choose not to make a decision that they believe to be the best one, for example.

Finally, from critical policy analysis, the argumentative approach, a conceptual framework, serves as an aid to dissect the data and apply the theoretical approaches discussed above. The argumentative approach recognizes that policy deliberations represent a specific 'moment' in the lifetime of a school's RSE policy, one in which it is the actors present who use the resources available, balance the pressures they face at the time, and resolve the 'task' of policy making, as they are able and see fit (Goodnight, 2012:198). It aligns closely with Morriss' concept of power, but offers the additional typology of 'personal arguments', 'technical arguments' and 'public arguments' to delineate arguments used to advance policy deliberations.

In the next chapter, I discuss my research aims and objectives and articulate my research strategy and methods. I discuss my methodology in relation to my overarching theoretical framework, Critical Realism, and demonstrate how my study design has served my research aims.

Chapter 4: Methodology and methods

In this chapter I introduce my research aims and objectives and explain my rationale for employing the research strategy and methods I used to achieve these ends. I revisit my philosophical approach – Critical Realism – to discuss how it has influenced my research design and supported me to design a study that corresponds to my research aims. I outline the processes used to recruit schools and participants, data collection instruments and techniques, and data analysis. I also discuss how I employed a reflexive research practice to improve the quality of my research.

4.1. Research aims

The aim of this research is to explore how primary school decision makers understand and (re)create value in policy making for relationships and sex education (RSE). ‘Decision makers’ refers to members of the senior leadership team, teachers, including subject leads for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE, which includes RSE), parents, governors, consultants and others who contribute to decision-making about RSE policy within a given primary school. Informed by my literature review and analysis of the historical evolution of RSE in the UK policy context (see Chapter Two), this study aims to provide insight into the complex processes through which decision makers assign value to different criteria; how they select, use and produce knowledge(s) to create arguments and engage with others to advance their preferences with regards RSE policy; and underlying structural mechanisms that shape these decision-making practices. To achieve my research aim, I identified four research questions:

1. What kinds of, and whose, knowledge influences policy deliberations about RSE?
2. How do institutional, hierarchical and cultural structures exert influence and authority to legitimise, or dismiss, knowledge(s) in the policy-making process?
3. How are decision makers’ personal values, attitudes, emotions and beliefs expressed and addressed in the policy-making process?
4. How are knowledge(s), and social relations that affect the legitimisation of knowledge, embedded in the written RSE policy in the school?

Situated at an intersection of critical policy inquiry and educational sociology, I aim to use “multiple methods of inquiry and argument to produce and transform policy-relevant information that may be utilised in political settings to resolve policy problems” (Dunn,

1981:35, qtd in Dryzek, 1982). Thus, while the research questions focus on the production of knowledge in schools, the broader aims of the study include exploring primary schools as political settings and contributing knowledge to help resolve the 'policy problem' of how individual primary schools contribute to RSE policy.

4.2. Preliminary research and preparation

I do not have a background in the field of education, and nor did I attend school in the UK, so I felt I needed to engage with people and organisations working on RSE in schools to make appropriate research design decisions. To this end, I did two things: first, I did a three-month work placement with Brook, a young people's sexual health charity, during which I conducted a distinct research project on RSE advocacy. Second, I had informal conversations with five individuals who had direct experience of RSE in primary schools: three school governors, and two consultants in RSE, one employed by the local authority and one independent consultant.

From October to December 2014, I worked with Brook to research advocates' experiences of campaigning for statutory sex and relationships education (RSE). I interviewed 19 advocates, including young people, NGOs, a House of Lords peer and consultants. The research highlighted the political sensitivity of RSE and the lack of political will among parliamentarians, despite widespread support for statutory status among professional bodies and the public.

My conversations with primary school governors and with consultants advising primary schools on RSE suggested that most schools in the city did not have much expertise in this subject area. (All parties were informed that these conversations would contribute to my research design and would not be part of my research data.) The substance of these conversations suggested that schools' decisions and activities around RSE depended on whether there was anyone associated with the school who had an interest in as well as knowledge about the subject, and this appeared to be exceptional rather than the norm. Malcolm, the local authority advisor, suggested that most schools offered the bare minimum in RSE, partly because it was not statutory and they faced pressure to deliver other outcomes. An important lesson from this preliminary research was that my recruitment strategy should aim to reach the small core of decision makers involved in RSE and I should let each school inform the selection of research participants. This research also informed the selection of research methods and the design of my research instruments, as I will discuss below.

Another perspective that inspired my research design was participatory action research (PAR). Early on in my doctoral journey, I attended a PAR workshop and subsequently became a member and then convenor of a doctoral PAR group. I am personally committed and inspired by human rights approaches and I felt passionately that I would like my research – the process and outcomes – to have a more substantial impact than a written thesis or peer-reviewed articles. I also wanted to work in collaboration with community members, not only to equalize power relations in the research process, but because I felt that they could strengthen and give momentum to the research within their own institutions. It should be noted that although I proposed a specific and detailed research design in my proposal to my progress review committee, as required by the doctoral research procedure, I still remained interested in how school research partners could help me to refine or adapt this research design to their specific aims and interests in researching RSE at their school. The doctoral research process did not allow me to begin recruiting school research partners/subjects until my progress review was approved (understandably, due to ethical concerns), so this collaboration could not begin ahead of time, but I was prepared to return to my research questions and method selection if possible to make my research more in tune with the fundamental aims of participatory action research.

4.3. Research design and methods

I introduced Critical Realism, my overarching philosophical approach, in the previous chapter, but here I articulate how it has influenced my research design. I then go on to discuss how I selected my research methods and the planning and design decisions I made regarding my research tools.

Critical Realism has four fundamental features. It suggests that: 1) there are enduring entities or objects in the world, whether known to us or not; 2) knowledge is fallible, thus any claim is open to dispute; 3) one may only have knowledge of what appears, but these refer to underlying structures which are not easily understood; and 4) these deep structures may contradict or be in conflict with their appearances (Bhaskar, 1998; Maxcy, 1994). Critical Realists propose that if we can observe the effects of social constructions and mechanisms (what they call ‘entities’), then we can infer that they exist (Hollis and Smith, 1991). Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, in their application of Critical Realism to their study on street harassment, suggest that it offers a much stronger framework for analysing complex social phenomena than either positivist or interpretivist approaches because it takes into account subjective, empirical accounts, but moves beyond the empirical and discursive to identify deep causal

mechanisms and underlying structures (2017:31). In the context of relationships and sex education, for example, one might anticipate that the codified systems and procedures of the state education structure – which have embedded within them particular values and ideas about the purpose of education (as discussed in Chapter Two) – could serve as a mechanism for imposing particular values upon RSE, regardless of the appropriateness of these values for RSE.

Critical Realism has been described as a theory without a method (Fletcher, 2017; Sayer, 2010) because key thinkers – notably Bhaskar, Archer, Porpora and Sayer – do not suggest specific data collection or data processing methods. Sayer (2000) argues that researchers themselves are in the best position to decide on appropriate methods, given their scholarly knowledge of the subject and context. Thus, researchers implementing empirical studies from a Critical Realist approach have looked to existing studies to inform their designs (e.g. Fletcher, 2017; Corson, 1991). One commonality among empirical studies employing Critical Realism is that they treat actors' accounts as the starting point. Actor's accounts are treated as legitimate but corrigible, limited by the existence of unacknowledged conditions, unconscious motivations, tacit skills and unintended consequences (Priestley, 2011). In seeking to provide an account of reality, methodology must draw upon empirical experience to construct an explanation of how mechanisms are activated and affect events; an explanation which should subsequently be subjected to empirical scrutiny and reflection (Bhaskar, 1989). I anticipate that there will be differences between schools and communities, but not all knowledge is tentative and context specific; in line with Critical Realism I expect there may be patterns in the structures and mechanisms that influence how decision makers establish what knowledge is valuable and relevant to RSE policy for primary pupils.

Given the primacy of actors' accounts in Critical Realist inquiries, and my interest in collaborating closely with community (i.e. school) in this research, I chose from among methods that enable respondents' voices to form the core of the data. In my preliminary research, as discussed above, I spoke to governors, educators and consultants who had been involved in RSE policies at primary schools. Prior to this, I envisioned that the decision makers would meet, agree on tasks, meet again to discuss their findings/proposals, put forward their own policy preferences for RSE, perhaps meet with diverse stakeholders, and finally agree the content of the RSE policy. I imagined that observing these meetings would offer a raw, unfiltered view of the process. However, after I had spoken to people who had been involved in RSE policy processes, and after reviewing the literature on observations, on qualitative methods more broadly (e.g. Flick, 2006) and on participatory action research (e.g. Bradbury,

2015), I felt that observation was an inappropriate method for this study. It was impractical on multiple fronts: first, because as a passive observer and a representative of higher education, I may be perceived as a person who was judging school policy deliberations, a concern that I felt was incompatible with my interest in participatory action research; second, because I was unlikely to be able to locate schools that were undertaking a review of their RSE policy at the moment I was available to collect data, so data collection would likely be retrospective; third, because my presence would likely influence the content and process of these meetings; and fourth, because – as discussed in Chapter 3 – policy deliberations and decision making do not occur simply and exclusively in the context of meetings (Foy et al., 2013; Yanow, 2007).

Positions and contributions to policy processes form in corridors, or on the commute to or from work, in the privacy of an office, in the reading of a blog or newspaper article, and in a potential multitude of other places and moments.

I decided, as a result, that the best approach would be to seek out the subjective accounts of the RSE policy processes from the people who had been involved. At this point, I had become immersed in participatory action research and was committed to research that enabled my school-based research partners to take on substantive, formative roles in the research process, so giving primacy to agents' subjective accounts seemed sympathetic to that aim. Secondly, I had also become interested in the Critical Realist literature, and accepted – as Critical Realism does – that all accounts and narratives are constrained by social constructions as well as personal experience and lens, and thus all accounts of social phenomena must be considered as interpretations, and all analyses are layers of interpretation (Danermark et al., 2002; Flick, 2006). The literature suggested that semi-structured interviews would enable me to produce creative analyses that do not attempt to construct an accurate depiction of what 'exists' but aim to contribute to knowledge with a recognition of the social processes involved in research and knowledge production (e.g. Archer, 1998; Baert, 2005). Parr suggests that "this more detailed and focused approach is necessary to understand the specific... connections and dynamics associated with the phenomena under study" (2013:4). Thus, I decided that semi-structured, in-depth interviewing would produce rich data needed to answer my research questions.

Semi-structured interviews

In-depth interviews are sometimes described as conversations, or conversations with purpose, and they attempt to reproduce a "fundamental process through which knowledge about the social world is constructed in normal human interaction" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:138). May

suggests, “interviews yield rich insights into people’s biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings” (2011: 120). It seemed likely that interviews would produce a balance between specific information I wanted, and also enable respondent’ voices and experiences to come out. However, Silverman (2017) warns against the assumption that interviews “allow us to enter into our respondents’ worlds and to understand their experiences” (146). Silverman suggests that interviews should be seen as respondents’ constructions of their experiences, appreciating layers of interpretation. He notes the importance of good interviewing skills and good data analysis (2017:145).

The suitability of semi-structured interviews, in particular, was supported by a range of comparable Critical Realist empirical studies, as well as studies about RSE in schools. Parr (2013) interviewed 26 participants for a qualitative study about the role of a government support service in governing anti-social behaviour. She wrote that these methods supported her to “[validate] women’s experiences and [use] their experiences as a basis for building knowledge in order to challenge oppression and affect social change” (2013:6). I agree with Parr’s claim the semi-structured interview enables the researcher to focus discussion on the issues and topics that are pertinent to the research questions, and furthermore “reflects the Critical Realist view that prior theoretical ideas are important in guiding the research” (2013:6). My selection of methods was also supported by previous research exploring RSE in schools (Abbott et al. 2015, 2016; Corteen, 2006; Mason, 2010).

At the outset, I planned to interview all respondents twice in order to develop discussion around different themes. Vincent (2013) suggests that repeat interviews can also help to improve relationships with respondents – useful when addressing sensitive topics – and can be useful where respondents are only available for brief periods of time. The interview schedules focused on the following themes: the first one asked about respondents’ understanding of sexuality and their personal experiences, values and attitudes in relation to RSE (Annex A), and invited respondents to reflect on how well the policy process had gone. The second interview focused on the actual policy-making process, such as how the issue came onto the agenda, who was involved, resources and how decisions were made (Annex B).

For both interviews, I designed open-ended interview questions to encourage participants to tell the story on their own, to demonstrate their perspective on the relationships and the process. I also included specific questions to obtain particular information. As suggested by May (2011), I included prompts to delve further into particular issues or for clarification. To conclude each interview, I asked interviewee to provide feedback about the interview. As

noted by Bowden et al. (2002), answering interview questions involves several processes: hearing and interpreting the question, retrieving the necessary information, deciding what answer to give, and then answering. Bowden et al. suggest that interviewees' reflections on the interview can provide insight on their interpretations of the questions and their answers.

To promote efficacy, I piloted the interview schedules with three individuals: one doctoral colleague who was also a governor of a primary school (which did not participate in the study), a friend who works in a secondary school and another friend who does not work in education. Their feedback helped me to clarify some questions and eliminate others.

At each school, I planned to conduct the two sets of interviews about two weeks apart, but I was aware that the timing would be determined to some extent by the availability of the respondents according to the pressures and schedules of the schools. As mentioned earlier, I anticipated that I would conduct all the interviews after the policy process in question, but again, I was prepared that this might not necessarily be the case. My preliminary research suggested that schools tended to revise their policy at various times, so the timing for interviews at the different schools did not have to be coordinated.

Review of key documents

Given the focus of this study is RSE policy, I decided to include the schools' official written policies themselves as complementary data. In addition, my preliminary research – in particular with external consultants on RSE – suggested that curricula often served as formative influences on schools' decisions about RSE policy. This was confirmed in the first set of interviews I conducted, at one of the schools. Therefore, I decided that reviewing the RSE curricula would also contribute to the findings of the study. I did not consider any of these documents as equivalent to the data I collected through interviews, because they did not provide accounts of decision-making processes regarding RSE, but they complemented the accounts offered by respondents by providing further detail and confirming what respondents had said about them and how they influenced decision-making processes. Flick warns against seeing documents as “factual reality... compared to the subjective views in interviews...

Documents represent a specific version of realities constructed for specific purposes” (2006:249). Further, Flick's notion of documents as “communicative devices rather than as containers of contents” (2006:252) was useful in relation to the written policies because they were products of the processes under the study, but not necessarily symbolic of the processes. While wary of these weaknesses, I decided that this additional data analysis would complement the interviews.

As noted above, while I presented this research design to my progress review committee, as required by the doctoral process, I was also open to the possibility that if I did manage to recruit school research partners who wanted to collaborate closely in this research process (e.g. to partner in a participatory action research project), my selection of methods and procedure could change. If this was the case, I was prepared that I may need to return to my committee for further discussion and approval.

4.4. Recruitment

There were two distinct strategies for recruiting schools: first, I attempted to purposively select the schools, and when this failed I used snowball sampling. The recruitment process took place over a period of 18 months, from April 2015 until October 2016. One reason for this is it proved challenging to recruit schools to participate in the study. I also went on maternity leave from December 2015 until the end of September 2016, in the middle of the data collection stage, which had the advantage of giving me more time to recruit schools.

To begin with, I set out to purposively select three or four primary schools in the same city, which had all revised their RSE policy in the last 12 months. The literature suggested that purposive sampling would help ensure that the “units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes” (Legard et al., 2003:78). A sample of three or four schools would not be sufficient to produce a cross-section of schools in the city, but it would enable me to gain some depth, explore some differences and answer my research questions (Alderson, 2016). I estimated that within 12 months, participants would recall the events sufficiently well for the purposes of the study.

To begin with, Malcolm, the local authority advisor who I had met in my preliminary research, assisted me to identify schools that were actually engaged in RSE and that would likely have revised their policy within the last 12 months. Malcolm was motivated to support me because he was personally interested in my study, having worked for more than 30 years in RSE, and given his current professional mandate, of supporting schools to improve their RSE. I also set out a rigorous procedure for selecting a diverse combination of schools. Drawing on the local authority website and Ofsted reports, I constructed a matrix (including socioeconomic indicators, religious affiliation, administrative form and ethnic composition) and used this matrix to classify the schools that Malcolm had helped me to identify as being engaged in RSE. With a shortlist of schools, I emailed the head teacher to introduce myself and the research

and invited them to meet. In these initial letters of invitation, I outlined my interest in participatory action research and offered that I was open to a close collaboration with them on the research project. However, I also recognized in these letters that schools had many other priorities and pressures and that if necessary, I could limit the time and effort required on the school's part to the very minimum. Of the 19 schools I wrote to, three replied to inform me that they were not interested, and the rest did not reply.

With time passing, I felt pressure to begin data collection, and I also accepted that due to challenges locating any schools that were interested in collaborating on this study, I would likely not be conducting participatory action research. Thus, I adopted a snowball recruitment technique. Snowball sampling, through which personal networks (of the researcher or respondents) are used to locate participants, is traditionally used to reach marginalized or hard-to-reach populations (TenHouten, 2017). While primary school decision makers would not obviously be considered in these categories, my initial recruitment experiences suggest that they are not easily available. Through personal networks, I contacted an additional ten schools, three of which ultimately agreed to participate in the study. In contrast to the original approach letter I had used, in these letters I removed all mention of participatory action research; I emphasized my appreciation of the pressures that schools face and stated that I would make their participation as easy as possible, with a clear indication of what time and support I would request of them.

Fortunately, the three schools that agreed to participate in the study have distinctive characters and have different institutional forms, being a private school, an academy school and a local authority managed school (hereafter and respectively, Fleming Primary School, Wingfield Academy and Latimer Primary School). The three schools came through different contacts: Fleming Primary I found with the assistance of Malcolm at the local authority; Latimer Primary came through one of my doctoral supervisors; and Wingfield Academy I found through a contact I had made in a separate research project. I emailed the head teachers at each of these schools to explain the aims of the research, to explain what the school's participation would entail, and to invite the head teacher to have a one-to-one meeting to discuss it further.

In one-to-one meetings, I met my key contacts and explained the aims of the research and what it would entail for participants. I aimed to "establish an intersubjective understanding in terms of the aims of the work, expectations of the participants and also what they may obtain as a result of the work" (May, 2011:140). I was hopeful that the school would benefit from

participating in the research (as well as myself), and offered to provide a service for the school, such as a summary of my literature review and/or a presentation, in addition to a brief report and presentation of the research findings at the end of the process. All three contacts agreed that the school would participate and proceeded to aid me in recruiting participants. Latimer Primary did not meet one of my criteria, namely that they had updated their RSE policy in the previous 12 months, however they were planning to revise the policy over the following six months, so we agreed that in their case, I would conduct the first set of interviews before they began revising the policy and the second set of interviews afterwards.

To recruit participants at each school, I asked my key contact to identify all the individuals who had been involved in the development of the school's RSE. I recommended that they name five or six individuals but advised that the number of people was their choice and informed them they could include anybody who had been, or would be involved. My key contact at each school provided information sheets and consent forms to all potential participants (see Annex C), and either arranged the interview schedule with those who agreed to take part or put them in touch with me, after they had agreed to participate, and I scheduled the interviews.

4.5. Implementation

As planned, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews as my primary research method. I also reviewed the schools' RSE policies and observed the demonstration of Andromeda curricula resources in a training day delivered by the publishers of Andromeda (a private sector company). This was a relevant activity to include among my research methods because interviews suggested that the Andromeda curriculum was the core curriculum package used by each of the three schools in this study. I considered my observation of the training day for the RSE components of Andromeda a proxy for analysing the Andromeda documentation, which I was unable to obtain.

Semi-structured interviews

In total, I conducted 30 interviews: 12 respondents I interviewed twice and seven respondents I interviewed once (including two pupils that I interviewed together). Most interviews were 45 minutes to one hour in duration. The respondents who only participated in one interview either did not demonstrate much involvement in RSE, and therefore I decided there was no benefit in pursuing a second interview, or they left the school (as was the case at Latimer, where there was a significant gap between the first and second round of interviews). I

anticipated that I would interview five to six individuals at each school – totalling 30 to 36 interviews – so my resulting data is consistent with my research plan.

The times and places of the interviews were proposed by almost all the respondents, and all of the interviews took place during or after school hours, on the school premises. All interviews were audio recorded using my mobile phone, these were then uploaded to an encrypted hard drive and deleted from my phone. I transcribed the interviews verbatim using the VLC audio player application. Given the extended period of recruitment and my maternity leave, I was collecting data over a period of 18 months. The scheduling of the interviews was as follows:

	<i>First round of interviews</i>	<i>Second round of interviews</i>
<i>Latimer Primary</i>	June to November 2015	November to December 2016
<i>Fleming Primary</i>	October 2015	November to December 2015
<i>Wingfield Academy</i>	October to November 2016	December 2016

While the year-long gap between interviews at Latimer resulted in attrition (two respondents), one advantage of being able to conduct interviews before and after the policy was revised at Latimer Primary is that I collected data on what respondents hoped for their revised policy, as well as reflections on how it had gone. For the other two schools, Fleming and Wingfield, I scheduled the interviews with at least a two-week gap between each pair so that respondents would have time to reflect on what had been discussed and to give them time to reconsider their participation. Both Fleming Primary and Wingfield Academy had finished revising their RSE policies by the time data collection began, so both sets of interviews were retrospective.

Mainly, I kept to the interview schedules. However, occasionally the respondent would diverge, and I would support them to lead the interview and pick up missed questions later. I found that respondents with more experience in RSE contributed much more detail in the interviews, and tended to diverge more from the interview questions, which is consistent with Flick’s description of the ‘expert interview’ (2006), whereas those with little expertise answered questions more succinctly. It was also necessary to adapt the questions for the respondent or school, for example the private school did not have a governing body so I could not ask about the involvement of the governors. I created bespoke interview schedules for three respondents: Malcolm (not to be mistaken with the informal conversations I had with him prior to beginning the research), who was identified as a key influencer for the RSE policy at Fleming Primary (see Annex D) and two 11-year-old pupils at Fleming (see Annex E).

I had not ruled out the possibility of including children among my respondents, but I allowed the participants to be determined by my key contacts rather than request specific stakeholders. The head teacher at Fleming put forward two pupils. Scholars suggest that children aged 10-12 years are capable of participating in standardized interviews (e.g. Bell, 2007; Scott, 2000), but researchers can take measures to make children more comfortable. I interviewed the two girls together, in a group interview, because the literature suggests that children are often more at ease in contexts they are familiar with (e.g. Vogl, 2015). The group interview allowed the pupils to agree their memory of events, so they clarified their role and contributions in conversation with each other, benefits of the method that have been noted by Cohen et al. (2018) and Pereira and Riano (2018). In addition, I allowed the pupils to diverge from the interview schedule more than I had with adults, as the literature suggests that enabling children to set the agenda is one way to mitigate the power differentials between them and the researcher (Griffin et al., 2016; Mauthner, 1997).

Although I carefully developed the interview schedule, and aimed to be sensitive to respondents during interviews, the power differentials and social dynamics between myself as the interviewer, and the interviewee are likely to have some affect on the results (Manderson et al., 2006). Disparities, or similarities, in terms of gender, age, class, ethnic background, communication styles and personality may have affected the interview, and even our moods, stress levels and pre-occupations will affect the results. While I kept field notes to record observations of this nature, in fact I noticed very few interactions that seemed to have been affected by social differences between myself and participants. For some of the interviews I was pregnant, and at times this helped to start conversation and build rapport. Another distinguishing feature about myself is that I have a Canadian accent, but only the pupils commented on this. The differences between the pupils and myself were the most noticeable – particularly our ages and consequent difference in autonomy and position – but in fact the difference that seemed to be most significant in this case was that I was an outsider to the school, and they were members of it. At times, I felt, they were acting as ambassadors for the school – seeking to reflect a good image of it – which perhaps had the greatest impact upon their answers.

Review of key documents

I analysed a number of key documents to complement the data and analysis of the semi-structured interviews I carried out, as suggested by a number of scholars in the field (e.g. Abbott et al, 2004; Evans, 2014). I analysed the most recent RSE policies of all three schools,

which had all been approved within the previous 12 months. These are the policies that respondents discussed in the interviews. The policies range in length from two to seven pages. This data was analysed alongside the interview data and my analytic approach and process is discussed in detail below.

I considered analysing the Andromeda curriculum for RSE. Andromeda – a pseudonym – is a commercial curriculum package for the whole of personal, social, health and economic education, including RSE, for primary schools. It is a comprehensive package that includes folders for each year group which offer a structure for PSHE over the calendar year, including lesson plans, objectives, content, audio-visual materials, worksheets, activity ideas, tactile accessories (e.g. toys, chimes), sample school RSE policies, sample letters for parents and more. The interview data suggested that all three schools had adopted Andromeda as their core curriculum package for PSHE as a whole, including RSE, although respondents at Latimer suggested that their RSE lessons were complemented by additional materials, and respondents at Fleming and at Wingfield suggested that they amended or left out some of the content. The data suggested that Andromeda had had a significant influence on the school RSE policies. However, the data also suggested that it was others' recommendation of the package as well as the material elements of Andromeda that largely influenced respondents to select it– the expansiveness of the package, including planning, worksheets, audio-visual resources and other content – that largely influenced respondents to select it, rather than its content. A full content analysis therefore seemed out of proportion with the extent to which it would contribute to the research aims of the study.

However, I did have an opportunity to learn about the RSE components of the Andromeda curriculum through my attendance at a training day for this curriculum, offered by the publishers. Although the training day was aimed at educators and school administrators, the publishers of Andromeda invited me to attend as an alternative to providing a copy of the curriculum (I requested a copy for the purpose of this study, but was declined on the basis that there was no financial gain for the company). My interest in observing the training was as a proxy for the actual documentation, so I was focused on making notes and observations about the materials being presented rather than, for example the trainer's skill. As such, my observations in this case do not accord with the literature on observation as a research method, which suggests, for example, that observations offer researchers the opportunity to record naturally occurring data, social dynamics and nonverbal communication (Moriarty, 2011). I recorded on my laptop the content of the Andromeda RSE materials that were

presented and the trainer's guidance to participants on how they could or should be taught, as well as answers to questions about the RSE components of the curriculum.

The training session was delivered by a trainer employed by the publisher and here were about 70 participants, mainly teachers from local primary schools. I observed the trainer's demonstration of a selection of the materials and her treatment of questions that were asked about the curriculum, and took detailed notes using a word processor on my laptop.

I analysed the official Guidance on Sex and Relationship Education (DfEE, 2000) in Chapter Two, as part of my policy context and literature review, and I considered analysing it again in relation to my interview data. However, the data suggested that very few respondents had consulted the government Guidance in depth, such that their accounts of it were not precise and in cases inaccurate. This could have been because their reading of it was guided in part by the local authority and/or by staff members who they felt had a more authoritative understanding of it. In any case, I decided that respondents' understanding and response to the Official Guidance was not based entirely on the document itself, and therefore my analysis would be better guided by their accounts themselves rather than the document.

4.6. Data analysis

For Critical Realists, analysing social phenomena involves a 'double hermeneutics', or mimesis, which involves layers of interpretation, including the interpretation of actors' subjective accounts (Danermark et al., 2002; Flick, 2006). As discussed earlier, actors' accounts are the starting point for Critical Realist analysis, but we understand actors as "constrained and bound by social structures... conceptual tools and discursive resources... provide them with ways of interpreting their circumstances" (Parr, 2013:9-10). Researchers, in contrast, may have access to broader understanding, informed by theoretical perspectives, other analyses and empirical data, as well as time for reflection and analysis, which allows them to provide a fuller account and to offer explanations that extend beyond subjective experiences and relate to what Critical Realists call 'real' underlying structures (Siljander, 2011; Sayer, 2010).

However, Critical Realists also come to their analysis with pre-formed interests. As Siljander wrote, "the interpreter always must *narrow down* the object of his or her interpretation... acceptance of realist conception of truth *does not imply* that there is only a single, correct description of reality" (2011:506). I arrived at the data analysis stage with pre-formed theories, concepts, questions and understandings that informed my analyses, as discussed above, and these shaped my findings. My analyses were underpinned by a tentative expectation that

agents and structures have a mutually influencing relationship: the actions of agents are both constrained by and enabled by existing structures, and the actions of agents in turn reinforce or transform existing social structures... once they are created, 'structures' take on a life of their own, and have properties and powers irreducible to those of the agents... something Critical Realists refer to as 'emergence' (Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017:34)

Thus, the primary themes emerged in part as answers to these expectations.

Data immersion

The first stage in my analysis was to transcribe the interviews verbatim. Mero-Jaffe (2011) distinguishes between two types of transcription: naturalised, meaning as detailed as possible, including mumbling, gestures, etc, and denaturalised, which refers to transcription that has been filtered to some extent, such as recording the words but not involuntary sounds. Many qualitative researchers do not describe transcription as a stage of analysis (e.g. Stuckey, 2015), perhaps because it may be seen as a simple transfer – from audio to text. However, at this stage I was already linking the data to theory by making choices about what data were relevant. Transcripts are “interactional accomplishments, not communicatively neutral artifacts” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2016:68). I did not intend to analyse conversational or linguistic detail, so I included only textual and behavioural elements that would help me to interpret the respondent’s intended meaning. For example, in addition to words, I noted where respondents laughed, because it indicated tone, but I did not include every ‘um’ and ‘ah’.

Scholars suggest that it is important to immerse yourself in the data before beginning any systematic analytic procedure (Stuckey, 2015; Bryman and Burgess, 2002), so I wrote summaries based on my data. First, narratives of each school’s decision-making process for RSE, including chronology, key actors, arguments and ideas. Then I prepared two-page summaries of every interview and each participant (see example in Annex F). This helped me to become closely acquainted with each participant’s account and supported in-depth reflexivity about the social dynamics among the agents, how they each contributed to decision making and their perceptions of the phenomenon. I noticed repetitions, recurring motifs, unusual events/ideas and tensions. I constructed visual maps (see Annex G for examples) to help organise my thoughts and to highlight the relationships I was observing, as well as to interrogate how I was making linkages. Each of these iterations represent an interpretation of the data: there were events and ideas that I highlighted and recalled, and others that I did not. While the narratives and visual maps that I created were useful, throughout the subsequent coding and writing I returned to the transcripts on a regular basis. These textual

representations helped me to recall the interviews and my interactions with the respondents, which helped animate the analyses.

Variances in data sources

I imported all interview transcripts, policy documents (the school RSE policies) and the notes I had made during the observation (of the Andromeda training session) into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software application.

At this point, I was well acquainted with the interview data, and I now revisited the written policies from the schools, and my notes from observing the Andromeda training session. I re-read these documents and noticed how and where they aligned with interview data, and where they jarred. For example, it became clear that the written policies were not particularly representative of respondents' talk about their school's RSE policy and programme. The policies range from two to seven pages, so in form they were not as rich and detailed, but also the language and content differed. Flick suggests that the researcher must always keep in mind the context when analysing documents by asking who produced the document and for what purpose. He notes,

Documents in institutions are meant to record institutional routines and at the same time to record information necessary for legitimising how things are done... what are they referenced to, what are the patterns of referencing, and what are the patterns of producing. (2006:250)

This helped to identify the written policies as instrumental tools for schools, not as proxies for their actual RSE programme. Similarly, the observations I had made about the Andromeda training were largely not echoed or supported by respondents. This brought into question how my perspective, and that of many of my respondents, was different, such that my reading of Andromeda - informed by theory and academic literatures - was comparatively critical. This also made me question how my reading of Andromeda might have been different if I had undertaken an analysis of the whole package (upon which respondents' opinions were formed), rather than a small selection of the RSE materials.

Coding and meaning making through abduction

The codes emerged from recurring motifs, issues and themes that I interpreted from the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), and as anticipated by the Critical Realist approach, my reading of the data was informed by my literature review, my theoretical approach and conceptual frameworks. Critical Realists advocate the use of abduction, a mode of inference that involves redescription or recontextualization (Fletcher, 2017; Danermark et al., 2002:81). The American

philosopher Peirce, who developed the concept of abduction as a form of analytic reasoning, suggests that it alludes to ways of reasoning, thinking and arguing. Unlike inductive conclusions, which are based on probabilities derived from empirical evidence, “in abduction the case presents a plausible but not logically necessary conclusion” (Danermark et al., 2002:90). In studies that employ Critical Realism, a frame of interpretation is applied (e.g. a theory or concept) to the data, and the researcher interprets or aligns the data with the theory. There are multiple possible interpretations of the phenomenon, however, and while the researcher may start out with some theories in mind, they may decide later that others are more appropriate (Fletcher, 2017; Bhaskar, 1989). Although it is not expected that analyses will show certainty, Critical Realists suggest that this type of analysis will almost always reveal new insight in terms of understanding phenomena (Choby and Clark, 2014; Siljander, 2011).

I did not begin coding with a priori codes, as such, but I had fully immersed myself in theories and models as discussed earlier – the argumentative approach and Macmurray’s philosophy of education – and a number of relevant terms became codes. This type of abduction is often called ‘creative abduction’, “when a researcher observes something from a frame of interpretation that nobody has used before, or which at least opposes conventional interpretations” (Danermark et al., 2002:93). The argumentative approach made me sensitive to argument spheres (public, private and technical), value-based criteria and persuasion techniques that respondents employed, as well as elements of school culture (e.g. ethos, leadership) that shaped decision making. I coded the data using Macmurray’s typology of knowledge in education, using the codes ‘technical knowledge’, ‘valuational knowledge’ and ‘intersubjective knowledge’. After coding all of the data, some themes began to emerge and I revisited the literature around power, notably Morriss’ work, and Social Realist work about the sociology of knowledge in education. I deliberately selected codes from their work – ‘epistemic ability’, ‘non-epistemic ability’, ‘cognitive norms’, ‘cognitive values’ – and applied these codes in my analysis.

I further developed the abstract connections and explanations in my research, and more fully answered my research questions, through my writing process. This involved drafting, re-working and then weaving through the text again to resolve the different themes and interrogate the tensions I found in the data.

4.7. Ethics

The proposed methodology for this study received ethical approval by the University of Bristol School for Policy Studies Ethics Committee in April 2015 (see Annex H for the ethics

application). The Committee was satisfied that the research process presented acceptable, low risk to myself or others, and that the burden of the research process was commensurate with the potential rewards. In the paragraphs that follow, I will discuss the following ethical issues that emerged and how I responded to them: how to produce a positive benefit through the research, so that it is not just research for its own sake; how to ensure autonomous, informed consent among participants; and how to ensure that participants' identities are effectively anonymised in the data.

Benefit of the study

Guidance on good ethical practice suggests that it is not enough to conduct research simply because there is a gap in the literature, the effort and burden of the research process suggests that, ethically, it can only be justified by producing benefit (e.g. Flick, 2006, Lather, 1991; Stanley and Wise, 1993). I was aware that asking decision makers at primary schools to give their time and attention to this research would detract from other responsibilities they have, to their school and pupils, so I was concerned that it should benefit them directly. My adoption of Critical Realism, discussed above, was in part motivated by its orientation to social justice (e.g. Alderson, 2016; Bhaskar, 1998, 2008). Deem suggests that social change can be achieved, at least in part, by empowering participants with critiques of existing practices, and skills or knowledge to improve their own (1994:165). Thus, I offered to support schools to help them gain knowledge and skills in three ways: first, I made a commitment to share the results of my research with the participants through a written report and a presentation; second, I offered the schools additional support, such as a presentation on what the academic literature said about RSE in primary schools; and third, I made a commitment to publish the results of my research more widely, so that it may have some benefit to the academic community and, hopefully, to practitioners. While none of the schools accepted my offer for any additional support, I have presented the results to them and I have already published an article in the *Health Education Journal* (Wilder, 2017), based on this study. I have also contributed to the Department for Education's public consultation, which will inform the new statutory programme for RSE.

Informed consent

Another ethical concern was about how to ensure that all participants consented to participate in the research of their own will, free of coercion from my lead contact at the school – in many cases, the head teacher, their boss. Ethical standards suggest that individuals

“act as autonomous beings who make measured decisions about participating in research on the basis of the information given to them” (Fisher, 2007:877). While the people I intended to involve in this study were not vulnerable, I was concerned that individuals asked by their employers to participate in research may feel compelled to participate on the basis of conventions such as complying with the requests of their superiors. In addition, Bryan and Burstow argue that as part of government reforms in education, “schools are encouraged and in some cases required to engage with and generate research, and this is welcomed as a means by which teachers are professionally developed” (2018:107). Scholars have proposed that improved documentation together with clear discussions of informed consent can make the process more effective (e.g. Hallinan et al., 2016; Lentz et al., 2017).

I aimed to ensure informed consent by making clear in the information sheet provided to potential participants, and the accompanying consent form (see Annex C), that it was each person’s choice whether to participate or not, and that they could change their mind at any time. I asked my key contact at the schools to ensure that respondents received these documents when they were asked to take part, at least two weeks before interviews began, and these documents included my contact details so participants could contact me independently. I also informed participants in person that it was their choice whether or not to participate before each interview, that they could change their mind at any point during the interview or afterwards, and I offered them opportunities to review the transcripts of their interviews, so that they could amend or redact any information they had shared. Transferring transcripts to interviewees can be an effective method of preserving research ethics and empowering participants by “allowing them control of what was written” (Mero-Jaffe, 2011:1). Only three respondents accepted the offer to review the transcripts from their interviews and none of them suggested any amendments to the transcripts.

Confidentiality and privacy

A third concern is that with so few schools and participants, it would be difficult to anonymize the results and preserve confidentiality. Developments in ethical practice, such as Hammersley and Traianou’s ‘alternative ethics’ (2014) and Denzin and Giardina’s ‘participatory mode of knowing’ (2006) suggest that informed consent implies a contract of trust in which the researcher commits to treat participants with respect and honesty. Thus, ensuring that my study complied with standards of ethical care required a consistent reflexivity and adjustment. Thus, on reflection, giving participants, schools and the city pseudonyms was not sufficient to conceal their identities. ‘Deductive disclosure’, or internal confidentiality, describes a situation

where the traits of individuals described in research reports – particularly those using thick description – makes them identifiable to others who are familiar with the research site(s) (Kaiser, 2009:1). There are few studies of this kind, so given that there are only three schools in this study, with five or six participants at each school, it seems likely that if the research participants were reading the resulting publication(s), they could use deductive logic to identify the individuals discussed. Kaiser notes that enabling deductive logic by failing to protect respondents' identities is a violation of the researcher's commitment to respondents' privacy and confidentiality (2009:2). To protect respondents' privacy, I therefore gave respondents pseudonyms, I did not necessarily preserve their gender in the pseudonym, and I did not maintain exact job titles. For example, instead of 'head teacher', I have used 'member of the senior leadership team'. In addition, I discussed the issue of confidentiality with respondents when I offered to share the transcripts of their interviews. I suggested respondents in their school who read any publications based on the study might be able to identify the individuals quoted. Participants thus had the opportunity to remove any data that they would particularly not want colleagues or others to associate with themselves.

Sensitive responses to the topic

Some additional ethical concerns include the possibility that participants might find the subject matter to be sensitive, and potentially invoke traumatic memories or experiences. With the exception of the two pupils, I considered the participants to be relatively empowered: all participants were employed and their head teacher recommended them. Nonetheless, to promote respondents' comfort I piloted the interview schedules, a recognized technique for improving participants' experience of it (e.g. Padgett, 2008). I also structured the interview schedules to begin by developing a rapport between myself and the participant and allowed them to get used to the interview questions and my style of interviewing before approaching more detailed questions.

With regard to the two 11-year-old participants, in accordance with recommendations from the literature, I promoted an ethical research practice by being more reflexive and making adjustments to ensure that the children could give informed consent, to mitigate power imbalances and to ensure that the children were aware of my obligation to speak to other, responsible adults in the event that they disclosed any information that would suggest a safeguarding concern (Griffin et al., 2016; Mauthner, 2007; Phelan and Kinsella, 2013). As discussed above, I created a child-friendly interview schedule (Annex E). Ahead of the interview, I shared it with my key contact at the school, who knew the girls well (by her own

admission) and who I trusted to make an appropriate judgment about the suitability of the content for the girls. However, she did not flag any content as being too sensitive for them to discuss. I also created a child-friendly information sheet and consent form (Annex I) to ensure that the pupils could give their informed consent. These were shared with the pupils and their parents at least two weeks before the interviews were due to take place. Researchers who work with children recommend involving adults who are responsible for them both for ethical reasons and to promote better data quality (e.g. Mauthner, 2007).

I am confident that the study was informed by ethical principles, and throughout the process I was reflexive about the ethical implications of my decisions and actions. Feedback from some participants suggests that they were satisfied with the process and benefitted from it.

4.8. Rigour and quality

In her article entitled ‘Qualitative Quality: Eight ‘Big Tent’ Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research’, Tracy writes, “criteria serve as shorthand about the core values of a certain craft... applying traditional criteria like generalisability, objectivity and reliability to qualitative research is illegitimate” (2010:838). Similarly, Cunliffe argues that our “metatheoretical positioning provides a basis for building crafted, persuasive, consistent, and credible research accounts” (2010:647). Thus, I do not argue that my findings are replicable or generalisable, but they are coherent, credible, sincere and significant in accordance with Critical Realism and the other theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning this work.

Critical Realism recognizes that science is a situated, social product, to the extent that all data collection – e.g. observation, interview, etc – and analysis is framed by a set of conceptual frameworks and are thus always and inevitably theory laden (Sayer, 2010; Scott, 2014). Thus, while Critical Realists propose that there is a ‘real’ world that exists, there is always a gap between what is ‘real’, and what we can actually know (Lennox and Jurdi-Hage, 2017). In that context, we understand social reality as emergent, multi-dimensional, subject to the will and action of diverse actors, including structural demands and influences (Danermark et al., 2002; Sayer, 2010). Critical Realist analyses aim to expose how the properties of certain objects – including actors, structures, policies – can make certain tendencies more likely, but the emergent nature of social reality means that these tendencies are never definite (Scott, 2014:35). Archer wrote:

To the realist, the one factor which guarantees that social systems remain open (and even forbids thought experiments about closure) is that they are necessarily peopled. Since realism insists upon a stratified view of the social, like any other reality, then

there are properties and powers particular to people which include a reflexivity towards and creativity about any social context which they confront. (1998: 190)

Her perspective accords with that of Gouldner who proposed that the possibility of value-free sociology does not exist, that a researcher's own personal values are unavoidable with regards to identifying the research problem and choosing conceptual schemes (1970). While I concur that researchers are motivated by their own histories and interests, and it is difficult to read texts and research other than through this lens, it is nevertheless critical for researchers – in the interests of producing knowledge – to reduce bias through a systematic, reflexive practice.

I adopted a reflexive research practice to promote a rigorous application of philosophy and conceptual frameworks. 'Reflexive research practice' generally refers to "analysis of how the relationship between the researcher and researched unfolds in the research situation and impacts on the analysis" (Simburger, 2014: 5), but has been applied to a number of different techniques, including a meta-analysis of the whole research process; reflections on how participants' identities (including researcher and researched) may have influenced the research; and reflections on power relations among those involved (Simburger, 2014). My reflexive practice has involved periodical analysis – at different points in the research process – of my own positionality as the researcher and how my assumed role may introduce bias in the data, as well as constant, careful questioning and revision of my own procedures and interpretations (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). For example, given recent media attention and critiques of school-based RSE, I was concerned that participants may view my research as premised on a negative opinion of them, so I made explicit in all my communications that I made no assumptions of this nature. While reflexivity can help to identify biases embedded in the practice of research, the researcher is doubtless still unaware of some of her own partialities that are exposed through her analysis.

Another approach that I adopted to improve the quality of my research was to read and analyse the data through multiple theories and conceptual frameworks. Tracy suggests that:

High quality research is marked by a rich complexity of abundance... Richness is generated through a 'requisite variety'... of theoretical constructs, data sources, contexts and samples. Requisite variety... refers to the need for a tool or instrument to be *at least* as complex, flexible, and multifaceted as the phenomena being studied. (2010:841)

This is an approach advocated by both critical policy analysts and by Critical Realists. As Sayer states, "understanding requires the use of a range of schemata or concepts... it allows considerable flexibility and a certain amount of cross-checking of observation or reflection" (2010:56). This type of triangulation promotes confidence in the strength of the findings and

makes what Sayer calls 'practical adequacy' more likely. Practical adequacy means "knowledge must generate expectations about the world and about the results of our actions" (2010:69). I do not propose to produce predictions, unlike some Critical Realists, however I do claim that my findings about particular tendencies are practically useful for policy making and can help inform expectations about similar contexts. Expectations will vary according to context since social reality is differentiated and emergent.

Beyond the fallibility of research, the findings of this study could be applied to other schools, albeit with caution because there is reason to believe that the schools in the sample are exceptional. The schools in this study, while invited to participate, effectively self-selected: they were willing to allocate time and energy to this research, with no clear benefit to themselves. This suggests that the schools have an interest in research and confidence in their RSE policy.

In the chapters that follow, I present my analyses and key findings that each examine distinct aspects of knowledge production and the attribution of value in relation to RSE in primary schools, and which collectively point to underlying structures and enduring patterns that influence RSE policy making.

Chapter 5: Argumentation in policy making

This first results chapter begins by presenting the three research sites – the schools – and the respondents at each school. After these introductions, I analyse the argumentative strategies presented by respondents to justify their selection and development of knowledge in their relationships and sex education (RSE) policies. I present data about the arguments that policy makers in at least two, and commonly in all three of the schools, used in their deliberative processes. As such, I suggest that these arguments are not specific to the school context or leadership, they are cross-cutting justifications that are related to national policy frameworks or norms. This analysis of argumentative strategies relates specifically to my first and second research questions, which focus on, respectively, what kinds of knowledge influence RSE policy deliberations, and how structures (such as public, political and professional discourses) exert influence to legitimise or dismiss specific types of knowledge in RSE policy making.

In interviews, decision makers often did not articulate clear arguments that they had used to advance their policy preferences for RSE policy; sometimes it was through talking about different types of knowledge, opinions and ideas that contributed to policy that decision makers articulated the criteria upon which their judgements were made, and these exposed their argument(s). The aim of this research is to explore how decision makers understand and (re)create value in RSE policy, so by identifying the criteria that informed their actions, I draw out how decision makers conceptualised value within RSE.

I employ Goodnight's three types of arguments – public, personal and technical – to delineate the authorities that decision makers appeal to and to isolate the specific criteria that underpin decisions. The arguments discussed are not exhaustive, they represent the most significant arguments that emerged from analysing the interviews and the documentary materials. 'Significant' usually means most prevalent, however a few arguments were significant for other reasons. I also apply Macmurray's theory around knowledge in education, Morris' theory of power, and Social Realist theory about the construction of knowledge in curricula to my analyses. These analyses lay the groundwork for arguments developed in my discussion chapter, but this preliminary work begins to demonstrate how the values embedded in knowledge used to construct RSE policies are multi-dimensional and layered.

5.1. Schools and respondents

Three primary schools participated in the study and they are all located in a mid-sized English city, called 'Collingwood' throughout the thesis. Collingwood has a population of about half a

million people and is socio-economically and ethnically diverse. The three schools are also diverse: Fleming Primary School is a small independent school located in an affluent area near the centre of town; Wingfield Academy is a large, relatively new academy in a middle class, largely white neighbourhood; and Latimer Primary School is an inner-city school that is culturally and socioeconomically diverse. Note that to preserve confidentiality, all names (i.e. respondents, schools, areas) used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

While there were significant differences in the RSE policies across the three schools, they had in common a model of delivery through which the RSE policy and programme was overseen by the PSHE subject lead, but any teacher might be asked to deliver RSE lessons. The PSHE subject lead served as a resource person and support to teachers. Another common feature across the three schools was that they had all adopted a commercially available curriculum, known as Andromeda throughout this thesis, as their core curriculum for the whole of PSHE, including RSE (see Annex J for a brief outline of the RSE content in Andromeda). According to the schedule proposed in the Andromeda curriculum, RSE would be delivered over a six-week period, in the second half of the summer term, in a weekly lesson. However, all three of the schools adapted or supplemented the Andromeda curriculum in different ways, including by reducing or increasing the duration and frequency of RSE lessons, and changing or adding to the content. Some of these local adaptations are discussed in the next two chapters.

Latimer Primary School

Latimer Primary School is a culturally diverse, local authority managed school located within two miles of the city centre. The area has a strong working-class history, but for many years has been home to a number of migrant communities. The area has become gentrified in recent years.

There are 250 children enrolled at Latimer School and it is a popular school, consistently over-subscribed. It is rated 'good' by Ofsted. Ofsted notes that the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils is 'excellent', and suggests the school offers opportunities for pupils to celebrate their cultural heritages while recognizing British values.

Pupils represent a range of socio-economic, ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. While the largest single ethnic group in the school is White British, most pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds (well above the national average) and 35% of pupils have English as a second language (compared to the national average of 20%). The largest ethnic minority groups are Caribbean, Pakistani, Somalian and Indian. Latimer School has a higher than

average proportion of pupils from low-income households or looked after children, with 28% of pupils eligible for free school meals (compared to the national average of 25.4%)¹. Latimer has fewer pupils with special educational needs, or educational, health and care plans (EHC), compared to the average primary school (1.6% vs 2.6%).

As with other local authority managed schools, Latimer has a governing body composed of parents, community members and school staff. The governing body is accountable for the school's performance and development.

I interviewed six people at Latimer School:

- Kate, a teacher and subject lead for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE)
- Sarah, a member of the senior leadership team
- Iris, a member of the pastoral staff
- Laurence, a member of the senior leadership team
- Amy, a member of the pastoral staff and teacher
- Wendy, a member of the pastoral staff

I conducted the two sets of interviews about one year apart, so there had been some changes of staff by the time I did the second interviews. Amy and Wendy had left, so as a result I only did one interview with each of them.

Fleming Primary School

Fleming Primary School is a private school located in an affluent area on the border of the centre of town. Though small, the school has been established since 1915 and has had the same owner since 1996.

There are nearly 70 pupils in the school. As a private school, Fleming is not inspected by Ofsted but by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISA). The ISA's most recent report of the school, dated within the last five years, suggests that six pupils have English as an additional language, a small minority are from minority ethnic backgrounds and eight pupils have special education needs or disabilities.

Fleming School does not have a board of governors, all decisions are made and/or approved by the head teacher and the owner (both members of the senior leadership team), and the owner is accountable. The ISI is approved to inspect schools under Section 109 of the *Education and Skills Act 2008* and reports to the Department of Education on the extent to which the schools

that it inspects meet statutory requirements. The ISI reported in 2014 that pupils of all abilities at Fleming School are making good progress in academic subjects, and also that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, partly as a result of the excellent pastoral care they receive at school.

I interviewed six people who are employed at Fleming School or who were identified by the head as having an influential role in their sex and relationships education programme and policy, as follows:

- Simone, a member of the senior leadership team and teacher
- Pamela, a member of the senior leadership team
- Audrey, a member of the senior leadership team and teacher
- Malcolm, local authority advisor for relationships and sex education
- Lena, parent and administrator
- Emily and Marion, pupils, both aged 11 years

Wingfield Academy

Wingfield Academy is located in a large residential suburb. Everett, the name of the suburb for the purposes of this study, is home to just over 10,000 people, about 90% of whom identify as white British. The top occupations of Everett residents include professionals, business, media, public service, managers, directors and senior officials.

There are more than 450 pupils enrolled at Wingfield Academy, which makes it larger than average for an English primary school, and the student body is more homogenous than the average. Fewer pupils than average speak English as an additional language (less than 10% compared to the national average of 20%) and fewer than average are from lower income households (i.e. less than 20% are eligible for free school meals compared to the national average of 25.4%). Only 1% of pupils have special educational needs, compared to 2.6% on average across England.

According to Ofsted's latest report, the school's academic results are good and have improved since the school was ranked 'Requires improvement' in Ofsted's previous report.

Wingfield Academy has changed dramatically since it was first established, and it has experienced some turbulence, in recent years, in relation to its ownership and status. For more than a century, Wingfield was a private Catholic school. In 2010, Wingfield went into administration after it became financially unviable due to low numbers of students. Wingfield was nearly closed down entirely, but Collingwood City Council bought the school site and an

academy chain took on the school. Wingfield opened as a non-denominational, co-educational school for the academic year 2010-11. The academy chain decided to close the school at the end of the school year, and at that point it was taken on by the Bridgestock academy chain.

Wingfield Academy is now one of a few primary schools operated by the Bridgestock academy chain in Collingwood. The Bridgestock academy chain directs its operations from a head office in London and is governed by a single governing body (its Board of Trustees). The academy chain employs regional teams in each region where it has schools to oversee the schools' performance. Each Bridgestock school also has a parental advisory group which provides support in guiding the school's development.

I interviewed six people associated with the school:

- Kirsten, teacher and subject lead for PSHE
- Patrick, a member of the senior leadership team
- Annette, a member of the senior leadership team and teacher
- Faye, parent and academy ambassador (previously a governor)
- Julia, parent and administrator
- Ian, teacher

5.2. Technical arguments

The data presented below demonstrates how decision makers introduced technical arguments (Goodnight, 2012) in their deliberations about RSE policy. The most significant technical arguments presented by respondents in interviews, and evident in the schools' written RSE policies, were:

- "To overcome our lack of expertise and good quality resources"
- "To demonstrate progress and outcomes"
- "Relationships and sex education should not be time- or energy-intensive for staff"

These arguments were clearly voiced by respondents, if not in these precise words then in similar language. I demonstrate how these are technical arguments but also illustrate that they are multi-dimensional claims, representing at times cognitive norms or cognitive values

(Young, 2008), technical knowledge or valuational knowledge (Macmurray, 1935, 1957; Fielding, 2012) and which relate to epistemic or non-epistemic abilities (Morriss, 2002).

"To overcome our lack of expertise and good quality resources"

All three schools in the study decided to make Andromeda, a comprehensive, commercial curriculum package, as their primary personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum, including RSE. The data suggest that Andromeda had a profound influence on the RSE policy at all three schools because it generally determined the structure and content of the lessons through the lesson planning materials (which specified lesson objectives, content and organisation), resources (e.g. video clips, images) and suggested activities/tasks for pupils. To overcome a lack of expertise in RSE among staff was a common argument for having adopted Andromeda as the core curriculum.

At Latimer Primary, Iris, a member of the pastoral staff, talked about how she and other staff had critiqued the RSE programme that the school had offered previously, and how this informed their aims in updating their programme. She said:

[We were] analysing some of the children's feedback about what was, you know, happening, what were they learning, were they learning anything... And we just noticed that there were some year groups where they were getting a better deal than others, because of the skills of the adults delivering, as well as um, being able to ask questions openly. But we just felt we needed [a curriculum] that was a little more precise and certainly with a lot more progression. (2nd interview)

Iris notes that skills among teachers delivering RSE varied and the existing curriculum was not sufficiently progressive, year on year, both of which had an impact on children's learning. This is a technical argument because it relates to Iris' ability – her professional competence – to apply children's feedback about what they were learning to the delivery of RSE, including educators' skills and the materials. Iris' solution is a more precise, progressive curriculum – specifically, the Andromeda curriculum – and she asked her head teacher to purchase it.

One of the key values emerging from this argument is the importance of consistency, or equity, across year groups. Iris expressed a desire to equalize opportunities so that children in different year groups could experience comparable benefits. The value placed on each year group having equal opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills reflects what Social Realists would call a cognitive norm: "Cognitive norms may range from rules governing the forms of persuasive argument that can be brought in defence of one's theory... to procedures... in the laboratory" (Schmaus, 1994:263, quoted in Young, 2008:30). Iris does not defend or explain her proposal that equal opportunity in RSE is a suitable objective, it is an assumption

that this is an appropriate aim. It harkens back to liberal conceptions of what education should strive to achieve, and the literature suggests that equal opportunity in education is an issue that has dominated political debates (e.g. Hartley, 2009; Young, 2008). Brighthouse and Swift write, “the state is obliged to pursue strategies... to promote equality of opportunity among all children... no individual should have his or her prospects of economic success, or of flourishing more broadly, diminished for morally arbitrary reasons” (2003:360). As such, educational equity is a standard rule or objective, which in this case – where equity is absent – requires a policy solution. The emphasis here is on a technical solution and therefore aligns with Macmurray’s theory about technical knowledge, which related to how things are done, in this case how education is organised and delivered (i.e. equally). My analysis suggests this technical argument is also linked to public arguments regarding what education should achieve.

Sarah, a member of the senior leadership team at Latimer, said that she did not particularly like using schemes, such as Andromeda. She said:

Things need to be made bespoke to your context and your community... [but] we had a massive turnover of staff... we kind of needed to have something that was easy and off the peg, where there was a default, where, if you do nothing else, if you do this than you’ll be delivering good PSHE with the right ethos... Because I am really anxious about people getting things off the internet... if it doesn’t fit with what we’re trying to do here, then it can be really dangerous. (2nd interview)

Implicit in this passage is Sarah’s experience and expectation that staff who come to the school will not be skilled in PSHE (including RSE), which is consistent with Iris’ assertion, above, about variable skill in RSE among teachers. By suggesting that an off-the-peg curriculum would at least create a universal baseline for PSHE across the school, Sarah reinforces Iris’ concern with the value of equity, which suggests some consensus regarding this cognitive norm.

In addition, Sarah is concerned with the underlying messages of the curriculum: whether it reflects the principles and values embedded in the school ethos. The importance of ethos at Latimer Primary is a critical feature in the school’s decision making around RSE and will be discussed below, but it is relevant to highlight it here because Sarah’s quote suggests that the ethos, and the values represented within it, are deliberately perpetuated through policy making. Sarah has reviewed the Andromeda curriculum with a critical lens, assessing the underlying messages, and evaluated it against the school ethos. She has decided to endorse Iris’ proposal to adopt Andromeda, based on her judgment that it reflects the school ethos and that it will help ensure the delivery of the ‘right ethos’. This differs from the equity issue – a

cognitive norm – because it is not simply a matter of how education is delivered, but what education is delivered, and therefore it reflects Social Realism's cognitive goals:

Cognitive values specify the aims of science... may include everything from a scientist's position regarding the ontological status of unobservable entities... or to explain a particular set of facts. (Schmaus, 1994:263, quoted in Young, 2008:30)

Sarah's deliberate decision to support Andromeda for this reason is a technical argument – distinguished from Goodnight's public and personal arguments – but it reflects Macmurray's valuational knowledge because it relates to what is worth knowing.

Audrey, a member of the senior leadership team at Fleming Primary, also suggested that the Andromeda curriculum could help to mitigate the lack of expertise in RSE among teachers. She said that Andromeda

has assessments, as well, for the teachers, and well-structured lessons that, if you don't feel confident, and actually, because I said to the children, my children, I said, 'look, I have read this through a few times, but I have never taught this before, this is a new resource that we've got, so if I'm actually teaching with the sheets, please forgive me' (1st interview)

Audrey was open about the fact that she had minimal training in RSE, so she relied on Andromeda and she expected this was true for other staff. She comments on the quality of Andromeda's form and material, the pedagogy it promoted. 'Well-structured lessons', for example, suggests that the organisation and the development of the lessons accorded with the quality that the school is accustomed to. The rationale she offers here for choosing Andromeda, therefore, is connected to professional expectations about how lessons should be organised. This reflects cognitive norms (Social Realism) and technical knowledge (Macmurray). She does not address what Macmurray would call valuational knowledge: how well Andromeda delivers on the aims that the school has for RSE (which brings into question whether they have defined aims, as such).

Recalling Morriss' theory of power, I argue that Audrey demonstrates non-epistemic ability, but not epistemic ability, because while she is able to take specific actions, and they will have consequences, she could not reliably anticipate what the outcomes will be. Her words 'if you don't feel confident', paired with an anecdote from her own teaching, betrays her own lack of assurance of the results that her actions will produce.

Wingfield Academy also talked about the materiality of Andromeda – the physical parts that it comprised – as a criterion for selecting Andromeda. Annette, a member of the senior leadership team, said that before the school adopted Andromeda, as a teacher delivering RSE, she had difficulties locating good quality resources. She said:

Every year, when I am planning for the sexuality portion of PSHE, I'll always look to see if there's something new that I don't know about, and the same things always come up: 'Here's this really old DVD that you can watch'... I really want to get some good ideas about how I can do it, and... there's just really not much out there.

Annette's frustration about the lack of good quality resources was echoed by many respondents in the study, at all three of the schools. As with Audrey, Annette is concerned primarily with the 'how' of the lesson. This suggests that she is also focused on the delivery - on technical knowledge and cognitive norms - not the cognitive goals, or valuational knowledge, reflected in the materials.

Kirsten, a teacher at Wingfield, said:

Andromeda is amazing because you get planning and you get the resources and what you don't have, they tell you how to get them, or what to get, so it recommends loads of books... most of the staff are on board with [Andromeda]... when I had my first staff meeting, I said, '[Andromeda] is just to make your life as easy as possible' (2nd interview)

This passage emphasises how Andromeda impressed Kirsten with its various components and resources, and how this quality was used as a selling point among staff. As above, this reflects technical knowledge (Macmurray) and cognitive norms.

The data above demonstrate that respondents at all three schools argued that Andromeda would help the school overcome the lack of expertise in RSE among staff delivering the subject, and difficulties accessing good quality resources. The arguments offered for selecting Andromeda were therefore largely 'technical' - in relation to the argumentative approach - because they relate to the task of teaching and professional standards, not public discourses or personal attitudes/opinions about RSE. In addition, the emphasis on methods and aids for delivering lessons suggests that it is technical knowledge that is valued, not valuational or intersubjective knowledge (Macmurray). Only three respondents, all at Latimer, touched on the relationship between Andromeda's content and the cognitive aims that the school had for RSE. Based on the data, I would suggest that this is because respondents are able to exercise their judgment as it relates to educational norms and expectations for pedagogy, and have epistemic ability in this respect, but they are not able to exercise judgment regarding the content, or anticipate what outcomes the content may produce, because they lack specialist knowledge in RSE.

However, some respondents cited the fact that Andromeda had been reviewed and endorsed by the public health team in the local authority as evidence of its quality. At Latimer Primary, Kate, a teacher and PSHE subject lead, said:

Going to the network meetings, with the other PSHE coordinators, and people saying how great [Andromeda] was, and the lady who... runs [the network] is like a massive advocate for it... she was like, 'if you're not using it already, it's amazing...' she was offering a discount... that was kind of good to hear. (2nd interview)

Kate suggests that having the local authority (i.e. the lady who runs the network) endorse and subsidize Andromeda (£1000 per school) added to its credibility. As noted by Fischer (2009), what is considered good science is often defined by those who offer technical resources and who are considered authoritative sources of knowledge themselves. Hearing positive feedback about the curriculum from other PSHE coordinators also encouraged her to have a positive view of it. The popularity of Andromeda thus makes the package itself a sort of 'cognitive norm', insofar as it appeared to be the dominant means for delivering RSE in the area, although articulation of cognitive goals for RSE was still lacking.

"To demonstrate progress and outcomes"

All three schools spoke about the need to demonstrate that their pupils were making progress in RSE. This argument influenced their decision making about the policy.

Kirsten's primary criteria for selecting a curriculum – and which led her to select Andromeda – was whether it would help her to deliver her objective as subject lead: to document performance. In the first interview, she explained:

As PSHE lead, it is my job to measure the success of PSHE, how children are developing and their progress... when I first took over, my first thing... was to get a new scheme then, because [SEAL] was awful and it was really hard for me to measure progress when it seemed like most of the year groups were doing the same thing... by the end of the year we'll actually have some sort of graph or table of progress... which would be amazing. (1st interview)

The perceived need to demonstrate progress also affected how Kirsten performed her role and her interactions with teachers delivering RSE. She said:

[Teachers] get an email from me about every other week asking them for things... [teachers' attitude towards] PSHE used to be, 'nobody pays attention to it so therefore if I've got things that are more important... I can scrap PSHE'. Whereas now they've got me, like every week, 'I need to see your lessons or what you've done', 'I need to see work for my display'... now they're going, 'oh great, we have to do it!'. (2nd interview)

Kirsten suggests that her regular demands for documentation and displays of outcomes in RSE (part of PSHE) has made the delivery of the subject more consistent and has improved teachers' monitoring of progress among pupils.

At Fleming Primary, Audrey described how the senior leadership team used a monitoring framework developed by the PSHE Association to assess their RSE programme:

We have outcomes. So ones that would basically go from 'not satisfactory' to 'satisfactory' to 'good' to 'outstanding' in Ofsted terms. And what we have done is gone through and highlighted where we think we are now, and where we need to be, to be outstanding in every area, as the curriculum has just changed... And we went through the whole document, from the 'leadership', 'organisation', 'monitoring and evaluation', 'professional development'... (1st interview)

Audrey noted that this exercise had been useful in supporting the senior leadership team to identify areas where the school needed to improve.

Based on my review of the policy context, I suggest that these technical arguments – and technical knowledge – reflect what have become cognitive norms across education, due to the central government's education policy. Childs (2013), for example, suggests that teacher training has become more technical and teachers engage in less critical analysis of teaching, learning and pedagogy. Claxton (2008) and Alexander (2007), among others, have suggested that as a result, teachers are less likely to challenge the fundamental assumptions underpinning curricula and they are more likely to focus on monitoring and performance activities than pupils' learning. My analysis supports these arguments.

At Latimer Primary, Sarah explained that their school had recently introduced something called the SMSC Grid, for 'social, moral, spiritual and cultural' (SMSC) development to measure and track progress in RSE, as well as broader learning and development. She said:

We document [SMSC] in two ways in school... all the children have an all-in wonder book, so all their [relationships education] and PSHE work goes in there, and the classes have a floor book, and whenever they do anything that's kind of PSHE-style... it goes in the floor book. So there is lots of evidence like that for Ofsted... we have the proof (2nd interview)

While this quote is comparable to those of Audrey and Kirsten, above, what sets it apart is that while discussions about monitoring and demonstrating progress was part of Latimer Primary's RSE policy making, these concerns were secondary. Sarah's reference to Ofsted makes clear that monitoring activities and the resulting data serve a distinct purpose: to demonstrate accountability to the government. At Latimer Primary these functions are peripheral to the school's work on RSE, whereas at Wingfield Academy accountability – documenting and demonstrating progress – is central to Kirsten's understanding of her role as subject lead for RSE.

These differences suggest more sophisticated reflectivity on the part of respondents at Latimer, compared to those at Wingfield, with regards to their obligations for reporting to government. Latimer maintained a focus on their primary aim (e.g. cognitive goals), whereas at Wingfield, the performance and record of delivering the subject seemed to be the aim itself.

The cognitive norms established by the government gave Wingfield a sense of purpose and direction. Kirsten could not speak confidently about the outcomes of RSE for pupils, but she spoke in detail and with enthusiasm about the steps she was taking to obtain documentation about what was being delivered. The government, and Kirsten's manager, had given her the formal authority and means to make decisions about the RSE policy, and the cognitive norm of accountability gave her a framework to deliver on this responsibility, in the absence of epistemic knowledge.

The technical arguments discussed here – focused on demonstrating progress and meeting expected outcomes – stems from managerial forms of administration that pervade the educational sector and have become the norm for core academic subjects. These are not only technical arguments – in accordance with the argumentative approach – they are also cognitive norms and reflect technical knowledge (Macmurray). These analyses seem to suggest that at Wingfield Academy and Fleming Primary it is the 'how' of delivering RSE that is valued and worked on, not the 'what'.

"Relationships and sex education should not be time- or energy-intensive for staff"

The argument that RSE should not be time- or energy-intensive for staff is a technical argument because it relates to the organisation of professional duties and symbolises the priority that the subject is given in relation to other subjects and responsibilities. One might also claim that this argument is a personal one: given the lack of additional incentive, the time a teacher spends on RSE is down to their personal interest and commitment. As noted by Kirsten, above, teachers at her school previously felt able to skip their PSHE lessons when they were short on time. However, the increased focus on documenting progress and outcomes suggests that teachers are increasingly compelled to deliver RSE, and decision makers argued that RSE would be more consistent if the materials made it easy and efficient for them.

At Latimer Primary, Iris said that part of the policy process was trialling the curriculum to make sure that all teachers were comfortable using and delivering it. She said:

We wanted to make sure it suited everybody... it's got to be what [teachers] are comfortable with. And it soon became apparent that you know, this stuff was really working and, you know, nice CDs and music and clips and you know, everything that you needed all in one place, you didn't need to scabble about for bits and pieces. (2nd interview)

This quote echoes some of the quotes presented above, which reference the various resources in Andromeda, but in this instance, beyond overcoming a lack of RSE expertise, Iris makes the point that the package will make it easier for staff and implies it will save them time. It

supports early arguments, made by various respondents, that prior to adopting Andromeda, staff would 'scrabble about' for materials to use in lessons, usually from the internet. Again, the emphasis is on technical knowledge.

Similarly, Kirsten, a teacher at Wingfield Academy, said that she would recommend to other schools that they purchase Andromeda, or another all-inclusive curriculum package that simplifies the process of planning and delivering RSE for teachers. She said, look for “[a curriculum] that makes the teachers’ life easier, they’ll appreciate [that]” (2nd interview). Ian, a teacher responsible for delivering RSE at Wingfield, contrasted the work that teachers are responsible for in traditional school subjects with the work that they have to do for RSE. He said:

My subject is geography, and I don’t think I could persuade the school to buy into a scheme, because teachers can plan their own lessons... as teachers, [with Andromeda] half the work is done for you, in decision making and planning and everything.

Ian supports Kirsten’s argument that making teachers’ work easier is an appropriate aim for RSE policy, in part because they lack the skills required to design RSE lessons. Drawing on Morriss’ theorisation of epistemic ability – that is, the ability to make decisions with intent and knowledge about what results those decisions are likely to produce (2002) – as a component of power, I argue that Ian is contrasting geography teachers’ epistemic ability in their subject to the epistemic ability of those tasked with delivering RSE. He suggests that geography teachers ‘can’ plan their own lessons – a reference to their abilities – and thus he would be unable to construct a persuasive case for the school to buy into a geography scheme. However, the school leadership would not similarly expect teachers to plan their own RSE lessons, and this formed part of the rationale for adopting the Andromeda scheme.

The school’s decision to adopt a comprehensive curriculum echoes central government policy in relation to RSE, which for many years outsourced RSE provision to the private sector. This decision also aligns with neoliberal educational policies that promote managerial principles such as efficiency and standardization in schools (Bell and Green, 2016): with a single curriculum used across the school, the school could rely on a consistent quality and delivery of RSE. The decision also suggests a low priority for RSE in the school: rather than investing in teacher training and/or recruitment (as they have with geography), the school expects a comprehensive curriculum to be sufficient. I imagine that Macmurray would be critical of this attitude. In ‘Learning to be Human’, he wrote:

What matters most is that those who design [the curriculum] and those who teach it should be under no illusion that it constitutes the whole of education, or that it can be treated as if it were the paramount aspect. (Macmurray, 2012:673)

As discussed in Chapter Three, Macmurray argued that education should be based on human relationships and knowledge of – not about – other people in the school community.

A number of studies have suggested that the persistent, low status of RSE contributed to the lack of investment in teacher training (e.g. Pound et al., 2016; Alldred and David, 2007). A key argument made by the New Sociology of Education movement, was that decisions regarding curricula, including decisions about prioritisation, were deliberate expressions of power that served and were made by privileged groups in society (Apple, 1993; Moore, 2013; Young, 1971). In a country where education is much politicised, I assert that politicians do not have much to gain by making RSE part of their agenda, and that if they did they might stand to lose the support of constituents who feel that RSE should remain in the private domain. Whereas, those who are less privileged – notably children and young people, who have the most to gain from good quality RSE – have less voice and influence over decisions about RSE. This argument could similarly be applied to individual schools, who may stand to face opposition if they develop their own tailored approach to RSE and invest in it when financial resources are strained, whereas resorting to popular, commercial schemes may carry less risk. Children, similarly, often have no voice in these decisions.

While respondents at Fleming did not suggest that RSE should be designed to be easy and time-efficient, they also appreciated that Andromeda had all of the materials required to pick up and deliver RSE lessons. The ease with which educators could pick up and deliver Andromeda could have contributed to their selection of it.

5.3. Public arguments

Decision makers involved in deliberating about their school's RSE policy appealed to a number of public arguments. These included:

- We should deliver what other schools deliver
- Children are innocent and need protection
- [It] is required by the government
- RSE is part of preventing child exploitation

Other public arguments were invoked, for example through mentions of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and the *Equalities Act 2010*, but the significance of these were patchy and minimal compared to those discussed above.

"We should deliver what other schools deliver"

Two of the schools – Wingfield Academy and Fleming Primary – accessed RSE policies or resources from other schools in the process of deciding what their own school RSE policy should be. It became apparent that the underlying value of this exercise was to design their own school's RSE policy in a similar way.

Fleming Primary consulted written policies from other schools (accessed online) and adapted parts of them for their own policy. A member of the senior leadership team, Simone, said:

We looked at lots of different policies that other schools had produced... we narrowed it down to... three policies that we liked... we gave the policies to the staff and said, 'look, have a read of them, see what you like about them, see if they reflect our practice so that we're not reinventing the wheel... There were a few tweaks that we as a staff wanted to make after we had sort of amalgamated these three and added our own little bits... (2nd interview)

While Simone encouraged staff to pick up on aspects of the policies that they liked – to incorporate in their own policy – another key aim was efficiency: to prevent her staff from duplicating work that had been done before. Simone did not guide her staff to strive for excellence, to improve upon what other schools were offering, but to ensure that they were at least matching the status quo, or – in Social Realist terms – reflecting cognitive norms.

Kirsten, a member of the pastoral staff at Wingfield Academy, said that the basis for her aim of acquiring the Andromeda curriculum for the school, and using this for their RSE policy, was her experience with Andromeda at her previous school. Kirsten had not taught RSE or used Andromeda previously, but she knew that Andromeda had a good reputation (1st interview). Her recommendation appeared to be partly based on the reputation of Andromeda.

Two other respondents at Wingfield commented that the sharing of the Andromeda curriculum (and other resources) among schools in the academy chain was one of the advantages of the academy chain format. Julia, a member of the administrative staff, called it 'best practice' and Faye, a parent and former member of the governing body, said, "[Wingfield Academy is] quite good at sharing... [the Bridgestock schools are] quite good at sharing... singing from the same hymn sheet". As in Simone's interview, above, this suggests that the purpose of sharing materials and learning across schools is so that the schools are doing the same thing. However, this is an uncritical, procedural perspective: it suggests that sharing

between schools is positive and beneficial in and of itself – a technically superior practice – without any critical evaluation of the process or the outcomes. It recalls Macmurray's technical knowledge – knowledge about *how* things are done – without attention paid to *what* the aim is.

The data above is perhaps also indicative of the fact that Faye and Julia, who were both parents of children in the school, were neither, it turned out, actually involved in making decisions about the RSE policy. They both informed me that they had not been involved in conversations or deliberations about the RSE policy. Faye informed me that her only exposure to the school's RSE programme had been when her daughter told her that she had had an RSE lesson at school, and Julia's only involvement had been in relation to her role as administrative assistant, she had been asked to post the finalised policy on the website. She informed me that her children were too young to have RSE classes (other respondents suggested that all children from year one had RSE lessons, so perhaps Julia did not realise that they had in fact attended RSE). While the PSHE subject lead reported that she had hosted a parents' evening about RSE, and both these individuals suggested they were interested in RSE, neither of them had attended the parents' evening. This reflects observations made by Alldred et al. (2016), namely that involving parents in RSE is a great challenge that schools face.⁹

Malcolm, a local authority advisor for RSE, said that many of the schools he had worked with had a desire to know that they were not making themselves vulnerable by offering RSE that was more progressive than other schools. He said:

What they're getting [from me] is, 'there's a lot of us doing this, here's the spectrum of what people are doing, and you can sit where you want in that, but you're not isolated... there are other teachers like you, struggling with the same sorts of issues and concerns for their children'... I think that's probably the biggest factor in helping people do it...

While schools and teachers may offer the explanation that they do not want to make the school vulnerable and raise questions or complaints among parents, another possibility is that they are also uncomfortable and uninterested in RSE, so they are also acting to preserve their own interests. While learning from other schools and sharing valuable tools are touted as mechanisms for sharing best practice and improving the quality of teaching and learning,

⁹ As noted in my final chapter, my reading as to why my key contact at Wingfield Academy had put me in contact with Faye and Julia was related to my initial request that the school put me in touch with '5 or 6' individuals who had influenced the policy. My analysis suggests that only two respondents at Wingfield had a substantive influence on the school RSE policy, neither of whom were parents.

conversely, for Wingfield Academy and Fleming Primary, in the context of RSE these mechanisms seemed to be employed for maintaining the status quo and cognitive norms.

Annette, a member of the senior leadership team at Wingfield Academy, said, “there’s not much of an opportunity for us to meet and discuss what we do [in SRE] with other schools... it’s not something that we talk about when we meet with colleagues.” (1st interview). While the sharing of resources was presented as evidence of good performance, Annette appears to confirm the lack of critical discussion about RSE among the schools. As discussed in the literature review, as central government has delegated more responsibility to schools to decide how they deliver educational outcomes, procedures for monitoring and surveillance have intensified and as a result, performativity has become a core value in the delivery of education (Ball, 2003; Elliott, 2011), or, I would argue, another cognitive norm.

"Children are innocent and need protection"

The idea of childhood innocence, and the asexual child, is a public discourse that has been present since at least the Romantic period, and as suggested in the policy context it has been applied to different versions of RSE over time (e.g. Hall, 2004). The argument that children are innocent and do not need to know about sexuality was most prevalent at Fleming Primary, but also emerged at Wingfield Academy. While respondents at Latimer did not present this argument, it is included here in the analysis because it was reflected in their conversations with parents, which suggests it remains an important argument in their school community.

At Fleming Primary, a number of respondents suggested that many of their pupils were less exposed to events and activities that occur outside of their everyday environments, compared to children in state schools, and that their RSE policy should reflect this. Lena, a member of the administrative staff who was responsible for updating the text of the RSE policy, and who also has a child at the school, said:

Something that the school is very proud of, is allowing children to be children, and protecting that childhood as long as possible, from all the *stuff* that goes on in the outside world... part of that is the whole kind of biological side of sex and sexual relationships, and sexual body parts... that’s not part of... fluffy teddy bears... the children come from an environment where the parents are protecting them from the outside world... you don’t need to know about the Paris bombings... and you don’t have to, kind of, process that information. (2nd interview)

Terms such as ‘allowing children to be children’, ‘fluffy teddy bears’, the ‘outside world’ and ‘you don’t need to know’ betray a naïve understanding of children’s capacities, knowledge and curiosity about themselves and the world they live in. It also suggests the speaker envisages a

divide between 'child' and 'adult', according to which all things sexual sit on the 'adult' side. As suggested by a number of government-sponsored reports, such as the Home Office's 'Sexualisation of Young People' report (Papadopoulos, 2010) and the Department for Education's independent review into the commercialisation and sexualisation of children (Bailey, 2011), children are continually re-constructed in the public sphere as lacking any sexual curiosity or agency. Lena appears to subscribe to this view.

Simone, at Fleming, said:

Something that was really controversial... is the language that we use to describe the sexual parts... teachers of the younger children did not want to use penis and vagina because they weren't friendly... We put it out there to the parents and we had absolutely no feedback... they were quite happy with the scientific terms. (1st interview)

Simone notes that parents were satisfied with the school using the scientific names for sexual parts, so the policy proceeded on that basis, but as presented earlier, other data support the suggestion that staff brought their personal opinions into policy deliberations and did 'dumb down' some content recommended for year six students. This part of the interview – including the words and Simone's body language – suggested that Simone felt frustrated with staff members who expressed discomfort with children's developing knowledge and sexuality. Her response was to put it out to parents and enable the final decision to rest on 'the market', by relying on parent feedback.

Malcolm, a local authority advisor on RSE noted that many primary schools use the narrative of protection to justify limiting their RSE programme. He said:

There is a dislocation between seeing the problem and being willing to take steps towards solving that, other than managing, you know, setting boundaries and managing... like blocking internet sites... cutting it off. So the narrative is still that children are asexual, not interested, and are innocent and have to be protected, which is, to a degree, sort of true, but it's also not a complete reading... of what is going on for children. (1st and only interview)

By 'seeing the problem', in this passage, Malcolm refers to the tension between evidence that children are interested in sexuality, such as touching themselves sexually, accessing porn and sexting, and awareness that children lack resources to learn about sexuality. He recognises that educators want to make things 'ok' for children, but they are unwilling to take on this contested subject.

This public argument is an example of Macmurray's valuational knowledge, and of cognitive aims, because it reflects motivations and aims about what decision makers thought RSE should achieve. Specifically, this argument suggests that RSE should help to preserve the domain of childhood as one that is safe, asexual and playful (i.e. clearly distinct from the adult

world of terrorism and eroticism) (cognitive goal), and that it can do so by being guided by adults, who confidently know what children need to know (cognitive norm). It is useful to appreciate that valuational knowledge need not necessarily reflect expert evidence about what RSE should be, it can also reflect conservative ideas about children's development.

"It is required by the government"

One of the most prominent public arguments present in the data is that schools are required to teach (or not teach) specific aspects of RSE because of what government legislation and policy stipulate. Respondents at all three schools spoke about the official Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (DfEE, 2000), and it was also cited in all three of the schools' written policies for RSE.

Iris, at Latimer Primary, noted that whatever processes the school engaged in (e.g. consultation), and whatever other documents they utilised in formulating their policy for RSE, "ultimately, in terms of the school, whether we like it or not, the local authority and government tell us the line, and that's the line we don't cross" (1st interview). Laurence, a member of the senior leadership team, gave the example of contraception to illustrate how the government guidance limited what the school could teach in RSE. He said:

In primary school we're not supposed to talk about contraception... I personally think that if people are asking then I should answer that. But it has been something we have had to try to avoid... I think that really should be mentioned in year six. There are really young parents. (1st interview)

By 'we're not supposed to talk about contraception', Laurence is referring to the limitations posed on RSE policy by the government. Although the 2000 government guidance does not prohibit primary schools from teaching about contraception, contraception is clearly identified as a topic for secondary schools. The guidance allows for primary schools to provide guidance on contraception when specific children express a need for this support (DfEE, 2000:16). My perception was that Laurence was fairly informed about the government guidance, so I infer that his interpretation and/or the guidance from the local authority did not support Latimer to deliver the RSE that they feel their pupils needed.

Government guidance and legislation is one of the most formal mechanisms through which cognitive goals are established and maintained. As I discussed in Chapters Two and Three, government guidance serves in part to establish valuational knowledge – what has value in the world, what is worth knowing – in the curriculum. Thus, respondents reflected that their school standards regarding valuational knowledge in RSE were determined, to some extent, by

the government. However, understanding government policy is more complex than the words contained in the policy document: as government policy is put into practice, it is interpreted and recontextualised by diverse actors involved in implementation, including senior staff members at state schools (Bernstein, 2000). Thus, respondents' interpretations are not necessarily what was intended by those who developed the government guidance.

Same-sex relationships is another content area of RSE where respondents at Latimer expressed feeling constrained by the government guidance, but where respondents' interpretation of government policy is complicated not only by the evolution of the public policy position, but by the response of members of the school community to this particular issue. A member of the senior leadership team at Latimer Primary, Sarah, said:

We have communities that believe that homosexuality is not ok, and that is, totally against their religion, etcetera. They would prefer that we do not talk about same-sex relationships. We won't do that. We will say that there are lots of different types of families... but we won't do a big lesson... we won't do a big promotion about it, but we won't pretend that it is not there. (1st interview)

Sarah suggests that it is in response to the community that the school would not do a 'big promotion' about same-sex relationships, but it is likely that the government guidance on sex and relationship education has also contributed to this decision. The government guidance says, "[Sex and Relationship Education] is not about the promotion of sexual orientation or sexual activity – this would be inappropriate teaching." (2000:5). Sarah does not use the word 'promotion' anywhere else to talk about the content of RSE, and nor do any other respondents, however it is a word that is strongly associated with both the current and historical government policies on addressing same-sex relationships in schools. Section 28 of the Local Communities Act (1988), stated that local authorities "shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or public material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability as a pretended family relationship". Though Section 28 was repealed in England in 2003, and regardless that it applied only to local authorities and not to schools directly, the language of Section 28 was much reported in the media and was talked about in the public sphere in relation to schools, and it is quite likely that Sarah is familiar with it. This is an example of intertextuality, discussed by Stewart in relation to socioscientific controversies (126). Sarah's use of language suggests that her understanding of policy in relation to same-sex relationships, and her decisions about how the school will address this issue, stem from historical and contemporary public policies, as well as community concerns. In policy making about RSE, therefore, Latimer Primary links together text and arguments that emerge from diverse spheres and discourses.

However, while respondents at Latimer are concerned that their RSE policy should comply with the government policy and guidance, the data suggested that the policy itself is not the first consideration in implementation. Kate said:

A lot more stuff is happening than is in the policy... teachers, for example, wouldn't necessarily pick up the policy first as a direction of what they should be doing, they would think, 'well what am I teaching?' and 'what class do I have?'. That is more powerful than, 'what does the policy say that I should do?'. (2nd interview)

This suggests that while the government guidance, and in turn the written school policy, may provide some structure, the actual delivery of RSE may be driven by teachers' knowledge of their pupils and their epistemic abilities.

Beyond official government policy and guidance, it may be argued that the Andromeda curriculum is viewed by schools as a vehicle for governmental recommendations for RSE. I make this claim on the basis that Andromeda is endorsed by the local authority and because the Andromeda publishers state that it was developed in accordance with the government Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (2000). Kirsten, at Wingfield Academy, said, "[Andromeda has] pictures of two men, with a child, and because it's normal now... if [Andromeda] has done it, they must have got the OK before they released this all to schools" (2nd interview). Kirsten recalls this family image to describe Andromeda's treatment of same-sex relationships, and by 'the OK', Kirsten means that the government must have approved it. At Latimer Primary, Sarah noted that the local authority endorsement of Andromeda made it a safe choice for staff (as discussed above), which implied, in part, that staff could be confident that its content was in line with the official government guidance. A full analysis of Andromeda is not within the scope of this study, but one example from the curriculum raises questions about its influence on primary schools' RSE policies.

The example I draw on is a year six RSE lesson from Andromeda, which aims to teach children about sexual intercourse. In the Andromeda training session delivered by the publishers, participants viewed a video that demonstrated sexual intercourse with an animated diagram of a penis entering a vagina. Through animation and audio, the video stated that sex was preceded by male (not female) arousal and proceeded to demonstrate human reproduction with diagrams of reproductive organs, conflating sex and reproduction. The trainer confirmed that this – together with corresponding activity sheets, lesson plans, etc – was the only introduction to sex in Andromeda. While this introduction to sex may be consistent with the government guidance on RSE, the knowledge it represents is biological, medical, sexist and heterosexual. There are no faces, bodies or identities to associate with the anatomical

diagrams, and no social or emotional scenarios accompany the sexual act. Critiques of current practices of RSE, and of a variety of RSE curricula, suggest that 'sex' should be represented more broadly, including not only heterosexual penis-in-vagina (often called 'PIV') intercourse but other intimate sexual behaviours, sexual acts between people of the same sex or gender, and by locating sex within relationships and situations that are social, emotional and realistic. The government guidance for schools on the *Equalities Act 2010*, for example, argues that schools must not discriminate against pupils, including on the basis of sex or sexual orientation, in the way it "provides pupils access to any benefit, facility or service" (DfE, 2014b:7). Based on the training session I attended, I would argue that any pupil who identifies as a girl or woman, lesbian, gay, bisexual, non-binary or transgender may feel excluded and/or discriminated against if they attended a lesson that taught about sex using only the *Andromeda* curriculum. Mason (2010) found that children were more confident and comfortable talking about sex when it was introduced and taught in the context of relationships, and she also found that lessons that recognized multiple motivations for having sex (e.g. pleasure, procreation, etc) helped promote a more comprehensive understanding of sexual relationships. Based on my exposure to *Andromeda*, it appeared to present the male as having all the agency and pleasure in sex and thus it failed to challenge gender stereotypes, and it also missed the opportunity to discuss diverse ways that people express intimacy and sexuality.

While the publishers of *Andromeda* claim to be experts in RSE, the disparity between this resource for teaching human reproduction and the recommendations and findings of a range of peer-reviewed studies and articles on RSE (e.g. Pound et al., 2015, 2016; Mason, 2010) bring into question what, or whose, expert knowledge informed the development of *Andromeda*, as well as whose interests are being served by *Andromeda*. The New Sociology of Education movement, dating from 1971 (Young, 1971) made this latter question a key consideration in the development of curriculum, and more recently Social Realism uses the term 'cognitive interests' to refer to those groups – often privileged, monied groups – who benefit from particular biases in the curriculum. In this case, I would suggest that the commercial interests of the publisher should be investigated. The publisher is in the market to sell a product and potentially controversial content – such as LGBT-inclusive teaching of sexual intercourse, or female sexual desire – could compromise sales. While the government promotes the involvement of commercial companies in education to promote cost savings and 'choice' (i.e.

parental choice, as discussed earlier), the data clearly suggests¹⁰ that respondents felt they did not have many choices for good quality resources. The data suggests that Andromeda had a monopoly in the market of RSE curricula, if not in PSHE more broadly, in Collingwood, and it came to dominate the knowledge basis of RSE at all three schools. Given the lack of comparable alternatives, there was arguably little incentive for the publishers to develop a curriculum that was particularly progressive, especially considering the somewhat controversial nature and history of RSE. As suggested by Ball (2013), knowledge is a business product, to be exported for the greatest value. While Ball was writing about the tertiary education market in this instance, his astute observations are applicable to non-statutory areas such as RSE which, one may argue, commercial companies have significant scope to profit from given the lack of specialist educators in this area (e.g. Formby et al., 2011; House of Commons Education Committee, 2015), together with an apparent lack of availability of good quality curricula. I suggest that competition and private sector involvement, as cognitive norms in education, are not serving the interests of schools or pupils when it comes to RSE. However, this type of private sector provision may be precisely what the government would consider a successful model of public-private collaboration in education. As noted in Chapter Two, since early in the 19th century the government has outsourced RSE to private sector parties – usually non-profit organizations – and this has enabled them to devolve responsibility for what is taught and evade public scrutiny on the subject. With private manufacturers now touting their products directly to schools, the government is implicated even less than when they outsourced RSE. Thus, I argue, the cognitive norm of competition – that has led schools to select commercially produced curricula, including Andromeda – serves the neoliberal agenda. Specifically, the aim to reduce the role of the state and introduce market elements to produce an efficient, effective public service. However, my discussion suggests that by relying on the commercial market to produce RSE curricula and resources – that is, by applying the cognitive norm of competition to this area – the government failed to ensure that schools would have access to good quality resources. While there are additional factors at work, further complicating schools’ abilities and choices, I suggest that the cognitive norm of competition constrained agents’ ‘ableness’ to affect appropriate outcomes in RSE policy.

¹⁰ See analysis above in relation to a technical argument articulated by respondents: ‘To overcome our lack of expertise and good quality resources’.

Despite my observations and analyses, the data suggest that Andromeda was well-liked and recommended by PSHE subject leads in a variety of local schools and by the local authority. It is understandable that school decision makers would value these recommendations in their deliberations. While Andromeda's other PSHE components may be good quality, my exposure to it leaves me unpersuaded in its merit as a curriculum for RSE.

The data and my analysis on the argument about needing to comply with government standards and policies suggests that government policy constrained the RSE policies at all three of the schools. Furthermore, all three schools have been constrained to some degree in their RSE programmes because of their adoption of the Andromeda curriculum as the core package for RSE.

The diverse arguments and practices relating to RSE policy, as reported and discussed throughout this thesis, suggest that the *content* of the government guidance (DfEE, 2000) was in fact a minor consideration. While it set some parameters, the guidance document was more often spoken about as an element of the school's obligation in relation to RSE, in relation to accountability structures linking the school to the state. Thus, while few respondents could speak confidently about the content of the government guidance (DfEE, 2000), it was cited in all three school RSE policies, which is in accordance with schools' obligation to develop their RSE policies *with reference to* the policy document, but not necessarily following the guidance closely. It should also be noted that although Fleming Primary is an independent school, and therefore not bound to refer to the government guidance on RSE, in the previous year it had achieved the Healthy School Standard, a government accreditation, which makes reference to RSE (and the government guidance), and in addition the school developed its curriculum and policies more generally with reference to state standards (which will be discussed in Chapter Six).

"Relationships and sex education is part of preventing child exploitation"

The government's statutory guidance on safeguarding, called 'Keeping children safe in school' (2016), together with public furore and media reports on child sexual exploitation, had notable impacts on the RSE policies of both state schools – Latimer Primary and Wingfield Academy – and to a lesser extent at Fleming Primary, the independent school.

At Wingfield Academy, safeguarding was the primary reason used to justify RSE to parents and also to teachers being asked to deliver it. This approach was adopted from the Andromeda training, attended by Kirsten, a member of the pastoral staff. She said:

When I went on my [Andromeda] training, and they were like, ‘and year one is now going to be doing SRE’, and I was like, ‘what!’. [laughs] ‘That’s not what I signed up for as a year one teacher!’. But when they explained the safeguarding behind it, everyone was like, ‘oh yeah, that actually makes a lot of sense’. (1st interview)

Kirsten went on to explain how she introduced the Andromeda curriculum to parents and explained the utility of the subject using the safeguarding argument. Safeguarding is now a central component to Kirsten’s definition of RSE:

In primary school, [RSE] is... a science lesson, just teaching children all about the different parts of the body, the science behind how babies are made. We don’t in year one, we’re literally just naming body parts, and again that’s more of the safeguarding. Touch wood nothing ever happens, but if it were to, they would know exactly what to say, what language to use, and if someone asked them a question, they wouldn’t be confused by it. (1st interview)

In this explanation, it seems that the primary reason for teaching children the correct names of their body parts is for their own protection and defence (in the event of suspected abuse). This approach is reflected in Wingfield Academy’s written policy and by other respondents.

Similarly, safeguarding is central to RSE at Latimer Primary. Laurence offered the following definition:

Children having an understanding of the safeguarding point of view, what healthy relationships are, their right to be safe and say ‘no’, and sex and relationships education at our school, from an early age also incorporates the sort of NSPCC ‘pants rule’, about being safe and keeping yourself safe. (1st interview)

This is not the entirety of the definition, but it clearly makes safeguarding a pivotal feature. While children’s safety and protection is an important and recognized rationale for RSE, as discussed in Chapter Two there are a number of other important benefits of RSE that should not be neglected. RSE can also support gender equality – among children and into adulthood – through the development of critical thinking skills around gender norms and fostering an appreciation and celebration of gender and sexual diversity (DePalma, 2013; Renold, 2003) and RSE can help children and young people to become assertive their relationships and confident in their bodies (Hirst, 2004; TPIAG, 2009). The discourse of safety and protection is another manifestation of the risk-oriented and damage limitation model of RSE that has been critiqued for failing to acknowledge relationships and sexuality as sources of pleasure and happiness in young people’s lives, and which fails to support children and young people to navigate their lives as creative agents (Corteen, 2006; Hall, 2004; Littleton, 2012).

Most respondents at Fleming Primary did not identify safeguarding as a central part of RSE, but safeguarding was identified as being important within the school. Audrey said that pupil’s safety was ‘paramount’ and in this context recounted a personal connection, and therefore

commitment to working with children on issues such as self-esteem and mental health. However, this was less connected to RSE compared to the other two schools.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the discourse of risk and protection has come to dominate public discourse around RSE at national policy level and it was, I argued, the lynchpin that secured the majority vote in parliament to make RSE statutory, as part of social work legislation. The values reflected in this discourse are that children are vulnerable and exposed, that the state has an obligation to equip children to protect themselves against predators. These values have become cognitive norms in the field of RSE, as suggested by my data and analyses. This argument reflects both valuational and technical knowledge, as it does answer the question of what RSE should do, but that 'what' is itself instrumental: RSE will serve to protect children from abuse and exploitation. Thus, safeguarding is a multi-faceted interest underpinning decision making about RSE.

However, one area of concern in respondents' treatment of safeguarding in relation to RSE is that safeguarding was spoken about almost exclusively in terms of prevention. The aim, in relation to safeguarding, was to prevent children from being drawn into dangerous and unhealthy situations in the first place. Only one respondent, Sarah at Latimer, acknowledged that RSE should be responsive to the fact that some children have already experienced damaging and unhealthy relationships, and other types of trauma. She said:

Certain children that either have seen things that they shouldn't have seen or have experienced things that they shouldn't have experienced... We have children who have been taken into care and who are adopted for very specific reasons, and we have children who are on child protection... so we need to be really really careful about where we draw the line in terms of children bringing stuff to, for it to be explored in a safe, secure way. (2nd interview)

Sarah did not touch on how this was addressed in policy, but suggested that staff knew which pupils had child protection plans and took these into consideration in teaching RSE.

Macmurray's argument that intersubjective knowledge should be a guiding principle in education is relevant and valuable here (1957). If RSE was driven more by the relationships that educators have with children and their knowledge of them, it seems likely that RSE would be more responsive to children's individual experiences. The data above – and perhaps more importantly the absence of data addressing the needs of children who have had difficult and damaging experiences of relationships and sexuality – suggests that far more thought and consideration must be made of how RSE policies and RSE educators should be responding to these needs, and also how their presence in RSE classrooms may affect what and how other children participate and learn.

5.4. Summary

In this chapter, I analysed the arguments that respondents used to make decisions about RSE, and I argued that RSE policies were based on both public and technical arguments (as per Goodnight's typology of argumentative strategies). Public arguments invoke public discourses and criteria and values championed by public institutions, whereas technical arguments are based on criteria related to the teaching and organisation of RSE, and recognized standards of quality in the field. Public criteria included the priority placed on documenting and performing outcomes by the Department for Education, and schools' important role in safeguarding children. Technical arguments related to access to good planning materials and resources for educators tasked with delivering RSE (given limited expertise in RSE among educators), and techniques for making efficiency gains, in view of the low priority of the subject. No personal arguments were common across the schools.

Many of the arguments presented reflect cognitive norms in education. These norms are, by definition, standardized codes, procedures and techniques, and many of them are promoted and/or measured by the state. Even though one of the schools is officially independent, administratively, it is part of the education sector and is influenced by standards established in the state. One observation about the analyses in this chapter is how often technical knowledge coincided or was reflected in cognitive norms. Many of the values and arguments related to how things are done, not the aims and goals of RSE. Biesta (REF), Ball (2000, 2009) and Elliott (2011) have all argued that central government education policy has focused excessively on technical, or instrumental, knowledge, such that values such as effectiveness, efficiency, competition, accountability and performativity – all key principles advanced through neoliberal public policy – now precede all other considerations. My findings suggest that these values are also prioritized in RSE. I conclude that through its neoliberal policies the government restricted the 'ableness' of agents in schools to affect appropriate outcomes in RSE policy because the cognitive norms created by these policies limit other kinds of knowledge and abilities. Important decisions are, consequently, not informed by valuational knowledge, or even intersubjective knowledge, or these play, at best, minor parts. Thus, the only valuational knowledge that cut across the schools to inform their RSE policies were public arguments regarding safeguarding and protecting children's innocence.

An important finding is the significance of the Andromeda curriculum. At all three schools, the Andromeda curriculum was readily available and appeared to respond to a number of aims that respondents were motivated to achieve with regards to RSE. It responded to criteria

connected with both public and technical arguments for the RSE policy: while Andromeda provided all the materials needed to deliver RSE and was perceived as a tool to overcome the lack of expertise among educators, it was also promoted by the local authority and apparently conformed to the official government guidance and policy. However, Andromeda appeared to set the agenda and pre-empted engaged, informed policy deliberations: most respondents did not critique the content of and knowledge reflected in Andromeda's RSE lessons. The emphasis on technical knowledge, as discussed above, is perhaps one reason why educators were satisfied to proceed with making decisions about RSE even while they lacked epistemic abilities in relation to the subject. The familiar (e.g. well-structured) format of Andromeda, paired with its wealth of resources, audio-visual materials, worksheets, etc, gave educators the confidence that they could deliver RSE, and distracted many of them from the fact that they lacked epistemic ability in the subject.

Chapter 6: School ethos, culture and leadership

A proponent of the argumentative approach to policy analysis, Dryzek wrote, “argument itself is not enough. The defensibility of policy analysis... depends on the conditions in which arguments are made, received, and acted upon” (1993:214). As noted earlier, the literature on RSE suggests that a school’s ethos – its values and mission – can have an impact on how decision makers and educators understand and incorporate RSE in the curriculum (Abbott et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2011; Gardener et al., 2000). The conditions through which arguments are advanced and contribute to policy also include educators’ shared beliefs about educational ideals, attitudes and values, and behaviours for achieving the school mission (Lawton, 1994). It is relevant here to recall Fischer and his concept of ‘cultural reasoning’ because of the emphasis he places on process. He wrote:

[Cultural reasoning] places emphasis on the circumstances under which the judgement was made, identified and publicized, the standing or place of the individual in his or her community who announces it, and the social values of the community as a whole... Cultural reasoning can, in this respect, be understood as a form of rationality inherent to the social-life world. (2009:151)

Even within a larger, institutional framework and a common culture, individual schools may define their own ways of ascribing value and reasoning in their decision-making processes. These may emerge from historical foundations or be championed by staff and others within the school.

Thus, this second findings chapter focuses on contextually specific conditions that contributed to preferences for particular types of knowledge in RSE policies. I examine institutional norms and draw out each school’s culture and ethos – the shared values and standards of knowing – and each school’s management and leadership practices – such as the policy process, power dynamics among decision makers responsible for RSE, and codes and procedures.

6.1. Latimer Primary School

As discussed above, Latimer Primary is a locally maintained school, characterised by ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity, and located near the city centre.

School ethos

Of the three schools, respondents at Latimer Primary represented the school ethos and culture most strongly: it is clearly defined and promoted by staff, it is expressed with specific values, and is also distinctive from the values and principles present in UK educational policy, as well

as other public arguments (as discussed in Chapter Five). The themes that emerged about Latimer Primary's ethos and culture, which had a bearing on the knowledge appealed to in deliberations about the RSE policy, were:

- School ethos embodies key aspects of relationships and sex education
- Responsiveness to the community
- Responsiveness to pupils

I elaborate on each of these themes in the following sections.

School ethos embodies key aspects of relationships and sex education

At Latimer, issues such as relationships, emotions, personal decision making and safety are integral to their RSE policy, but are similarly part of their school ethos and therefore cross into other areas of their teaching and school culture. Kate, a teacher and PSHE subject lead, said:

[PSHE] doesn't always have a beginning and an end, like French... although we teach distinct lessons, it falls into so many other things... it's all the time... when does it become PSHE and when does it become behaviour management policy, and when is it sex and relationships education, or safeguarding... It blurs so many boundaries... that it is kind of hard to keep it, 'this is the subject that we teach'. (1st interview)

Sarah, a member of the senior leadership team, similarly explained the school's mission and educational goals, and links them to RSE:

What we're trying to do here is giving children enough knowledge and empowering them to be able to make healthy choices as they grow up and being able to navigate the complex... relationships between friends... and as they grow older, between co-sexual partners... It's what we call 'caught and taught', so it's not just about the, well a letter goes home and we're going to have the 'sex lessons'... we're talking all of the time about permissions, and about consent, and about the way that we are, and we're living that through the values of the school (1st interview)

In this passage, Sarah clearly articulates the cognitive goals that she and other members of the senior leadership team have defined for the school, as well as the cognitive norms that will enable the school to achieve these goals. As Schmaus wrote, "Cognitive values specify the aims... cognitive norms specify the means to achieve these goals" (1994:263, qtd in Young, 2008). Sarah makes clear that her commitment to teaching about consent, about healthy relationships and about informed decision making extend beyond the RSE curriculum. 'Caught and taught' is a pedagogical approach that refers to teaching lessons and values through everyday practice. A member of the pastoral staff, Wendy, gave this example:

[Laurence] just handed out some information about how to talk to girls. You know, you make sure you are inclusive and aren't setting yourself up, saying 'oh isn't she a pretty little girl'... our children here, they question you... they will say, 'what did you mean by that?', they are not frightened to ask... we are educating people all the time.

We are constantly saying things like, 'better you rephrase that, reframe that question... we would like you to use these words instead', and that's the only way you can move forward... that's how we talk to our parents, and that's how we talk to each other (1st interview)

This passage illustrates how the staff are promoting language and values that reflect human rights, particularly messages around equalities and inclusion, in everyday interactions with pupils, other teachers and parents. The cognitive aims identified by respondents at Latimer are mostly closely aligned with what Macmurray called intersubjective knowledge, that is, knowledge about community. It relates to aspects of life that are shared and take place between people (Macmurray, 2012).

The alignment of Latimer's ethos with its work around RSE reflects existing literature from the field which suggests that RSE and school ethos can be mutually supportive. Brown et al., for example, suggest:

A sympathetic school ethos might support... PSHE into a school whilst the presence of PSHE in a school curriculum might assist in identifying and strengthening the core values of that school. The school ethos also supports the impact that PSHE can have on pupils' attitudes, values and behaviour. (2011: 119)

The synergies between the school's ethos and RSE policy contribute to what I will argue is the school's whole school approach to RSE. The following sections includes data and analysis that relate to this theme so I will return to it in more detail below.

Responsiveness to the community

Respondents at Latimer Primary spoke in depth about their efforts to engage parents and families in what they aim to achieve in RSE, and to adapt RSE, if necessary, to accommodate parents' concerns. Amy, a member of the pastoral staff, said:

We take on board the school that we have, we take on board the families, we take on board the children, and we take on board the different views and we try to make [RSE] to be as sensitive as possible... we do adapt [RSE] for different families, we have done, we've put out the curriculum in a slightly different way (1st and only interview)

In addition, Sarah said, "I think that we have worked really really hard on talking a *lot* about healthy relationships and what that looks like, and in the context of all sorts of different types of families." (1st interview). Iris and Wendy spoke about the effort and time they expend on getting to know parents and families, for example by talking to them at the school gates every day, and a number of respondents noted that they spend a significant amount of time meeting with parents who have concerns to explain the RSE programme. Wendy, for example, said:

We do a lot of work with the parents as well, first, so we tell them, we show them our resources, we show them the clips, we tell them exactly what we're going to tell their children, and then in some cases, [laughs] we've taught parents things. Because they all, they say 'I didn't get that bit'. (1st interview)

The aim of these conversations is not only to seek parents' support for their child(ren) to participate, but also to develop relationships with parents and foster the idea that RSE is a joint effort that families and schools do together. If gaining the parents' support meant adapting the programme, they would. For example, they would provide small group, single-sex lessons for children whose parents did not want them to learn about puberty in mixed sex classes.

As part of his 'school as community' concept, Macmurray suggested that personal relations should take priority over functional relations (Macmurray, 1950, 1957; Stern, 2012).

Macmurray's theory of personal relations is that relationships and interactions between people are reciprocal and caring exchanges between individuals, concerned for people and not for ends; whereas functional relations are transactions focused on specific ends, not on people (Macmurray, 1950; Fielding, 2007). The data presented above suggest that respondents at Latimer Primary did take care to develop relationships with the children, the parents and other members of the community, to learn about their culture and values, and the data suggests that these interactions were based on an interest in the people themselves. Wendy, for example, spoke with enthusiasm about building relationships with parents and she was sympathetic to the fact that sometimes parents had received poor RSE themselves and still lacked knowledge that the school was proposing to teach their children. She took pride in the fact that she was also teaching parents at times.

One of the ways that the senior leadership team ensured that all staff were committed to the same cognitive goals, and the cognitive norms through which these goals would be achieved, was through recruitment. Sarah said:

We're always looking for that empathy, and looking for those, the way that people value relationships... We are looking for how they relate to the children, the way they speak... what they think are important in education... That's a big thing here, when people realise [our ethos] runs through everything we do here, like a stick of rock, then they kind of, they either stay and really throw themselves into it, or they go. And lots of people do leave, because, they leave because of the behaviour policy, because the behaviour policy is about the positive management of emotions, and about discipline with dignity... Also some people don't like the way we bend and are flexible with the community. They say, you know 'I'm about education, I'm not a social worker'. (2nd interview)

The terms 'empathy', 'relationships', 'dignity' and 'flexible' emerge from this passage and signify the value that the school places on respecting who people are and where they come from. While the school places value on flexibility and empathy, adapting to its community, the ethos itself is 'a stick of rock', it has gravitas and rigidity.

Thus, although respondents at Latimer Primary are concerned about being responsive to the community and adapting the delivery of RSE where possible to accommodate personal, cultural and religious beliefs, there are limitations to these adaptations. The school's commitment to specific educational values – to the cognitive aims it has established for the education it offers – takes priority over community responsiveness and personal relations. Though some respondents demonstrated that they were interested in parents and other community members, I propose that the data suggested that relationships between the respondents and parents, and between the senior leadership team members and teachers, were what Macmurray would recognize as 'functional' relations. Respondents' engagement with the community is an instrumental part of being able to deliver RSE effectively, in line with the school RSE policy. Similarly, Sarah suggests that recruitment decisions are made on the basis of how well staff align with the existing cognitive aims – the ethos – whether they will be able to adopt and mobilize them. Staff-management relationships are not personal (although personal aspects may develop), they are functional. These findings are consistent with literature on how teachers formulate their RSE provision. Abbott et al., for example, suggested that teachers conceptualised their RSE provision in line with school ethos because doing so gave them a rationale for the decisions they made, in a context where the teachers were found not to have substantial expertise in RSE (2016:682, 689).

While the school ethos at Latimer Primary helps to make the school sensitive to its community, it should also be asked to what extent the specific community has pushed the school to adopt this type of ethos. One particular aspect of Latimer Primary's RSE policy may be seen as a direct response to the local context and history: the inclusion of measures to protect RSE educators. The argument that RSE policy should protect staff members from risks to safety and reputation was only put forward by respondents at Latimer Primary, which suggests that it is related to the local context.

Latimer Primary school included a provision in their RSE policy that two staff members, including at least one teacher, would be present in all lessons. Sarah, a member of the senior leadership team, said:

We always make sure there are two people in the lessons. Just because it just means that one, you have somebody else to be able to support that dialogue, and two, if anybody said that there was anything, you know, there is another adult to be able to protect you if there was an allegation or anything like that. (1st interview)

'Safety', in this context, means that arguments for including or disallowing certain things in the RSE policy pertained to reducing the risks for staff members, such as false accusations that could bring into question individual staff members' integrity or professionalism.

Sarah illustrated the risks faced by teachers in her example about teaching human reproduction. She said, "we talk about how babies are born, you know, how they're delivered, in that kind of, in that ring-fenced kind of [way]...". Then, she pointed out:

There are things in the papers and in the news, and on the telly, that the children are hearing about, and then they are coming into school to do the relationships and sex education, and we're talking about, 'well, you need a man's sperm, and a lady's egg, and this is how a baby is made', well actually, no, there are so many other ways that babies are made now. And we have children in the school who have been made in lots of different ways, who *know* that they have... suppose there was an opportunity to be able to, to answer that question or to talk more generally about, 'well actually, Jim, there are lot's more ways, yes'... but... what ends up being concentrated out in the message that goes home, 'well, today we learnt about transgender people being able to have babies and babies being grown in...', and all sorts, and you know, you have to be really careful that it doesn't get taken out of context. (1st interview)

By 'made in lots of different ways', Sarah refers to assisted conception methods, such as in vitro fertilisation. Sarah suggests here that teachers' efforts to help children understand human reproduction could cause stress and anxiety at home because of the way children may communicate the content of lessons to their parents, or parents' interpretations of children's narratives. So, having two adults in a RSE classroom is a way of protecting staff who are delivering the lessons from complaints and allegations of inappropriate teaching.

This passage also illustrates Sarah's frustration with the limitations presented by the government Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (DfEE, 2000), and by the potential negative consequences of addressing children's questions in more depth than what the government advises (e.g. "in that 'ring-fenced' kind of [way]"). However, while it is the risk of negative consequences that Sarah brings attention to, she is also highlighting the controversial nature of some aspects of RSE. Implicit in her narrative is that children learning about transgender people being able to have babies and that babies can be born through assisted conception methods would not be acceptable to some parents, or at least that it would not be

acceptable outside of the context of RSE¹¹. Some of the respondents explicitly aligned these challenges with the ethnic and cultural diversity of the student body, which is unique at Latimer compared to the other two research sites. As noted above, although respondents at Latimer Primary did not use the public discourse of child innocence and asexuality to advance their policy preferences, they encountered these messages through conversations with parents.

One way of interpreting and understanding the challenges that respondents at Latimer Primary faced – in terms of feeling constrained by the government’s official guidance on RSE (DfEE, 2000) and also concerned about how parents and the community might respond to the school’s attempts to provide a more adequate and nuanced RSE to pupils – is in relation to Morriss’ concept of ableness. As mentioned above, Morriss’ theory of power twins agents’ abilities with ‘ableness’. Ableness refers to agents being able – through authorisation, qualifications and practical ability to perform the task at hand – to take action to affect outcomes. While the government has not officially authorised the school to teach about assisted conception technologies – to use the example offered by Sarah – through its official guidance, it has authorised the school to make autonomous decisions about RSE by assigning it the task of developing its own RSE policy. Sarah suggests that this is something pupils are curious about, and she would like to school to be able to address their interest, however she is concerned that parents, and the community, will not ‘authorise’ this teaching. Community engagement around RSE, as discussed above, is one way of mitigating negative impacts, and obtaining authorisation for the kind of RSE that the school seeks to deliver – with the interests of its pupils in mind. Backstopping each RSE lesson with two staff members may be understood as another way of claiming the school’s authority and qualification to deliver appropriate RSE. It provides a means for RSE educators – perceived as vulnerable to claims of professional incompetence or inappropriateness – to verify their professionalism.

In addition to having two adults in every class, it was partly due to the school’s concern about safety – or authorisation – that led them to select the Andromeda curriculum for its RSE programme. Sarah said:

¹¹ As an aside, this particular example pinpoints errors in assumptions that the government policy on RSE supports ‘factual’ knowledge (e.g. a characterisation of knowledge in RSE made by selected respondents at Wingfield, to be discussed below), because although few would argue that assisted reproduction technology is ‘factual’, it is, as Sarah suggested, not always considered acceptable for RSE.

Part of the feeling [among staff] was that there was safety in having something backed by City Council and Healthy Schools... you could randomly find resources in PSHE catalogues or online or whatever, but had they... been critically kind of assessed by PSHE leads in the city... for me that was fine, if that made people feel comfortable... to have a big battle in those PSHE resources was just not on the agenda. (2nd interview)

Sarah recognizes that Andromeda provided staff with some assurance because it was supported by specialist RSE advisors at the city council. Given other big changes that the school was dealing with (i.e. staff turnover, new SATs), she was content for staff to select a safe option in terms of the curriculum. She then added:

Most our [city] schools use [Andromeda], so it doesn't matter if you don't like it and go to another school, we're all using it. So there was a bit of safety in that... there were some resources to support reducing homophobia a few years ago, used in one of our local schools, and there was a big backlash from the community and it hit the press... members of staff were victimised and it was horrible, really horrible. And I think schools have been kind of anxious about resources and anxious as to the... potential backlash from parents. (2nd interview)

By suggesting 'it doesn't matter if you don't like it and go to another school', Sarah refers to a common approach – mentioned by a number of respondents at Latimer – by parents who are not happy with RSE; that is, to threaten to move their child(ren) to another school. This action is, I suggest, a clear statement from a parent that they do not recognize the school's ableness – its authority, its qualification – to lead and deliver an appropriate RSE programme. However, when all schools in an area are using the same curriculum, this threat is largely redundant. In achieving a universal (or near universal) approach to RSE, schools in a single area may limit the ability of parents to deny their authority in RSE.

The data suggests that RSE is a continuously contentious issue in this community, compared to the surrounding communities of the other two schools in the study, and the events that Sarah describes, from a few years ago, still linger in the minds of some staff members at Latimer Primary. This analysis reinforces the assertion that a school's treatment of RSE cannot be seen in isolation from its specific community, and illustrates the conflict and complexity presented by the government's current RSE policy, which grants schools some authority but simultaneously constrains them to make the decisions they feel are most appropriate.

The next section explores how respondents at Latimer Primary took account of children's expressed needs and concerns in their deliberations about RSE.

Responsiveness to pupils

All respondents at Latimer identified the need for their RSE programme to respond to children's needs. As noted above, Iris said that children's feedback about the RSE that they

had received suggested that it was not progressive enough, year on year. Here, Iris explains how the Andromeda curriculum responded to these concerns:

Starting off that we were just going to look at [Andromeda] in the early years, but we didn't, we ended up buying the whole lot because it was very progressional and it was very child-friendly, but at the same time it really hit the nail on the head. It was a little bit more meaty, if you like, especially for the younger children, in terms of naming body parts... (1st interview)

This passage suggests that Iris and her colleagues selected the Andromeda curriculum because it addressed the shortfalls of their existing programme, as identified by children, and because it seemed to be better quality, educationally, than what they already had. Her comments here are focused on what Macmurray would call valuational knowledge, that is they focus on what is worth knowing, what has value in RSE, whereas I argued that the technical arguments presented earlier reflect Macmurray's technical knowledge (or, how education should be done, how RSE should be delivered). Importantly, it is not only Iris' own opinion that matters in her assessment of Andromeda, it is how well the content of Andromeda responds to what children themselves have been asking for.

In addition to pupil's feedback, staff experiences in delivering RSE and supporting vulnerable children contributed to the revised RSE policy at Latimer Primary. Wendy, a member of the pastoral staff, said:

I feel you can't pigeon-hole a class or a cohort to say, 'oh we need this'. You need to have maybe three different programmes... we know we have cohorts where we might have children who may be, may have sexualised behaviour, so we might like to tweak that programme, for that particular class, because we know that we need to put that support in, for that particular child... I wouldn't want anybody to just say, 'oh, I have this and it is the be-all and end-all', because it's not. (1st and only interview)

Wendy and others at Latimer Primary described additional resources they used to fill gaps not addressed sufficiently by the Andromeda curriculum, for example they used a resource by a national children's charity to discuss consent with children in the reception year. This contrasted sharply to Kirsten's suggestion, at Wingfield Academy, that the Andromeda curriculum 'has everything'. Wendy's view on curriculum accords with that argued by Macmurray, who suggested that no curriculum should form the core of education, that education should instead be based on human relationships and knowledge of people (1957) (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Iris and Wendy both demonstrate an in-depth understanding of how the RSE programme and delivery relate to what children learn and experience in RSE. Wendy, for example, describes knowing the cohorts of children, and their behaviour, which suggests to her that they need

particular kinds of information and support in RSE. Implicit in this passage is her expectation that by introducing 'that support, for that particular child', that child will learn relevant knowledge and/or skills that relate to him or her specifically. Wendy suggests that her decisions about RSE are therefore based on her knowledge of the children and knowledge about RSE pedagogies and content. It suggests that while policy and curricula can be helpful resources, real power to affect outcomes in RSE is rooted in the educators tasked with delivering it, especially in their capacity to ensure that it responds to the children they are teaching. Data from interviews with Wendy, Iris and other respondents at Latimer suggest that they have what Morriss (2002) calls 'epistemic ability' – an essential component of power – which means they can take specific actions with reasonable confidence about the results that those actions will produce, for the children involved.

One example of how staff at Latimer tailored the content to suit their pupils relates to a lesson to teach gender. The Andromeda curriculum included a worksheet with female and male figures on it which pupils would be asked to label, followed by a discussion of what defines boys and girls, what makes them different, etc. In one class, however, there was a biologically male child who self-identified as a girl. Respondents noted that the value of inclusivity is part of the school ethos, therefore part of the cognitive aims of the school, so they were committed to adapting the lesson to be supportive to this child. Laurence, a member of the senior leadership team, described the process of adapting the lesson:

There were some protracted conversations with... [the] parents... to-ing and fro-ing about whether you are really explicit about the parts of the boy's body and the parts of the girl's body, with the label of 'boy' and 'girl'... the teacher just decided not to use a particular worksheet and just talk about it in a very general way, like 'some people's bodies have this' (2nd interview)

Thus, rather than delivering messages such as 'boys have penises and girls have vaginas', the teacher taught their pupils, among other things, that anatomy is different from gender. We can see Macmurray's valuational knowledge in practice, here, by drawing on the explanation given by Fielding:

Underlying and informing these valuational imperatives is a view of human flourishing that places substantial emphasis on spontaneity and imagination in the development of a living, egalitarian culture which is both the basis of democracy and a principled and effective answer to the perennial challenge of how people come to understand and adequately respond to the realities of unremitting, often fundamental, change in their ways of life. (2012:766, referring to Macmurray, 1931)

The process that respondents and others at Latimer Primary went through to ensure that their teaching of gender was inclusive could be said to be supportive of 'human flourishing' and an

‘egalitarian culture’ – as employed by Fielding above – as they invested time in the interests of one child who identified as a sexual minority, though the benefits were far reaching, including other pupils and teachers. This example also illustrates Morriss’ (2002) assertion that the power to affect outcomes is dispositional and changeable. While staff at Latimer Primary had expertise in RSE, they recognized that they lacked the ability to make appropriate decisions about teaching gender to a gender-creative child, and therefore consulted parents and deliberated on how best to approach the situation. By reacting productively to this issue, they improved their epistemic abilities and this contributed to the school’s overall knowledge about gender diversity.

Another example of how Latimer Primary responded to the needs of pupils is their treatment of female genital mutilation (FGM) in RSE. Latimer Primary pupils include many who come from communities affected by FGM. In the year prior to field work, there had been a number of local activities to raise awareness about FGM and to campaign for families, communities and local government to take action to prevent FGM.

Latimer Primary’s written policy, entitled ‘Relationship and Sex Education Policy’, notes that children in years five and six will learn about FGM in the context of child protection. It states, “These... conversations that are designed to empower young girls to understand their rights to be safe and in control of their bodies... that it is not ok or legal for someone to cut or change them” (2016:3). A number of respondents expressed pride that the school teaches about FGM. Amy, a member of the pastoral staff, suggested that one of the recent changes to the policy related to “feeding in the FGM element that obviously Sarah is very, well she is a local guru I think, so we value that” (1st and only interview), and Kate, a teacher, gave the example of FGM content in RSE as an indication that the school is at the forefront of RSE. She said, RSE is

definitely at the forefront of what we teach... in other places... they’re always rolling out the same thing, year after year, and here I think it is re-assessed quite often... it’s moving quite quickly in response to... issues that are coming out that we hadn’t quite realised.... They need to be taught. (1st interview)

The respondents were proud of the fact that the school was responding quickly to issues in their local community, and also that the school was a ground-breaker in introducing FGM to RSE. Amy, a teacher, said:

Talking to lots of other teachers, heads, SENCOs... [FGM teaching has] been done really well here. And its [Sarah]... [Wendy]... they have definitely led the field locally... putting their heads out, sticking their heads right out when parents, community at the school have said ‘nah, we’re not even touching that, we’re not even going into that, or we’re not having it termed in that way, or we’re not making it as prescribed as that, or as young as that’... we’ve definitely stuck with our guns and looked at research and

looked at different ways to do it and as a school, I think that we do it really well (1st interview)

This is a strong example of the sentiment expressed by all respondents. Malcolm, the local authority advisor on the subject, also commended the school's work in this area. This data suggests that Latimer Primary not only responded to issues as they arose in classrooms, as in the case of the gender-creative pupil, but also took the initiative to identify and respond to community concerns that had relevance to their pupils.

The data and analysis offered here supports the argument I developed in the previous section, that Latimer Primary – while responsive to the community – puts its commitment to its own school ethos and cognitive aims first. This analysis is strengthened by an additional quotation from Sarah, who said:

It is a belief of mine that it is our job to [be responsive to the community]. And I know [other schools] don't believe that it is. So, how far you change, how far you will accommodate different parents' beliefs, in order to provide some form of relationship education, and how far you say, 'no, that's what we're doing'... we will try to accommodate parents' own ideas of what their child should or shouldn't hear, provided that it isn't untrue, that they don't tell us what we have to teach... We show them what we're going to run, they can opt in or opt out of certain bits, but we won't not comply with the *Equalities Act*, we won't not talk about same-sex relationships, we won't... not talk about transgender. (1st interview)

The commitment that Sarah and other Latimer respondents expressed towards their pupils relates to Macmurray's argument for personal relations in schools: he argues that the principles of freedom (e.g. to be and express oneself) and equality (e.g. each person has equal worth) are critical features of personal relations (Macmurray, 1950), and this is why personal relations must be central to social, functional activities, such as school (Fielding, 2000:402). The data above suggests that respondents at Latimer Primary understand that they are putting their heads out', and perhaps taking risks that other schools are not willing to take, but they characterise themselves as a school at the forefront of RSE policy and practice. I suggest that this is because they have expertise and knowledge in RSE, they have epistemic ability. Beyond their own expertise and training, Amy notes above that they have 'looked at research' and other ways that RSE is being done, so they have the power not only to make appropriate decisions about RSE, but they have the confidence that that they are making appropriate decisions due to their epistemic abilities. While the argument that the RSE programme should respond to the children's needs would seem to be an important one, it was only apparent at Latimer Primary, out of the three schools in the study.

The next section focuses on management and leadership. While it is set apart from school ethos and culture, it must also be recognized that this is a somewhat artificial divide. There is, as can be construed from the analysis above, a considerable amount of leadership and management involved in sustaining the school ethos.

Management and leadership

There were two significant findings in relation to the management and leadership of RSE at Latimer Primary. They were:

- Leadership by senior leaders, implementation by teachers
- Demonstrating accountability for relationships and sex education

Leadership by senior leaders, implementation by teachers

The data suggests that the leadership and guiding vision for RSE came from the senior leadership team at Latimer Primary, while the actual development of the policy and day-to-day implementation was carried out by teachers and pastoral staff. All of the respondents at Latimer Primary suggested that it is Sarah, a member of the senior leadership team, who had the greatest influence of the overall direction and content of the RSE policy. Kate said:

[Sarah] does have a vision for it and as long as what you're doing fits within the wider scheme of where she wants it to go, I think you'll be fine... the teacher-to-teacher stuff, I would do all that, like she wouldn't come and talk to anyone else about the subject, that would be me, evidencing it and assessing it (2nd interview)

Kate suggests here that as the PSHE subject lead, she would lead the implementation and provide support and feedback to teachers involved in delivering RSE. However, Sarah's vision of RSE determined the core values and content. Data from other respondents reinforced Kate's perception that Sarah is a strong leader in the subject.

Sarah herself pointed out that before she had become a member of the senior leadership team at Latimer Primary, she had been the subject lead for PSHE, and before that she had helped implement an emotional literacy programme at the school. In terms of formal qualifications, Sarah had completed an accredited PSHE certification and a postgraduate certificate in socio-emotional development. Sarah and others suggested that Sarah was the person on the staff with the greatest expertise in RSE, and they looked to her for leadership in this area.

However, there were a number of priorities that Sarah and other members of the senior leadership team needed to focus their attention on. She said:

I could have given it to a senior leader, but it wasn't high on our priority list... the 'caught and taught' element of what we do in the school is really strong, woven through... it's really ingrained in our blood, as to how you are and how we do things. And I think I probably took a bit of advantage of that, to just carry us through this period. Because we are just so busy... the new assessment arrangements, the new year six curriculum, and... the new SATS. There are really pressing things that had to be exactly right. And I kind of took advantage of the fact that I knew that this would be ok, because everybody got it... I kind of let them get on with it, which was a bit weird because it's always been my baby. (2nd interview)

Sarah explains here that although RSE has always been her 'baby', she felt that it was the right thing to have delegated the RSE policy to staff – as a result, staff had more ownership of it.

While Latimer Primary does not fall neatly within any of Goodnight's particular categories of context (i.e. what he called technical, personal or public spheres), Sarah's expectations of staff with regards to making appropriate decisions about RSE do recall Goodnight's expectations in terms of how people within specific spheres make decisions. He wrote, "argument spheres are symbolic constructions that shape the expectations of interlocutors who engage in the activities of theoretical and practical reasoning" (2012:198). Sarah was confident that Latimer Primary had such clearly articulated rules of logic, standards of knowledge and conventions that her staff would make appropriate decisions about RSE. However, Sarah acknowledged that she was not especially pleased with the resulting policy. She suggests she would have had a more structured process for developing it, including consultation with community members and more research of the resources available.

The data above also emphasizes that the school's top priorities – the new assessment arrangements, the new year six curriculum and the new SATs – were effectively determined by central government and recall scholarly critiques of neoliberal education policy. Ball argued that neoliberal education policies de-professionalised teachers: their role in making qualitative judgments about education was reduced and they became responsible for 'performing' to the state through the demonstration of academic achievement, which held consequences in the form of rewards and punishments (2003). He suggested that these reforms should not be seen as "de-regulation... they are processes of re-regulation... a new form of control" (Ball, 2003:217). Sarah's suggestion, in the quotation above, that the implementation of new education reforms had to be 'exactly right' meant that although she was the person on staff with the greatest epistemic ability in RSE, the consequences of not getting RSE 'exactly right' were less serious.

Demonstrating accountability for relationships and sex education

Respondents at Latimer Primary noted that as with other subjects, they documented what they did in RSE, and PSHE more broadly, to demonstrate their accountability to the

government. Since 1992, schools have been monitored by Ofsted and therefore they have developed routinized procedures for documenting their teaching across the National Curriculum, and the implementation of other statutory policies such as safeguarding, to demonstrate accountability. The actions that the school undertakes to document their teaching for RSE are discussed in the previous section, under the argument ‘To demonstrate progress and outcomes’, so I will not discuss it in depth here. However, it is important to note that these aspects of RSE are part of the school’s everyday practices - they are institutional conventions, rules that influence how lessons are structured and documented. As I will discuss later, these practices also have a bearing on the type of knowledge that is valued and taught.

This section illustrates the complex processes through which Latimer Primary deliberated and agreed its RSE policy, and how RSE is contested and developed on a regular basis through engagement with diverse stakeholders. The data and analysis recall Stewart’s work on ‘socioscientific controversies’, which he describes as “extended argumentative engagements over socially significant issues comprising communicative events and practices in and from both scientific and non-scientific spheres” (2009:125). Respondents at Latimer Primary discussed the diverse voices that have been heard and considered in relation to their RSE policy, including parents, community members, pupils, colleagues at other schools, governing board members, the local authority and external experts. Though they have faced opposition, Latimer Primary has managed to provide leadership and remain confident in its RSE policy and practice due to its respect for expert, authoritative voices on RSE, including among its own staff, and because the core values and attitudes that they seek to impart through RSE are also central to the school’s overarching cognitive aims, or its school ethos. Because respondents at Latimer Primary have what Morriss called epistemic ability, and because of the school’s general orientation towards the core values and aims of RSE, I suggest that Latimer Primary employs a ‘whole school’ approach to RSE. That is, while there are distinct RSE lessons, the values and learning that the school aims to deliver through RSE are also integrated across the school’s daily practice and culture. The literature suggests that RSE is most effective when delivered through a whole school approach (e.g. Ringrose et al., 2012; House of Commons Education Committee, 2015), and this may also be considered in parallel to what Macmurray called ‘the school as community’ (1950; Stern, 2012).

Macmurray’s concept of the school as community is based on the prioritisation of intersubjective knowledge throughout the school. ‘School as community’ is a school that not only prioritises the teaching of intersubjective knowledge in lessons, but interactions and the ‘way of doing things’ are focused on personal relations (Macmurray, 2012). He wrote, “going to

school is itself a stage in the process by which we learn to live in community” (1957:6). This prioritisation of intersubjective knowledge comes from Macmurray’s belief that the defining feature of humanity is mutuality, and that education is fundamentally about learning to live happily in community with others. Macmurray distinguished communities from societal institutions (‘societies’) by suggesting that in communities, people treat each other as ends in themselves – they are the point of interest – whereas in societal institutions people engage with others as means to an end (1950). The analysis above suggests that respondents at Latimer place a high value on children learning to live in community, to have empathy with those around them, to appreciate diversity within and beyond the school community, and to explore common values and strategies for living together. I argue, therefore, that Latimer adopted a whole-school approach to RSE, an approach that, I feel, has some elements of Macmurray’s concept of the ‘school as community’.

6.2. Wingfield Academy

Wingfield Academy is a large, recently academized primary school located in a mainly white British, middle class area of the city.

School ethos and culture

The school ethos - as a distinctive overarching aim and set of values guiding school policies and educational practice (Gardiner et al., 2000) - is much less apparent at Wingfield Academy and Fleming Primary, compared to Latimer Primary. As noted in the methodology chapter, compared to respondents at the other two schools, respondents at Latimer Primary had a lot to say about RSE, including how it related to the school’s ethos, culture and community, which suggests that respondents at Latimer Primary could be considered to have greater epistemic knowledge on RSE than those at the other schools (Flick, 2006). As a result, identifying the school ethos and culture at Wingfield and at Fleming was more challenging and my analyses are more succinct.

Nonetheless, at Wingfield I identified two possibilities for guiding frameworks that shape the school culture and ethos:

- Human rights
- Neoliberalism

First, respondents talked about the fact that Wingfield Academy had joined a UNICEF initiative, an accredited programme called 'Rights Respecting Schools' that aims to support schools to recognize and promote children's rights. The Rights Respecting Schools programme seems a credible option as a guiding framework for the school ethos because it is imbued with clear statement of values that relate to human development and dignity:

By promoting the values of respect, dignity and non-discrimination... [the] Award gives children a powerful language to use to express themselves and... to challenge injustices... to access information that enables them to make informed decisions about their learning, health and wellbeing (UNICEF, n.d.a)

As noted by Halstead, values are "principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, standards or life-stances which act as general guides to behaviour... and which are closely tied to personal integrity and personal identity" (1996:5). Secondly, and I will argue a more likely scenario is that the neoliberal agenda has become Wingfield Academy's defacto ethos. Although the values of neoliberalism seem at odds with RSE, and the connections to 'personal integrity and personal identity' are weak, the principles of neoliberalism echo throughout respondents' talk about the subject.

Human rights

The Rights Respecting Schools Award is a UNICEF initiative that encourages schools to promote human rights within schools and enable pupils to exercise fundamental human rights, as articulated in UN human rights treaties and conventions. The Rights Respecting Schools Award website reads, "Together young people and the school community learn about children's rights, putting them into practice" (UNICEF, n.d.b). The scheme articulates four specific areas where it seeks to have an impact: children's wellbeing, participation, relationships and self-esteem. In her first interview, Kirsten, a teacher and member of pastoral staff, said:

We are a Rights and Respect council level one school, and we are hoping to get level two. So we have got what is called the 'Rights and Respect' council, and there is one child per class in it, so they get to make some decisions (1st interview)

While the Rights Respecting Schools award aims to promote human rights, Kirsten appeared to be more concerned about the visibility of the scheme and progressing through the scheme's levels. For example, she explained, "when we were organising the school we were looking for a place to put up all the Rights and Respect articles" (1st interview). This concern in relation to human rights recalls Ball's argument that neoliberal education policies have pushed schools to perform and demonstrate achievement, and diverted attention away from genuine reflection

and attention on children's learning and development (2003). Kirsten suggested that as part of the Rights Respecting School programme, the children may have a say on how things are done in PSHE in future, but the children themselves decided the agenda and they had not raised PSHE as an issue they wanted to influence.

While the implementation of the Rights Respecting School Award programme appeared to promote pupils' rights to participation, it should not be considered an overarching school ethos because the data suggest that only the children who were on the Rights and Respect council were particularly engaged in the initiative. Importantly, respondents did not identify any connections between human rights and RSE, although there are UN documents (e.g. the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development's Plan of Action (UNFPA, 1994) and subsequent affirmations¹²), expert international guidance on RSE (UNESCO, 2018) and national campaigns (e.g. the Sex Education Forum's 'It's my right' campaign (Sex Education Forum, nd) that promote the recognition of RSE as a human right for children and young people. The four key areas where the Rights Respecting Schools programme sought to make an impact – wellbeing, participation, relationships and self-esteem – could also be strongly linked with the aims of RSE. However, the connection that was made between the Rights Respecting Schools programme and RSE - or, to be precise, the Andromeda curriculum - was related to demonstrating their performance. Kirsten said:

[Andromeda] covers British values... which is another 'tick' for us then. And because we're a Rights Respecting School, it ticks those boxes as well. So I think, yeah, [the senior leadership team] seem happy with it just because it covers so many things. And it applies to the [Collingwood] Healthy Schools as well, and Danielle, who's in charge of that, she was saying, if you mention that to the judges, or the people on that panel, that you have [Andromeda], they're just like, 'yeah, that covers anything', so it just ticks that off. (1st interview)

The second sentence here suggests that the Andromeda curriculum would help Wingfield Academy to achieve the standard expected by the Rights Respecting School programme. The Rights Respecting School programme offers opportunities to promote human rights as part of RSE and as part of a school ethos and culture, but the data from Wingfield suggest that this opportunity has not been taken up.

The passage above as a whole suggests an enthused concern with ticking boxes for Ofsted, for the Rights Respecting School Award officers and the Healthy Schools standard officials. Kirsten's use of the word 'judges' suggests that she feels the school needs to perform for the

¹² E.g. ICPD Beyond 2014, www.unfpa.org/events/icpd-beyond-2014-review-process

judges, and she notes that the senior leadership team also seemed satisfied with Andromeda because it would get them through the different inspections and evaluations. The phrase ‘it covers so many things’ implies efficiency: with the one curriculum, they could have several boxes ticked, and therefore, presumably, the school would have to invest less time and energy in other tools or curricula. This passage underlines a concern for demonstrating, if not performing, accountability, and a value on efficiency, which also comes from the managerialist principles incorporated in neoliberalism (Wilkins, 2018).

These findings recall some of the literature about how schools interpret and apply guidance and curricula that relate to social and emotional aspects of education. For example, Baginsky et al. (2015) and Wood and Warin (2014) examined statutory safeguarding recommendations and the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning Framework (SEAL), respectively. They argued that while these frameworks and recommendations appeared sound, they both appeared to imagine that schools either already have or could easily foster a certain style of school ethos, that staff were finely tuned to the nuances of child protection and wellbeing, and that sensitive relationships existed between key actors. The risk and critique (including Formby et al., 2011) was that the instrumental aspects of the frameworks might be implemented – such that boxes could be ‘ticked’ – but the essential values and purpose would be missed out. In their writing on social and emotional wellbeing in schools, Watson et al. argue that due to the complexity of the concept it is reduced to a set of indicators that derive from professional practice, which have the unintended result of reducing interventions to pathology and therapy, rather than wellbeing (2012:7). These findings are aligned with my research findings. While Wingfield Academy has chosen to adopt the Rights Respecting Schools award scheme, presumably because they felt that the aims of the scheme aligned with what they wanted to achieve and deliver for their pupils, their orientation to the scheme embodies neoliberal cognitive norms – i.e. box ticking, process and performance – and they have failed to authentically, deeply engage with the cognitive aims of the scheme. As early as the 1950s, Macmurray warned against tools and frameworks that were seen as instruments for achieving uniformity across schools, as efficiently as possible. He wrote, “the attempt to turn would-be teachers into technicians by teaching them classroom tricks is as stupid as it is ineffective... [teaching] is not an engineering job. It is personal and human” (2012:674). He would have been highly critical of Kirsten’s enthusiasm of Andromeda as a tool to help ‘tick boxes’ because it does not necessarily require personal expertise or require reflection and teaching based on real human relationships.

Neoliberalism

In the previous chapter, I analysed the argumentative strategies used in policy making about RSE and suggested that some of the criteria and rationales offered by respondents, as the basis for decisions about RSE, reflected public discourses and conventions. Arguments such as ‘to demonstrate progress and outcomes’ and ‘to overcome our lack of expertise’ reflect the government’s neoliberal agenda in education, and neoliberal values are thus embedded in these arguments. The neoliberal principles of performativity and accountability were particularly prominent in the data from most respondents at Wingfield Academy, and these principles resonate throughout much of the criteria that decision makers discussed in their policy-making processes related to RSE. Respondents also articulated the school’s aims and vision, including their own objectives, in terms of neoliberal values. Patrick, as a member of the senior leadership team, described his role as follows:

[I am] in charge of every adult that works in the school and seeing what happens with every child in the school... the planning, the overall view of the school and trying to strategically plan what the school needs to do to improve and to get that message across to all the staff... I report to [Bridgestock] on a very regular basis... and people come into the school, obviously to judge the whole school, but that will kind of come through me... I’m the person who has to kind of speak to them about what’s going well, what we need to develop, and kind of work with Bridgestock as our kind of overseers and also our governing body (1st interview)

While Patrick does mention ‘every child in the school’, he largely articulates his role with little mention of pupils’ development. ‘What the school needs to do to improve’ brings to mind the effectiveness agenda in education, which was a key pillar of Tony Blair’s campaign platform prior to being elected Prime Minister in 1997 and was a key pillar of education policy throughout the New Labour administration (Whitty, 2002). This excerpt parallels Kirsten’s explanation – presented in the previous chapter – that the aim of her role, as subject lead for PSHE, is demonstrating progress. In addition to effectiveness in education, the New Labour government reinvigorated emphasis on schools achieving academic outcomes and established educational targets (Green, 2005); these values have remained central in current education policies (Wilkins, 2015). Similar to the cross-cutting technical arguments discussed in Chapter Five, these rationales reflect what Macmurray identified as technical knowledge, which is knowledge that is focused on how things are done (Fielding, 2012), which also align with Social Realism’s cognitive norms, which specify the rules that guide how decisions should be made, and standards of knowledge that guide decision making (Young, 2008). In the paragraphs that follow, I will build on earlier analyses and argue that neoliberal values are central to Wingfield’s school ethos and culture and that they shaped the knowledge that underpinned their RSE policy-making process.

The neoliberal value of performativity was a reoccurring theme in the data from respondents at Wingfield. Kirsten confirmed that performativity is a central part of her aims for RSE. She said:

It's my mission to make it really well-known to all the children, so if you say [Andromeda] they know exactly what you're talking about. Especially if Ofsted come in, if they went, 'what's your PSHE?', they can go 'Oh that's [Andromeda]', and then just start reeling off all the... (1st interview)

Again, in her second interview, she talked about how she encouraged the children to respond to references of Andromeda in scripted ways. She said:

I walked into the assembly in the past two days... I said, 'last time, when I said, every time I say the word [Andromeda], I want you to cheer', and I said, 'what did I say to do when I say ['Andromeda']?' and they went 'we have to cheer!', and I was like, 'ooh, wow, you do remember!' (2nd interview)

These passages clearly articulate Kirsten's anticipation that the children will be able to perform to the inspectors, that they will be able to persuade the inspectors through their recollection and reaction to the name 'Andromeda' that they are receiving good quality PSHE, including RSE. The notion that this type of performativity is indicative of actual, good quality learning is central to a number of critiques of neoliberalism in education policy (e.g. Ball, 2000; Wilkins, 2015), and my analysis suggests that these concerns are valid in RSE at Wingfield Academy. As noted previously, there was little discussion in Wingfield Academy's policy deliberations about its RSE policy about the quality of the curriculum it selected to adopt, beyond the knowledge that it was widely recommended, which I argue is partly due to the low level of epistemic ability for RSE among staff at Wingfield. Kirsten did critique the SEAL curriculum for being out of touch with children's actual experiences (i.e. using animals to talk about puberty), but on the whole respondents at Wingfield did not articulate why they felt the Andromeda curriculum was good quality beyond the fact that it had been recommended.

In addition to accountability and performativity, one value that emerged through the interviews as being central to Wingfield's ethos is the recognition of each pupil's talents and abilities, and a corresponding commitment to adapt lessons and teaching to enable each pupil to thrive. This is a complex value, which has been aligned with both liberal and neoliberal spheres, so it is worth examining it in further detail. In her first interview, Kirsten said, "we're very big on the high ability children being stretched... and it's with all lessons..." (1st interview). Similarly, Patrick informed me that Bridgestock's mission statement is to provide good quality education in deprived areas and narrow the gap of educational outcomes between children

who may be living in poverty and those who are not (1st interview). These statements reflect the principle of meritocracy – the idea that educational achievement should be related to pupil ability – which is a reaction against historical patterns in education, where access to education and educational attainment was determined by material resources and family connections (Tomlinson, 2001). The statements above also suggest that meritocracy is a core value, embedded in decisions and actions across the work of the school. Meritocracy is an idea that was originally and is still aligned with liberal conceptions of education, for example the idea that education should foster individual development and social mobility, enabling disadvantaged and oppressed groups to participate and be heard in all spheres of society (Brighouse and Swift, 2003). However, meritocracy is also increasingly associated with neoliberalism because it places the responsibility and outcome for education on the individual (Loxley and Thomas, 2001). However, neoliberal interpretations tend to ignore structural features which produce inequity in society and influence a person’s opportunities to excel in education.

Respondents at Wingfield stated that the school is focused on ensuring the best learning opportunities for all pupils, which reflects the principle of meritocracy. To implement this vision, staff are expected to differentiate all lessons for pupils of varying abilities. Kirsten said that when she introduced the new curriculum, *Andromeda*, to staff:

I had a meeting to make sure, though, that even though [ability] is not being differentiated in the lesson, that teachers are using their initiative and making sure that those higher are getting pushed, but also that lower ability children are not getting left behind” (1st interview)

Here, Kirsten explains that although the lesson plans in the *Andromeda* curriculum are not differentiated by ability, she expects teachers to adapt them to be. However, Kirsten noted that in practice most teachers did not have time to do the differentiation themselves, so she spent time differentiating the lesson plans. The examples of differentiation that Kirsten offered were transferring a hard copy of an assessment form that teachers had to fill out into an Excel file, to make it easier for them to complete, reproduce and share, and adjusting a number of lesson plans to reduce the length of the lessons from an hour to thirty minutes. She said, “that’s something different that I’ve done... condense them. They are quite lengthy... so just making them shorter... Two lessons become one lesson.” (2nd interview). Kirsten explained this was because teachers had pressures to deliver on academic aims, so they could not allocate the whole one-hour session to RSE. So, under the rubric of differentiation, to realise the principle of meritocracy, Kirsten was in fact making RSE less time- and energy-intensive for staff (recalling a technical argument discussed in Chapter 5), freeing them up to focus on

the academic subjects that really matter, the subjects that, according to neoliberal education policy, will prepare them for the labour market and help them to contribute to the economy. Thus, this 'differentiation' in RSE effectively served the neoliberal agenda and reinforced neoliberal values.

The prominence of neoliberal values in respondents' talk at Wingfield Academy provides a strong platform from which to argue that the neoliberal policy underpinning the central government's education policy is mirrored in Wingfield Academy's school ethos and culture. Neoliberal principles and values have had profound consequences for the types of questions, concerns and priorities – knowledges – in decision makers' deliberations and agreements about the school's RSE policy. The data and analysis suggest that Goodnight's concept of argument spheres is applicable to RSE policy making at Wingfield Academy (2012). As noted above, in relation to Latimer Primary, the specific spheres Goodnight defined – technical, public and private (2012) – cannot be translated to the primary school context, but respondents at Wingfield Academy, as at Latimer Primary, demonstrated a consistent pattern in terms of their rules of logic, standards of knowledge and cognitive aims (i.e. Social Realist concept regarding what the school is trying to achieve), which suggests a clearly defined school culture and way of doing things. The values of efficiency, differentiation, demonstrations of accountability and performativity were highlighted by Kirsten and Patrick, in particular, and to a lesser extent by the other respondents, who had less involvement in the RSE policy process.

One reason for the lack of a self-defined and locally relevant ethos and culture at Wingfield Academy (distinct from central government policy) could be the history of the school. The Academy nearly ceased to be a school in 2010, when, as a private school, it went bankrupt. Since then, the school has taken on an entirely new management team, and it is now governed and overseen by a multi-academy trust headquarters in another city. As argued above, the government has clearly prioritised academic achievements and targets, so it would not be surprising that the senior leadership team of Wingfield Academy have focused on these expectations in their first few years in post. In addition, respondents had little expertise or experience in RSE, so their ability to make informed judgments about RSE, including the outcomes that these judgments would be likely to affect – was limited. Thus, they were guided by other frameworks and knowledge that they possessed, including central government expectations.

The Rights Respecting Schools agenda offers an alternative perspective on the aims of education, but my analysis suggests that currently, the human rights agenda has been subsumed within the neoliberal framework at Wingfield Academy.

Management and leadership

The data and arguments presented above are significant not only in relation to the school ethos and culture, but for the management and leadership of RSE at Wingfield Academy. Already, it is apparent that concerns about accountability and performativity were foremost in the minds of decision makers at Wingfield, as they went about the task of developing and agreeing the RSE policy. As such, there is significant overlap between school ethos and culture at Wingfield Academy, and this section on management and leadership. This contrasts with my findings about Latimer Primary (above), where we saw clear distinctions between school ethos and culture, and management and leadership.

In this section, I will explore two findings about the management and leadership of RSE at Wingfield Academy that I have not touched on before. They are:

- Relationships and sex education led by staff with little subject expertise
- Relationships and sex education influenced by the academy structure

Relationships and sex education led by staff with little subject expertise

At Wingfield Academy, the development of the RSE policy was led by Kirsten, a grade one teacher with little prior interest in RSE. In addition to developing the policy, Kirsten is responsible for monitoring and demonstrating progress in PSHE, overseeing the implementation of the Andromeda curriculum and supporting teachers to deliver it, under the supervision of the head teacher. However, Kirsten's appointment to this role was arbitrary or, at best, a coincidence of timing: the role was available, and so was she.

Kirsten explains that when she started her post at the school, one year earlier, "[PSHE] was thrust upon me. I think I started and there were no subjects left... they gave me the folder and said, 'here's what you need to do'" (1st interview). Kirsten went on two training courses for PSHE: the first was about how to get a 'good' ranking with Ofsted for PSHE, and the other was a one-day training course on implementing the Andromeda curriculum. Both these courses might be considered 'technical' training, in that they relate to specific tasks that need to be done and how to employ resources, and therefore they served to deepen and enhance what Macmurray called technical knowledge in RSE at Wingfield Academy. Kirsten received no training and support that deepened her valuational knowledge about RSE (or the cognitive

aims of RSE): that is, her theoretical understanding of the purpose of RSE, and what is worth learning (or teaching) in RSE. This is relevant because neoliberal approaches to education are often critiqued for supporting teachers to be ‘technicians’, rather than to give them a broader, theoretical education that enables them to employ their own judgment (Alexander, 2007; Ball, 2009; Claxton, 2008). Kirsten was open about the fact that teaching RSE was not something she had wanted to do, and she was not pleased when she found out what she was expected to teach. She said:

Working at another primary school before, [RSE] was never taught in key stage one, it was taught in year three, and when I went on my training and they were like, ‘and year one is going to be doing SRE’, I was like, ‘what!... that’s not what I signed up for as a year one teacher!’ (1st interview)

She noted that after her training she understood the value of PSHE and the safeguarding function, in particular, of RSE. While important, the safeguarding function of RSE could be considered instrumental, or functional, to draw on Macmurray’s terminology. Learning in RSE that is related to safeguarding tends to be about identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships, with the aim of enabling children to identify, prevent and/or report inappropriate behaviour. While safeguarding education does aim to promote healthy relationships, it is predominantly focused on behaviours and does not necessarily engage children in affective (values, attitudes) learning, which experts agree is a key component of good quality RSE (Goldman, 2013; Breuner et al., 2016).

Patrick, a member of the senior leadership team, provides support and oversees Kirsten’s work. He explained:

I will ask her at the start of the year, what is her action plan, what does she want to do through her subject... She’ll go and watch the other teachers deliver lessons... But yeah, it’s kind of delivered and run by her... (1st and only interview)

Patrick noted that he has had no training in RSE, so he relied on Kirsten to advise on the quality of teaching, what was needed to deliver RSE and so on. Patrick’s own understanding of RSE was that it was about delivering “age appropriate information” to pupils, so that “when they do reach those certain ages when certain questions become prominent... you can actually... give them the facts” (1st and only interview). The words ‘information’ and ‘factual’ recall positivist and empirical models of knowledge – Macmurray’s technical knowledge. The passage suggests a lack of understanding about the relational, processual and ambiguous content in RSE, as well as a lack of knowledge about the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning in RSE, which are equally as important as the ‘factual’ knowledge that good RSE might impart (Goldfarb and Constantine, 2011).

The data and my analysis suggests that Patrick and Kirsten – the key actors responsible for deciding the RSE policy at Wingfield Academy – had low levels of epistemic ability, which implies a less powerful position in terms of making appropriate decisions in relation to RSE policy, according to Morriss’ theory of power as the capacity to affect outcomes (2002). With the terms ‘age appropriate’ and ‘certain ages’, Patrick appears aware of popular, accepted terminology within which to couch RSE. Nonetheless, the terms place an emphasis on the importance of children being ‘mature’ enough to receive this information, and this age-related readiness suggests some sort of consistency of development and experience across age groups. While ‘age appropriateness’ is generally accepted as an appropriate aim for RSE, some experts in the subject have suggested that the delivery of RSE should, simultaneously, be sensitive and responsive to pupils’ diverse stages of maturity and development at varying ages (Brook et al., 2014). This concept was acknowledged by respondents at Latimer Primary, who have greater epistemic ability in RSE compared to those at Wingfield.

It is clear that the individuals responsible for leading RSE at Wingfield Academy do not have a wealth of expertise in the subject. It is perhaps due to this lack of expertise, and an awareness of this lack of expertise, that the school has adopted a relatively unbending policy in relation to how teachers might change the curriculum.

Patrick suggested that teachers were required to deliver the agreed curriculum as presented to them. He said:

You need the scheme of work to say, ‘no, you’re a year three teacher, year three are covering this’... obviously there is a place for someone to come to me or Kirsten and say, ‘I am really uncomfortable about such-and-such’... and we may have to look at a way of getting by that, but... they can’t just say, ‘oh, I didn’t teach that because I didn’t really like it’. Because you know, you might not like long division, but you still have to teach it. (1st interview)

This emerged from a specific question about how or whether teachers own opinions and experience might contribute to the RSE policy. While I was getting at how different stakeholders had been consulted or involved in the policy process, Patrick applied it to his understanding of the implementation of RSE, in the classroom. Patrick is clear here that staff opinions and views on the subject should not affect the content. Kirsten similarly suggested that Andromeda would always be her guide for making decisions about the knowledge that would be taught in RSE lessons. In response to a question about how Kirsten would coach teachers to respond to questions that were not included in Andromeda, she said:

We guide [pupils] to what the lesson is about... We’d say ‘oh, we’re learning about this today, this is what we’re talking about’... because it’s not age appropriate’. If they were

supposed to know at six years old, then [Andromeda] would have created it like that (2nd interview)

Like Patrick, Kirsten demonstrates a belief that children at a particular age have uniform experiences and development in relation to puberty, sexuality and relationships, and therefore subscribes to the idea that 'age appropriate' for RSE is rigid and constant. While respondents at Latimer, at times, similarly demonstrated conviction that certain elements of RSE should be delivered, regardless of an individual teacher's beliefs, they also valued the expertise that educators had gained from interacting with students and delivering RSE lessons and anticipated that knowledge of this kind could help make RSE more sensitive to children's individual development and experience. I infer, here, that Patrick's own lack of epistemic ability in RSE has moved him towards a less flexible policy as he is unable to judge what criteria are suitable for guiding decisions about the RSE policy, including how flexible the RSE programme should be in its delivery.

Relationships and sex education influenced by the academy structure

As a member of a multi-academy trust that has no particular interest or policy for RSE, Wingfield Academy had extensive autonomy when it came to making decisions about their RSE policy. Wingfield Academy is one of few primary schools in Collingwood that are part of a larger multi-academy trust, Bridgestock, which has its headquarters in London. None of the Bridgestock academies have their own governing body, instead it is the trust's governing body, also based in London, that is ultimately accountable for the schools. But, as Patrick explained, the governing body have very little to do with the school; it is Bridgestock's regional director for education who oversees the school's progress and development, and this director liaises directly with the senior leadership team. This director had no involvement or interest in the RSE policy at Wingfield Academy. The significance of this is that Kirsten and Patrick were making decisions about RSE autonomously, without any further oversight or guidance. Lukes, writing about Morriss' theory of power, elaborated upon Morriss' idea of practical context, which is about how power is used based on the context. Lukes wrote:

We need to know our own powers and those of others in order to find our way around a world populated by human agents, individual and collective, of whose powers we need to be apprised if we are to have a chance of surviving and flourishing... We carry around in our heads maps of such agents' powers. (2005:65)

Applied to this study, this means that the agents involved had a sense not only of their own power in relation to RSE, but of the power that others had around them, for example to penalise them or reward them based on their decisions in RSE policy. Patrick and Kirsten both spoke about the fact that RSE was not a subject that the regional education director, or any

other senior staff in the academy chain, were interested in, in fact they noted that schools in the academy chain had significant autonomy in their RSE policies. Parents had a stake in it, but historically very few parents withdrew their children from RSE and it was not a pressing concern for either Patrick or Kirsten, and while Kirsten shared that children enjoyed RSE, none of the data from respondents at Wingfield went into greater depth about children's feedback or experiences of RSE. Achieving a good Ofsted score in PSHE was a concern and a stated job objective for Kirsten, so her exercise of power – of making decisions about RSE, within the broader subject of PSHE – was focused on this objective.

The key mechanism through which the multi-academy chain had an affect on Wingfield's RSE programme was through the network of the Bridgestock schools in Collingwood. Patrick explained that Wingfield collaborates closely with the other Bridgestock schools that are based in Collingwood, "some by choice, some because we have to, because we're part of the same Bridgestock chain" (1st interview). It was through this network that Wingfield Academy managed to acquire the Andromeda curriculum. Kirsten said that when she decided that Wingfield needed a new PSHE curriculum, her first thought was the Andromeda curriculum because it was used at the school where she had worked previously and she had heard good reviews of it. She said, "When I approached the head last year... she was like, 'yeah, if you can get it for free!'" (1st interview). The Andromeda curriculum retails for £3000, a significant investment for any school. Conveniently, another local Bridgestock school was already using Andromeda, and offered to provide hard and electronic copies of it at no cost. Although Kirsten had already decided that she would like to use Andromeda, it appears that the cost savings was a key criterion for adopting Andromeda. Patrick said:

I think [Andromeda is] across all [schools] now, we've kind of gone for it as a group. It helps to have that consistency, that we're all doing [Andromeda]... and if there's a resource that's very expensive, you know, one of us could buy it and obviously share with the other... schools. So those kind of economies of scale work for us. (1st interview)

It is questionable whether the publishers of Andromeda would support this type of cost efficiency, but nevertheless the multi-academy chain structure enabled cost sharing and also promoted consistency in RSE across schools. It could be argued that Kirsten had already expressed a preference for Andromeda, so the selection of that curriculum was due more to her preference than to the fact it was freely available. However, Patrick noted that prior to approaching the other school, he had had in mind a different PSHE curriculum package for Wingfield. It is not certain whose preference would be given greater weight – Patrick's or Kirsten's – but they became biased towards selecting Andromeda when they discovered it could be obtained for free. Kirsten had heard positive reports about the quality of Andromeda,

but had not evaluated the content herself, so it was likely a combination of Andromeda's positive reputation and the cost savings that convinced Wingfield to adopt Andromeda. This data and analysis further support arguments made above about neoliberal principles and values governing decision making about RSE, including the decision to adopt Andromeda as the core PSHE package, including RSE. Cost efficiency – which is what was achieved by Wingfield Academy, when it chose to adopt a curriculum that it could get for free from a partner school – is a well-known business principle that has been promoted by the Department for Education for several years. In fact, respondents at Wingfield could have been citing a recent government review of efficiency in the school system (DfE, 2013b) – given the similarity in the language they used in their accounts of decision making about RSE. The government report recommends that schools “make good use of school clusters, sharing expertise... accessing economies of scale when making shared purchases” (2013b:3).

6.3. Fleming Primary School

Fleming Primary is a small, affluent private school, with a relatively homogenous white student body.

School ethos and culture

At Fleming Primary, like Wingfield, respondents did not present a clear concept of the school ethos; there appeared to be some pluralism regarding the school's core values, beliefs and mission, as well as behaviours for enacting its values and achieving its mission. Through respondents' talk and explanation of RSE, I identified two dominant concepts that each, in turn, seemed to represent the school ethos:

- The person-centred school
- Marketisation

The person-centred school

Respondents articulated a vision of Fleming Primary as a person-centred school, where all individuals who comprise the school – including pupils and teachers – are valued, known and reflected in its educational strategies. Pamela, a member of the senior leadership team, said “we're absolutely striving to try to make sure that every opportunity is sought out for the children” (1st interview). Lena, a parent and administrator, said:

The school is often recognized as pretty good, pastoral care side of things... [Simone] has realised that actually what we do is *really* good and needs to be documented. And

that's all part of this process, is formalizing it so that it can be recognized, rather than it just being part of our culture (2nd interview)

Lena suggests that the school's focus on pupils emotional, social and mental development is not only part of the school culture, but that it is exceptional in this regard compared to other schools. Pupils' emotional, social and mental development is what Macmurray refers to when he writes about 'valuational knowledge'. Macmurray suggested that emotional development is a profound part of developing the capacity to have lasting, healthy relationships (1935). Thus, emotional development contributes to intersubjective knowledge and, I argue, should be understood as an integral part of RSE. Fleming Primary's focus on pupils' emotional and social development, as a part of their school ethos, therefore appears to support RSE. As noted earlier, RSE is often much better supported and delivered in schools when their school ethos aligns with it, including through core values (Brown et al., 2011; Formby et al., 2011). Audrey said:

We've always had a very strong, certainly the relationships part of it. I think the sex ed, we've had workshops on it recently and made sure that we are up with the guidelines. We... tailor [RSE] to the children we have here. If we think something is inappropriate in the year three curriculum, we might leave it to the year four curriculum, whereas other schools might not have that option. It's not statutory *yet*, if it becomes statutory they might not have an option of where they teach things. (1st interview)

Audrey suggests here that Fleming Primary, as an independent school, has the autonomy to make their own decisions about the RSE curriculum, in response to their children. She contrasts the freedom that staff at Fleming Primary have to that experienced by staff in 'other' (i.e. state) schools, where, she supposes, professional opinions and judgements regarding the appropriateness of the RSE curriculum for their pupils are not welcomed. She corrects herself in the last sentence, recognizing that RSE is not yet statutory, but if it does become statutory she suggests that state schools may no longer be able to choose how they teach RSE. Audrey's talk here about tailoring the RSE curriculum to the school's pupils mirrors respondent's accounts of how they tailor other subjects and timetables to the pupils in the school, which state schools do not have the freedom to do. This type of flexible, child-centred education aligns with Macmurray's ideal about what education should be and do for pupils. As discussed in Chapter Three, for Macmurray learning is a contemplative activity: individuals learn by reflecting on what they perceive and understand about the world, and this is transformative (Macmurray, 1950, 1957). He suggests that when personal relations and personal relationships are suitably valued in schools, teachers and pupils have more empathy and teachers are better able to engage pupils. As such, pupils are the subjects and guide teacher's decision making about how learning is organised and delivered. This is what Simone was getting at: she

suggests that teachers at Fleming Primary can respond to pupils' learning and plan lessons accordingly, rather than pupils being expected to fit their learning into pre-structured lesson organisation, which she expects is the norm in state schools. This analysis supports my suggestion that the vision of the person-centred school is central to the school ethos at Fleming Primary.

Another manifestation of Fleming's person-centred school ethos is consensual policy making. Most respondents pointed out that the school highly values staff members. Simone said of the school, "it is very friendly... as in it welcomes you as a person rather than a number or a role..." (1st interview). Simone and Audrey talked about how consulting with teachers is a regular part of the policy making process, and Lena suggested that involving staff in decision making in the case of RSE was considered especially important:

All the people who are involved have to have a stake, have a say, and also buy into it. Because [RSE is] too important to have teachers who don't really want to do it, that don't understand it or don't agree with it (2nd interview)

Involving staff in policy making for RSE thus helped build staff support for and understanding of RSE. Prior to developing the new policy, Simone recognized that many staff were uncomfortable and lacked confidence to deliver RSE, so she recruited Malcolm, the local authority expert advisor on RSE, to train staff. She explains:

I knew that our relationships and sex education policy needed updating, but the staff weren't behind me... [Malcolm] said, 'well I'll come in and do some sessions, what is it you are actually wanting to achieve?'. And I sort of said, 'well I'm actually wanting to unite the staff, so that they all understand why we're doing what we're doing, and so they all want to do what we're doing'. (2nd interview)

Beyond building staff support for RSE, Simone recognized most staff had low epistemic ability in RSE and she wanted to invest in their RSE knowledge and expertise. Simone recognized that power to affect outcomes in RSE, and epistemic ability in particular, could be developed and improved (Morriss, 2002).

When Simone introduced the task –revising the RSE policy – to staff, she said, "it was presented as, 'this is going to pull everybody together and this is for the benefit of everybody in the school, not just children but also staff'. It is to do with the wellbeing of staff as well" (2nd interview). She explained that she knew the process would involve a lot of inward looking and reflection, of individual staff members examining their values and attitudes. In his training sessions with staff at Fleming, Malcolm said they looked at

what your influences were, what are your beliefs now about how you teach this, a little bit of content, a bit about the best way of teaching, a bit about the sensitivities of parents and the difficulties, just giving them some space to think through what their

fears were, what their strengths were, as a school... then I think we provided materials, or suggested materials that they might use. (1st and only interview)

Malcolm encouraged teachers to talk about their personal experience and beliefs in relation to the topic, and about the concerns of parents, in addition to building capacity for teaching RSE. As a member of the senior leadership team, Simone promoted a school culture where the personal experiences, values and attitudes of staff were acknowledged and appreciated. In his writing about personal relations and about valuational knowledge, Macmurray argued that all those involved in education – pupils, teachers and other members of the community – should be welcomed and appreciated for who they are. Fielding, writing about Macmurray, wrote:

Whereas traditional approaches to these matters require us to internalise received notions of value, Macmurray argues that we should be authentic... not parroting social convention and traditional conviction. The choices we make should be *our* genuine choices and judgments, not someone else's. (2012:680)

According to Fielding, Macmurray argued that educators should not be expected to deliver 'notions of values' articulated and promoted by the state for instance; educators should be confident to impart their own genuine values and ideas. Macmurray suggested that this would encourage children to learn to reflect on and contemplate their own opinions and values, and to think for themselves (1932, referenced by Fielding, 2012:683).

Audrey said:

I think [Malcolm] made it all right for staff to go, 'actually, I am not dealing with this bit. No, we're not answering that. Let's put that over there, children, we are dealing with this.' And I think he sort of let people go, 'actually, I can do this, because I don't have to answer everything the children say. If I think it's inappropriate, we don't need to do it.' (2nd interview)

Audrey suggests that Malcolm helped staff to feel confident that they could deliver RSE, that they could decide what they were comfortable with and their judgments were an appropriate measure for shaping RSE lessons, despite their lack of expertise.

After Malcolm delivered the training sessions, the staff as a group decided what the RSE policy would be. Audrey said, "[as a staff,] we got to the point where there was a consensus of opinion... we sort of agreed that certain things should be taught in certain timescales." (2nd interview). Simone said "[as a staff] we decided that we didn't want to do what was recommended for year sixes, so as a result we've dumbed down, or we've moved the goalposts up in that one... We wanted everyone to feel comfortable, that's the main thing." (2nd interview). This analysis suggests that the senior leadership team's vision of Fleming as a person-centred school shaped the policy making process for RSE: it encouraged staff to feel

that their personal comfort and subjectivities were appropriate grounds for making decisions about RSE, regardless of their lack of expertise.

Marketisation

Marketisation goes beyond introducing elements of business management into public sector services (as neoliberalism does), it refers explicitly to commercialisation: in this case, the commercialisation of education. Respondents suggested that Fleming sees itself in competition with state sector schools. As a private school, Fleming charges fees and therefore it must distinguish itself from state schools, and other private schools, in order to gain the business of parents (clients). Defining itself in the education 'market' is a central feature of its mission.

Simone said:

We have always struggled as a school to promote what we do extremely well. And we produce very happy, content, well balanced, confident children, who are accepting of their weaknesses, and set targets to remedy those. And that is very hard to parcel up, and say, 'here, this is what we do'... People like working with things that are concrete... they can recognize, to get from there to there, we have to do this... So, we are beginning to formalize, I guess, what we do, and package it up so people can understand and can see what we're doing, rather than us feeling it... although we're incredibly advanced in relation to other schools, us, on our journey, this is just the beginning. (2nd interview)

In this passage, the terms 'promote', 'parcel' and 'package' all invoke marketization. Simone is suggesting that the school is trying to create a tangible product, a commodity, to sell to customers. By 'they can see it, and they can recognize, to get from there to there, we have to do this', Simone is proposing here that in developing the school's RSE policy, in implementing assessment tools and improving documentation of students' progress in the subject, the school is producing evidence of a service that can be used to market the school to parents. Her description of the package that the school strives to produce suggests that consumers (parents) are "rational utility maximisers... [who] strive for conditions in which the freedom of the individual to pursue their own self-interest is not impeded by 'externalities' such as the authority of the state" (Wilkins, 2018:17). Simone envisions parent-consumers as rational beings who can see the 'interventions' that the school implements and understand a linear progression in their child's development.

Later, Simone specifically talks about how, by packaging its RSE, Fleming Primary will distinguish itself from other schools. Simone explained:

In this particular case [of RSE]... because of all the conversations that we had before... in trying to make what we do here far more visible... it was... already, always on the teachers mind. 'How can we disseminate this without regurgitating what everybody else [other schools] does? You know, "We treat the children as individuals"'. They don't actually. You look at what their expectation is, they are mass producing the same thing, which you can't do with people, which you should never attempt to do with people... [pupils] have to hit this level, at this target... [we were] trying to make sure that what we, what we do so *well* is just, is out there... this is just an ongoing thing that we have always discussed... how can we advertise it (2nd interview)

In this passage, Simone critiques other schools and suggests that Fleming Primary wants to 'disseminate' their ethos – 'what we do here' – to gain customers. She suggests that while many schools – presumably state schools – claim that they 'treat the children as individuals', this is not reflected in their practice. In line with Wilkins' proposal, above, Simone promotes Fleming Primary as a school free from the constraints imposed by the state. Where Fleming is person-centred, offering education tailored to the individual, other schools are 'mass producing the same thing'. This passage demonstrates Simone's belief that Fleming genuinely, authentically engages with pupils as individuals, and tailors its education programme to meet their needs. However, as a private school, Fleming Primary is in the market for parents, and advertising their offer is an ongoing concern.

A tension that stands out at Fleming is the recognition of the school's pastoral care, in which is it 'incredibly advanced', combined with the recognition that its RSE programme is just 'beginning'. Respondents do not distinguish between relationships education that is a formal part of RSE, and the school's pastoral care, which takes place in informal ways, in everyday interactions. Audrey said, "We've always had a very strong [program], certainly the relationships part of it... I think the sex ed, we've had workshops on it recently and made sure that we are up with the guidelines" (1st interview). She suggests it is the sex education part of RSE that respondents are unfamiliar with. Simone expresses frustration with the reluctance of some staff members to use the correct names of sexual body parts with younger children, for example. However, it appears that Simone's awareness that the school's sex education still needs substantial development does not dampen her enthusiasm for packaging the school's pastoral care as RSE to sell their education services to potential customers.

Fleming Primary's preoccupation with marketing RSE to potential customers suggests that a number of marketing principles are at work: the school is competing with other schools for parents who it visualises as consumers; and it is focused on communicating its education service in a way that is attractive and also opaque. By 'opaque', I mean that there is a deliberate effort to cover up what respondents know: that their RSE (SE, in particular) is not

particularly exceptional. In addition, this marketing effort draws attention away from the people the school claims to be focused on, its pupils and staff.

While Fleming Primary's senior leadership team demonstrated a genuine concern and considered effort to deliver a highly personalised, excellent quality education to every pupil, and to ensure that each and every staff member felt involved and valued, this analysis suggests that their motivations were plural rather than always educational, with the result that their school ethos and mission was compromised.

Management and leadership

The analysis above suggests that educators and other staff members had a considerable influence on the school's policy. However, the policy making process was not entirely consensual in that there was a leader driving the agenda and she managed the policy process using particular tactics to achieve her aims.

One leader's vision

Simone defined herself as the instigator, the pusher of RSE. She informed me that sometimes policies come onto the agenda because of parental demand, or because of an incident that has highlighted a loop hole in the policy structure. In this case, she said, she identified a shift in educational priorities and wanted to develop the school's RSE policy ahead of RSE being made statutory. However, she recognized that staff capacity in this area was lacking and that it would take a concerted effort to gain staff support. She said:

I said I wanted to unite everybody together and I wanted everybody to be teaching this, not just, as in, a week in the summer, I want the relationships thing. I try very hard not to dictate, but I guess if somebody asks if, before I started on a particular journey, 'what is your aim?', I do have a clear aim. Just, I don't necessarily decide to tell everybody from the outset, because sometimes if you do, you get a complete disastrous response, which then hampers everything else along the way. (2nd interview)

By 'a week in the summer', Simone refers to the scheduling of RSE programme at many schools, which is done for one week in the summer term. Interestingly, she counters this with 'the relationships thing', which suggests that not only would the scheduling be spread out, but that it is about fostering relationships. More broadly, Simone articulates that she does have an aim, but that she anticipated she would face conflict if she presented it openly to staff. Simone describes her strategy:

[It was] a game of manipulation... I thought, 'I really like [Andromeda], this is great', so then I start talking, and dropping tidbits to teachers that you know are really

interested in that aspect... if you want a teacher to trial something, if you say, 'I think this will really work for that child', they will give it a go... So you start building up a momentum... and then bringing it to a staff meeting and discussing... And then another big factor was [the local authority] managed to get some money off, so... that was even more of an incentive... the whole staff... was on board. (2nd interview)

Simone decided to slowly coach her staff towards where she wanted to be, and to support the adoption of the Andromeda curriculum. Like Wendy, at Latimer Primary, who talked about putting in particular pieces of support for individual children, Simone recognized that certain children might respond to particular strategies or pieces of content in RSE. Simone had participated in a year-long certificate of professional development in PSHE, and she recognized that she had the greatest knowledge – the greatest epistemic ability – among staff at Fleming Primary. She understood that her power to affect outcomes in RSE was justified not only because of her position, as a member of the senior leadership team, but because of her epistemic ability. While Simone calls it manipulation, her tactics could also be described as diplomacy: she exercised power by navigating the context and motivating colleagues in specific ways, in consideration of their sensitivities, towards a pre-defined outcome.

In articulating his concept of the practical context – one situation in which power is exercised – Morriss wrote that the exercise of power is influenced by how agents understand the field, how they understand their powers and resources in relation to those around them, and how they interpret the actions that are necessary to advance their agenda (2002). This describes Simone's exercise of power. In addition to the relationships with staff members, Simone describes how she secured consent from Pamela, another member of the senior leadership team:

[Pamela], who obviously holds the purse strings, was told that we were very interested in this resource, it was going to cost this amount of money... she didn't say, 'oh I want to have a look at the scheme... because obviously from an educational point of view she wouldn't really know what she's looking at. (2nd interview)

For her part, Pamela said, Simone "is an amazing lady to work with, amazing. I absolutely hold her on a pedestal... I believe we've built up a great relationship" (1st interview). Lena reflected Pamela and Simone's opinion that Simone's judgments with regards to education were valued and trusted. She said:

my husband says... 'If [Simone] has made that decision, I'll go with it. That's fine, that's fine by me'... care for the children, and what they're learning, that's the school's job. (1st interview)

However, despite Simone's power to make and implement decisions in relation to RSE, due to her formal position, due to the trust that parents and staff had in her, and due to her epistemic ability, Simone's power in RSE was hampered by the school's tradition of consensual

policy making. As discussed in Chapter Five, Simone expressed frustration with staff who were reluctant to teach the scientific names for genitalia in RSE, and other conservative views that did not correspond to current guidance and evidence on RSE (which she had learnt in her PSHE training). In this instance, rather than allowing the consensus to steer the decision, Simone pushed for using the scientific names and allowed the parents to decide – by communicating the decision to parents and giving them the opportunity to object. This example demonstrates that Simone felt held back by the lack of support for RSE among her colleagues.

The tradition of consensual policy making had a restrictive affect on the RSE policy because of the collective low level of expertise in RSE across the staff. The school may have been able to adopt a more progressive stance in RSE if more members of staff had epistemic ability in sex education, specifically. While other members of the senior leadership team defer to Simone and she is trusted by parents, and Simone herself expressed confidence in her role as leader, she nonetheless felt compelled to lead the development of the RSE policy in what she herself characterised as ‘a game of manipulation’. Due to the school’s person-centred ethos, Simone led her staff through a process where they gained knowledge and skills in RSE, and where they felt that their concerns and feelings were reflected in policy. The policy making process for RSE was thus a complex negotiation, a to-ing and fro-ing between Simone’s leadership and superior knowledge about RSE, and the school’s tradition of consensual policy making.

Simone’s exercise of power can also be understood in relation to Luke’s third dimension of power (Lukes, 2005), as discussed in Chapter Three. The teachers and other respondents involved in decision making about RSE are unaware that their consent is gradually being communicated to them. Simone is drawing them into her vision for RSE in bits and pieces, and the data suggests that they are unaware of the extent of this strategy. While the strategy is defensible – Simone has the formal authority to lead the development of the policy, and she is by all accounts the person with the most expertise in RSE – it does not align with Macmurray’s proposal that intersubjective knowledge should be at the centre of the school. This example highlights potential problems with intersubjective knowledge, and more specifically the conflict between democratic, community-owned decision making and evidence-based decision making. Simone speaks passionately about the fact that the school values every person in the school community, but she is equally committed to developing an RSE policy that is more in line with the current evidence – particularly her own epistemic knowledge – than it is currently. She actively strives to build capacity among her staff, by bringing in an external expert to deliver training and improve their own skills and knowledge, but she

recognized that it would take a long time to gain their full commitment. As a member of the senior leadership team, Simone is responsible for the school's strategy direction and she recognized that it was up to her to make the change happen.

Macmurray does not offer much analysis on how senior members of staff should fulfil their formal responsibilities in his vision of the school as community, but my interpretation of his work is that Simone should have engaged with her colleagues and staff honestly and authentically, securing their commitment to change by presenting her thinking, her rationale for change, and offering them opportunities to defend the way things were currently done if they did not agree with her. Part of Macmurray's argument for intersubjective knowledge in schools is so that it progresses with societal change. He writes,

We can no longer look upon education as a means of teaching children to believe what we believe, to hold the same opinions and like the same things as ourselves... Here then is the real problem of education for a progressive society. We have to train our children... to keep the processes of progress going, and so to keep themselves changing as they change the world. (1933:5)

Macmurray recognizes that what teachers and adults might have learnt and experienced will be different than what children's experiences are and will be. This is a forceful point in relation to RSE, and one of Simone's complaints – the rationale she gave for concealing her ultimate aim to staff – was that her staff were not progressive enough, not sufficiently supportive of change. Macmurray suggests, as a solution to this problem: “we must ourselves learn to sit more lightly to our own prejudices, and we must abstain from giving the younger generation the impression that we are ‘the last word’” (1933:6). Simone did try to change her colleagues' prejudices and lack of knowledge, by bringing in an external trainer, but Macmurray may have suggested that the staff try to consult and engage more substantively with the pupils themselves. This may have had the effect not only of changing their prejudices, but may have been a far more consultative, democratic method of policy making. In conclusion, the data and discussion clearly demonstrate that however enthusiastically respondents spoke about the school's appreciation of every person and their opinion, in the case of RSE policy Fleming Primary did not model Macmurray's intersubjective knowledge.

On a final note, it is worth noting that among the respondents at Fleming Primary were two eleven-year-old girls. My key contact at the school had suggested that pupils had contributed to the RSE policy and these girls would be able to describe their involvement. Unfortunately, in response to my questions about how pupils at the schools had been consulted or involved in relation to the school RSE policy or programme, the pupils could not recall or confirm that pupils had been involved in any way. I further prompted them about their views on whether

pupils should be involved, and what ideas they had about how RSE might be improved at their school. In response, the two pupils said that they were happy with the RSE that they received and that they were happy for their teachers to make the decisions about what should be taught in RSE and how it should be delivered. They reported that they felt their teachers were best placed to make these decisions. However, aside from my key contact at the school, none of the other adult respondents suggested that pupils had been consulted in the development of the RSE policy either. This suggests that the consultation with pupils had been relatively insignificant and/or perhaps the pupils had not been informed that their views had contributed to the policy. My data contrasts with much of the literature about young people's participation in RSE decision making – which is, however, largely focused on secondary school pupils – that suggests young people want their views and desires for RSE to be taken into account (e.g. Allen, 2008).

6.4. Summary

In this chapter I analysed how institutional ethos, culture and management influenced the policy making processes for RSE at each of the schools. The data suggest that the distinctive core values, vision, beliefs and values of each school had profound implications for the significance and features of the RSE policy.

At Latimer Primary, respondents suggested that the school has a clear, recognizable ethos that values children's rights, relationships and expressed needs. There were demonstrable synergies between the school's ethos – which was central to the school's cognitive aims – and the RSE policy. Latimer Primary prioritizes what Macmurray called intersubjective knowledge, or knowledge of community, and aligns to some extent with Macmurray's ideal of the 'school as community'. While appreciation of the school community's ethnic and socio-cultural diversity was central to the school ethos and culture, the senior leadership team and other staff deliberately prioritised the school's cognitive aims. The data and analysis suggest that the senior leadership team represented a powerful champion for RSE and that the conditions they created and reinforced in the school established a logic, conventions and criteria for decision making that served to promote a whole school approach to RSE. Findings from Latimer Primary also suggest that this whole school approach depends in part on having a number of staff with a high degree of epistemic ability in RSE. The findings from Latimer Primary illustrate how complex and sensitive negotiating RSE policy can be.

At Wingfield Academy and Fleming Primary, the school ethos was less clear, partly because respondents spoke about it less, but nonetheless their core values, missions and leadership styles emerged through the data. At Wingfield, neoliberalism emerged as the defacto ethos. Wingfield's decision making about RSE suggest that the school is embedded in the neoliberal institution and it has not yet managed to carve out school values and a mission – or cognitive aims, to use Social Realist terminology – that sit apart from this institution. The criteria that underpinned decisions about RSE aligned with Macmurray's technical knowledge and Social Realism cognitive norms: that is, questions about *how* RSE is delivered, *how* to demonstrate progress, *how* to make improvements. Wingfield prioritised procedures associated with efficiency (e.g. sharing resources across schools), documenting lessons and performing the curriculum, and there was little evidence that they engaged in reflective evaluation of children's experiences and learning. The findings suggested that low epistemic ability across staff is partly responsible for the lack of qualitative analysis of RSE, specifically what Macmurray would call the valuational or intersubjective aspects of knowledge in RSE.

Fleming Primary has a clear vision of itself as a person-centred school, and as such strives to give ownership and voice to the members that comprise it. One way that this ethos is mobilized is through consensual policy making for RSE, however, there is a clear tension between the senior leadership's desire for staff to own and be involved in RSE policy making and epistemic ability for RSE, which is centred in one person: Simone, a member of the senior leadership team. She exercises power by carefully executing a strategy for RSE policy development, which includes a somewhat insincere process of consensual policy making. While respondents talk of how the school is centred around pupils needs, the findings also suggest that pupils' experiences and desires for RSE are left out of RSE policy making. Efforts to engage honestly with the school's record on RSE, particularly in relation to the sex and sexuality components, are encumbered by Fleming's need to distinguish itself in the education market.

Chapter 7: Discussion and conclusion

Themes of knowledge, structure, agency and power are interwoven within and across the policy making processes that I have explored in the preceding two chapters, and these relationships provoke further interrogation and theorising. In this final chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to my research questions and propose new perspectives for theorising about policy making about RSE; I offer recommendations for policy and practice; I discuss my contributions to knowledge, as well as limitations of this study; and I consider what future research this study points to. I conclude the thesis with some final thoughts about the significance of this study in the context of RSE as a policy subject that continues to be at the forefront of public debate.

7.1. Answering my research questions and critical appraisal of my theoretical approach

In this section, I address each of my four research questions in relation to my findings. Building on the data and analyses presented in Chapters Five and Six, I draw out the themes and patterns that I have discerned and discuss them in relation to relevant literature. I also deepen theorisation about primary schools' policy making for RSE.

What kinds of, and whose, knowledge influences policy deliberations about sex and relationships education?

My analysis suggests that policy deliberations about RSE are complex and contextualised, and the knowledge(s) that have influenced RSE are accordingly diverse. There are commonalities across the schools – notably public and educational discourses that respondents applied to RSE policies and policy processes – but equally significant are the specific, divergent knowledge(s) that have shaped the schools' policy deliberations and RSE policies. My analysis has drawn attention to knowledge about the aims and content of RSE, as well as knowledge that relates to the processes and practices that have influenced RSE policy.

My analyses of the individual schools demonstrated that RSE policy making was rendered far more complex by local culture, ethos and practices. As discussed in Chapter 6, each school demonstrated unique values related to education, standards of knowledge and codes of practices, which overlapped and intersected in their RSE policy making. I drew comparisons with Goodnight's 'argument spheres', which represent codified environments that have specific conventions, rules and procedures that members understand and abide by in order to

advance their policy preferences (2012). At Latimer Primary, for example, the school ethos – embodying values such as inclusivity, mutual respect and equity – was such an ingrained part of school culture and practices that respondents appeared to perpetuate it without question through their RSE policy and the policy-making process. The policy-making process for RSE was therefore characterised by a sensitivity towards the local community, which was socio-culturally diverse, and to pupils’ unique experiences and needs. At Fleming, a private school, decisions about RSE were guided foremost by concerns about being able to package and sell an educational product, although internally the process was also consultative and cooperative. The values and criteria considered by respondents reflected the school’s economic and administrative structure (i.e. its survival depended on patronage), central to which was the school’s commitment to a school image that values and appreciates each person’s contributions.

Given that my sample was limited to three schools, I am reluctant to propose policy making ‘models’ or spheres (as Goodnight has done), but from my analysis emerged a number of distinct discourses and genres that the schools drew on to present arguments and which shaped policy-making practices for RSE. Criteria for making decisions for RSE related to particular frames about how policies should be made and/or what education should achieve. The diversity of these frames bring to mind Stewart’s definition of a socioscientific controversy: “extended argumentative engagements over socially significant issues and comprising communicative events and practices in and form both scientific and nonscientific spheres” (2009:125). He argues that socioscientific controversies draw upon, and mix, orders of discourse at both intertextual and interdiscursive levels. My analyses suggest that the claims that inform RSE decision making are drawn from diverse spheres and authorities, however conceived, and knowledge from diverse forms of text (e.g. curricula, government guidance, memories, opinions) are equalized or prioritised in heterogeneous ways to produce RSE policies and practices. Thus, note that the frames I have identified, discussed in the following paragraphs, are not consistent in their level of abstraction or form.

Neoliberal principles

In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how all three schools presented technical and public arguments (Goodnight, 2012) to advance their RSE policy that aligned with neoliberal principles, many of which are perpetuated through official educational policy. For example, the principle of standardization – of ensuring that pupils experience the same (or greater) benefits from RSE as pupils in other schools, and other year groups – and the need to demonstrate progress and

outcomes was articulated by respondents at all three schools. In Chapter 6, I proposed that neoliberalism is the defacto ethos and culture at Wingfield Academy, and argued that it influenced knowledge in Wingfield's RSE policy making. This was demonstrated by respondents' overwhelming focus on measuring outcomes, performing accountability for diverse adjudicators and achieving cost efficiencies. Neoliberal principles are focused on *how* RSE is delivered, aligning with Macmurray's technical knowledge and Social Realism's cognitive norms. Neoliberal principles represent both Goodnight's technical arguments – guiding, as they do, standards and norms for managing schools in England – as well as public arguments that have defined what matters in education (i.e. academic subjects; technical solutions that stress the need to improve the 'how', not the 'what' of education) (2012).

Popularism

In Chapter 5, I argued that public discourses about child innocence and protection were evident across all three schools, and these discourses emerged from public debates about RSE as well as public policies. Safeguarding was identified by multiple respondents, at all three schools, as a primary aim of RSE, echoing government policy. Preserving childhood innocence was an argument that affected all three schools, although in different respects. At Fleming, teachers consulted in RSE policy making sought to protect children from 'all the *stuff* that goes on in the outside world'; at Wingfield it was the key decision makers who aligned childhood with the discourse of protection; and at Latimer, respondents experienced pressure from parents who believed that RSE would interrupt child innocence and integrity. Goodnight's argumentative approach, from the field of critical policy analysis, helped to delineate criteria related to public opinion, debates and policy (Goodnight, 2012), while Macmurray's valuational knowledge helped to locate these public arguments within respondents' talk of knowledge in education, identifying what children should (and should not) learn.

Market engagement

Distinct from neoliberalism, which applies business practices to public services, I use the term 'market engagement' to refer to criteria that herald the market as the authority and expert. Thus, schools have engaged in the commercial sector, either as a vendor or a consumer, to make decisions about RSE. At Fleming Primary, for example, respondents deferred to parents, their patrons, to make a final decision on language used in RSE with young children. At Wingfield, respondents placed complete trust in the Andromeda curriculum, a commercial package, which – while recommended by the local authority – was, I argued, invested with

commercial interests. These interests, I proposed, influenced Andromeda's RSE content, and, in the absence of any critical appraisal and/or supplementary materials, determined the school's RSE programme. Young's original *New Sociology of Education* (1971), as well as his more recent work, drew attention to the cognitive interests underpinned in educational decision making. My arguments about the significance of market mechanism in determining knowledge and values in RSE also resonate with warnings made by prominent educationalists Ball (2013) and Wilkins (2015) about the implications of private sector involvement in curricula.

Community-oriented values

In Chapter Six, I analysed in depth Latimer Primary's efforts to be responsive to its school community, in reactive and proactive ways. The senior leadership team's commitment to include FGM in RSE, its willingness to explore and learn about inclusive ways of teaching gender (in the presence of a gender-creative child), and regular practices of adapting RSE when and as required to accord with cultural, religious and personal values are examples of their efforts to 'bend' with the community. Macmurray's intersubjective knowledge and his theory of personal relations in education aided in analysing and demonstrating how community knowledge helped to make Latimer's RSE policy and practice more relevant to its pupils and community, and how it supported innovation and learning in RSE.

Collegiality

Collegiality, in this context, refers to decision making that places authority for RSE among colleagues, among educators, and suggests that those leading decision-making processes for RSE recognized their colleagues as professionally competent in RSE. Collegial principles were exercised in RSE policy making at both Fleming Primary and Latimer Primary, regardless of their expertise in RSE, and teachers' contributions appeared to have had significant influences on the values and criteria that informed RSE policies. I understood these contributions as 'technical arguments', in line with Goodnight's description of arguments that appeal to professional conventions and practices, and which recognize the stature of a profession (2012).

Pupil driven focus

Latimer Primary was unique among the schools for its interest in making decisions about knowledge for RSE based on pupil feedback and experiences in RSE lessons, as well as their knowledge about pupils' social settings (e.g. their families, religious contexts and communities). There appeared to be no direct pupil involvement in RSE policy at any of the schools, but knowledge of pupils was significant in RSE policy making at Latimer Primary.

Macmurray's proposal that educators' personal relations with pupils – their care and interest in pupils as people, and not with the sole aim of some educational outcome – should be a cornerstone of teaching practice and planning. Latimer not only demonstrated this in practice but illustrated why this principle is valuable, for RSE at least.

As my findings chapters demonstrated, all three schools employed criteria and values from more than one of these frames. These frames contributed knowledge for the content and aims of RSE, as well as knowledge that shaped RSE policy-making processes at each of the schools. My analyses demonstrate that these frames interacted and overlapped. Collegial contributions to RSE policy, for example, at times were characterised by neoliberal or populist arguments. And the prioritisation of criteria, and/or the steps required to realise them, were not always clear. For example, at Fleming Primary most respondents claimed that decision making regarding the RSE policy was driven by pupil needs and desires, in line with what respondents perceived to be one of the school's greatest assets: pupil-centred education and pastoral care. The data, however, challenged claims about RSE being driven by knowledge about or from pupils; it suggested that decision making was guided more by collegial consensus, which in turn was shaped by hierarchical decision making. At Latimer, the senior leadership team transparently promoted the school ethos, including particular values and criteria about the kind of knowledge – the kind of education – that they wanted pupils to receive.

In addition, the employment of these different frames cannot be simply understood as supportive of good quality RSE or detrimental to it. In the case of the 'Collegiality' frame, Latimer Primary and Fleming Primary both consulted teachers delivering RSE in their policy making processes, but their motivations for doing so differed and so were the process and outcomes. In Chapter 6, I analysed how democratic decision making was presented as a regimented practice in Fleming Primary, an enactment of the school ethos' appreciation of all members of the school, of their identities and opinions. However, it appeared that Simone, a member of the senior leadership team, covertly managed the policy process, which aimed not only to secure other teachers' interest and commitment to teach RSE, but to gradually obtain their support for Simone's pre-existing RSE plan. While a pre-determined RSE policy runs in conflict to the principle of democratic decision making, teachers nevertheless had a short-lived influence on the policy: one outcome of teacher consultation at Fleming Primary was that the school decided not to teach sexual intercourse in year six, despite expert advice to do so. At Latimer, those leading RSE policy development also sought teachers' input to the policy

because they wanted them to feel comfortable with the new policy and confident teaching RSE subsequently (similar to Fleming), but also because they recognized teachers' expertise. In contrast to Fleming, however, my analysis suggests that teachers at Latimer had comparatively higher epistemic abilities and comfort level in RSE, so the knowledge they contributed may have been more productive in relation to good quality RSE.

One frame that may be missed in this schema is that of peer-reviewed, academic knowledge about RSE. The data did not wholly exclude references to scientific knowledge, but these were brief. For instance, Amy and Sarah at Latimer noted that the school had consulted research, but they did not detail what knowledge they had gleaned from it. Some respondents at Wingfield recognized Malcolm, the local authority expert on RSE, and his contributions as representative of scientific knowledge on RSE, but some respondents at Latimer suggested that he did not always have the most current knowledge and saw him more as a government actor than as a scientific expert on RSE. While references to RSE research are lacking, the data also suggests that 'expert knowledge' more broadly understood was present in some of the decision making about RSE. For example, I suggested that Malcolm did bring some expert knowledge to Fleming (and respondents at Latimer noted that the school had benefited from his expertise in previous years), some respondents at Latimer had expert knowledge in RSE, from their own experience and training, and pupils themselves had expert knowledge and this was represented to a limited extent in collegial contributions.

My analyses and findings illustrate, I believe, the strengths of using a Critical Realist framework. As suggested by Scott, "at any point in time within a system, a number of differently organised struggles may be going on. This is because those structural properties do not automatically carry with them benefits and dis-benefits which compel role-holders to act in certain ways" (2000:33). Beyond immediate rewards or consequences, in addition, agents may find themselves at the intersection of multiple epistemes and feel compelled to give priority to one or another set of values and processes. It is by engaging with diverse theories, and considering both agents' accounts and deeper, structural influences and events, that I have been able to describe and explain some of the structured interests (e.g. the prevailing power of adults to shape policies), constraints, predicaments and webs of relationships that have influenced knowledge in RSE policy making (Porpora, 1998).

These findings suggest the need for different theoretical approaches to analyse RSE policy making – including but extending beyond Critical Realism – than what has been employed in the majority of the literature on RSE. The findings cannot be described or contained by

Goodnight's argumentative approach, including technical, public and personal arguments, and neither Social Realism's cognitive norms/goals/interests, nor Macmurray's typology of knowledge, or distinction between personal and functional relations could alone uncover and illustrate the complex nature of RSE policy making at any one of the three schools.

Nonetheless, the complexity of these findings are supported by historical research into sex and relationships education (e.g. Pilcher, 2004; Hall, 2004; Thomson, 1994), which suggests that the themes, discourses and champions for the subject have come from various spheres.

One theoretical approach that has emerged as being potentially quite productive for theorisation about RSE policy making is Stewart's conceptualisation of 'socioscientific controversies'. As noted above, this concept refers to arguments about socially significant issues that may incorporate various types of communicative practices, that draw on scientific and non-scientific criteria, and mix diverse spheres and forms (Stewart, 2009). Although this concept emerged as being relevant to my data and analyses at a late stage – and therefore I have not discussed it in depth – I would suggest that this could be further developed.

However, Stewart's focus is on argumentation, whereas my analyses are aided greatly by Young and Moore's sensitive and comprehensive treatment of the conditions in which decisions are made (e.g. Young, 2008; Moore, 2013; Moore and Young, 2001). Macmurray's concepts of personal/functional relations in school further refined my analyses of practice (1950, 1957), and the attention Macmurray paid to personal relationships and knowledge of community helped to delineate and reflect on the contribution of these features to knowledge in RSE policy making.

How do structures, such as institutional, hierarchical or cultural discourses, exert influence and authority to legitimise, or dismiss, knowledge(s) in the policy-making process?

The frames identified above point to a range of authorities and structures that legitimised, or dismissed, knowledge in schools' RSE policy making. My analyses in Chapters Five and Six demonstrate the mechanisms through which these authorities, and the structures they are represented by, act on RSE policy-making processes. I touched on these in explaining the frames that have contributed criteria and values to inform knowledge for RSE policies, above. Here, I focus on what is perhaps the most authoritative structure: government.

I suggest that government is the most authoritative structure in RSE policy making based on its significance for all three schools and in comparison to other authorities. Government was represented by the official Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (2000), the local authority (including the local authority advisor for RSE) and by other government policies

that contributed to knowledge in RSE policy making processes, such as the statutory guidance on safeguarding. It includes pressures and expectations imposed on schools by government which affected daily practices, policy-making procedures and the (lack of) prioritisation of RSE. Even Fleming Primary, an independent school, defined their RSE policy and programme in relation to standards and expectations in the public sector.

Although government policies officially authorised schools to endow their RSE policies with local knowledge and expertise (see DfEE, 2000:4, 7 and 27-29, and the *Education Act 1986*, c.61), by enabling parents to withdraw their child(ren) from RSE they are undermining schools' authority to make appropriate decisions. Data from Latimer Primary demonstrated that although many staff had extensive expertise in RSE, respondents felt frustrated by government policies that 'ring-fenced' the content that could be addressed in RSE, and also felt frustrated by the amount of time and effort they expended trying to persuade parents that their child(ren) needed RSE and that the RSE programme the school offered was appropriate (and therefore they should not withdraw their child(ren)). While respondents felt confident that their own expertise was a better guide for making appropriate decisions about RSE than government policy, they were unable to apply this knowledge and did not feel sufficiently authorised by the government as RSE educators and experts. As discussed in Chapter 6, respondents at Latimer Primary lacked power to affect outcomes in RSE because they lacked 'ableness', to draw upon Morriss' term, which refers to having the authorisation or qualifications or being practically able to do the required action(s) (2002). Specifically, in this case, respondents were not effectively authorised by the government as leaders and experts in RSE, and therefore their knowledge was delegitimised. Negotiating and claiming authority as an RSE provider thus incurred significant time and investment.

At Fleming Primary and Wingfield Academy, however, I suggest that respondents' lack of epistemic ability posed more severe limitations on their power to affect outcomes in RSE than their lack of official authorisation. The government indiscriminately authorises schools to make important decisions about RSE, regardless of their in-house epistemic ability, and simultaneously it has failed to provide the resources for schools to acquire or develop these epistemic abilities. As discussed in Chapter Two, the government has failed to establish a steady supply of trained RSE teachers. In its review of PSHE, the House of Commons Education Committee reported that government funding cuts to the national programme to train teachers in PSHE had a drastic impact on the number of teachers accessing training: in the 2009-10 academic year, when training was free, there were 1937 registrations, whereas in the 2013-14 academic year, when the course cost £700, only 175 teachers registered (House of

Commons Education Committee, 2015). This represents a 90% drop in teachers training in the subject. The government has also failed to make RSE training a meaningful part of pre-service teacher training. Thus, while government authorises educators to make decisions about RSE, it simultaneously delegitimises their knowledge by failing to equip them with the knowledge is needed.

In sum, the government delegitimizes the knowledge of both those educators that do have the epistemic ability to make qualified, appropriate decisions about RSE, as well as the knowledge of those who do not, and in addition it at once authorises schools to decide RSE policy and authorises parents to deny this authority. Building on Morriss' theory of power (2002), I understand this situation as a paradox in power. The government has delegated responsibility for deciding what knowledge should be represented in RSE, but that delegation comes with restraints and scepticism of schools' actual power to deliver RSE appropriately. The government's ongoing reluctance to staunchly defend the position that schools are appropriate places for children to learn about relationships and sex, against any group who would beg otherwise, and its failure to qualify them accordingly, has placed schools and educators in an untenable position.

My application of the concept of power is an innovative approach to this phenomenon. It applies a conceptual framework to findings that are also present in existing literature, which suggests that educators and schools feel uncertainty, anxiety and fear in making decisions about RSE, largely due to a lack of leadership, structure, support and training around RSE (e.g. Alldred and David, 2007; Mason, 2010; Renold, 2000). Thus, I am building on and taking further findings from earlier research.

How are decision makers' personal values, attitudes, emotions and beliefs expressed and addressed in the policy-making process?

Compared to the previous two research questions, this third question proved to be less useful in responding to the central aim of my study, which was to explore how primary school decision makers understand and (re)create value in RSE policy making. Initially, I asked respondents questions about their experiences of RSE as pupils and experiences such as parenthood that may have shaped their views of RSE (see Annex A). However, my analyses and engagement with the data and with theory has encouraged me to understand these 'personal' attributes and opinions in opposition to dominant discourses and structures that have influenced knowledge in RSE policy making.

Critical Realism promotes an understanding of agents as both products and producers of social systems, and my study aids an understanding of structure and agency as fluid and differentiated. While some respondents appeared to subscribe fully to government ideas and policies whole-heartedly, with no thought given to the underlying assumptions or aims (e.g. Kirsten at Wingfield Academy) – still, arguably, an expression of ‘personal’ values and beliefs – I offer a more productive answer to this question by interpreting it in line with agent creativity and dissent.

As discussed in Chapter 6, at Latimer Primary Sarah articulated how she deliberately marginalised government policy as an obligatory component of their practice. She talked about how the school was producing documentation of RSE for the purpose of providing ‘proof’ for Ofsted, but these tools were peripheral. My findings demonstrate how multiple respondents at Latimer Primary understood the purpose of RSE, and of their school ethos, as having aims and values that were distinct from government educational policy. At Fleming Primary, Simone discussed how the school was differentiating itself from state schools: she expressed her belief that the school was offering personalised pastoral care and support to each pupil and valuing each member of the school community. Respondents suggested that this ethos made Fleming Primary ‘special’, it created value because it was different from what most schools had to offer.

While the decisions and actions of Sarah and Simone, and other respondents, demonstrated creativity and enterprise in RSE policy making, it is also important to note that their views align with other discourses and frames (e.g. human rights, personalisation). As argued by Critical Realists, agents are inseparable from the social constructs that create meaning in their environment. While these agents are resistant and creative, they nevertheless draw their ideas and aims for RSE from somewhere.

In addition to respondent dissent, my ‘Pupil driven’ frame for RSE policy making includes additional discussion about the personal in RSE policy. My analyses have demonstrated how personal relations may be significant in RSE policy making, and deepened understanding about the appropriateness of the ‘personal’ in educational policy making.

The value that I have demonstrated of the personal in RSE policy making is a distinct step away from the prolonged focus on functional relations, including ‘evidence-based policy’ (although they are not necessarily mutually exclusive), and I consider it a unique contribution to knowledge.

How are knowledge(s), and social relations that affect the legitimisation of knowledge, embedded in the written sex and relationships education policy in the school?

This fourth research question also proved peripheral to my central research aim. My data and analysis would suggest that the response to this question in fact serves my first research question, as it provides evidence for the first frame I proposed – ‘Neoliberal principles’, and my second research question, as it demonstrates how the government legitimizes particular forms and types of knowledge.

As discussed in the findings, the written RSE policies were considered an instrument for accountability: they were available for parents and for government agents (i.e. Ofsted, the Independent Schools Inspectorate) to review, but they were not complete representations of knowledge(s) in RSE policy making. The written policies presented opportunities for state schools to evidence to Ofsted (the state) that they had developed their RSE policy and programme with reference to the official Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (DfEE, 2000), which is a statutory requirement for any school that chooses to offer RSE, and to other official policies, including the safeguarding guidance and the *Equalities Act 2010*.

As discussed in the literature review, my reading of ‘policy’ in this thesis extends beyond written policies to include expressions of intent, practice of policy, programmes of work, interpretations and applications of government written policy/guidance (Bochel and Duncan, 2007; Levinson et al., 2009). My analyses demonstrate that while the written policy is relevant, it is a limited dimension of policy analysis.

7.2. Contribution to knowledge

I have strived to present the findings of this research reflectively, thus throughout these final few chapters I have unveiled what I understand to be the main contributions of this study. To minimize repetition, I summarise here my main contributions to knowledge.

First, this thesis contributes to existing literature on RSE by presenting a theoretically pluralistic analysis of the policy making process at the school level. In contrast to much of the work on RSE, discussed in my literature review, I have brought together theories from different disciplines – education, critical policy analysis and sociology – which offer distinct perspectives for explaining phenomena related to decision making and knowledge in education. Methodologically, this is a novel approach in RSE research. One of the strengths of this methodology is that by playing with and exploring the phenomena through diverse conceptualisations of agency, structure and the production of knowledge, I have strengthened

the rigour of my arguments. For example, at Wingfield Academy I discussed the primary drivers of RSE policy preferences and priorities in relation to what Social Realist theory calls ‘cognitive norms’. Macmurray’s typology of knowledge then helped to delve deeper into the significance of Wingfield’s cognitive norms, specifically the dominant type of knowledge – what Macmurray called ‘technical knowledge’ – reflected in their practices and regimes. This supported a nuanced discussion about how Wingfield’s understood the goals and purpose of RSE. Through this multi-dimensional data analysis, I have demonstrated how complex and emergent RSE policy making can be.

Beyond methodological innovation, I have contributed valuable findings about RSE policy making in English primary schools. I have identified patterns across different orders of discourse and form, including those occurring across all three study sites and those that are occur within only one or two of the schools. I have made meaning out of these patterns, proposing distinct frames that each contribute unique criteria and values to RSE policy making in English primary schools. In my literature review, I encountered discussions of the criteria and values that inform educational curricula and policy more generally, for example Young (2008) and Ball (2013), and within the field of RSE I encountered research that addressed more generally the significance of values and standards to RSE and SMSC (DfE, 2014a; DfE, 2017a; Hester and Westmarland, 20005; Ringrose et al., 2021). However, I did not encounter any work that attempted to explore and explain in depth specific influential types of knowledge or authorities governing knowledge in school RSE policy making.

Additional novel contributions to the field of RSE include my proposal that educators lack *power* to affect outcomes in RSE – in spite of official government authorisation – aided greatly by Morriss’ dispositional concept of power, which focuses attention on what agents can practically achieve given the situation they are in (2002).

My application of Macmurray’s writing on education, including his advocacy of personal relations and intersubjective knowledge in schools, also deepens understanding of the significance and value of interpersonal relationships between educators and pupils, and educators and parents, for RSE. This is distinct from community and local service consultation/engagement, which the UK government and some scholars have previously identified as an important part of RSE policy development (e.g. DfEE, 2000; Alldred and David, 2007; Corteen, 2006), because it is not only about what stakeholders think about RSE, it is about how ongoing relationships, how care for and knowledge of pupils and families, contribute to RSE decision making. Popular conceptions of good practice commonly involve

duplicating or simulating exemplary models (e.g. Barksfield, 2017; National Children's Bureau, 2017), so the idea that interpersonal relations have an important role in schools' RSE policy making is new and interesting.

Finally, I also contribute to critical policy analysis by applying it to primary school policy-making processes. While much of the literature in social policy journals, and much of the development of policy literature, focuses on government politics and administration, this thesis demonstrates how local service institutions may be considered ripe for critical policy analyses.

The paragraphs above describe my contribution to academic spheres, but I also feel that this study has relevant findings for policy and practice. Sayer suggests that Critical Realist analyses should strive to be 'practically adequate', that is, "knowledge must generate expectations about the world and about the results of our actions" (2010: 69). While cognizant that this study reflects the experiences of only three primary schools, I nevertheless feel that my research offers sufficiently robust findings to be 'practically adequate'. Reflecting on my data, analyses and findings, in the next section I offer a few tentative recommendations for both the Department for Education and for primary schools themselves.

7.3. Recommendations for policy and practice

Recommendations for the Department for Education

This study suggests that there are two important conditions that underpin a primary school's capacity to develop good quality relationships and sex education (RSE) policies: first, the staff members tasked with making decisions about the RSE policy and overseeing its implementation have specialist expertise in RSE, and second, these staff members are invested with the authority, confidence and means to make and implement the RSE policy. With regard to specialist expertise in RSE, this study demonstrates that where the staff members leading the development of RSE policies had formal qualifications in PSHE, and/or experience in teaching and leading RSE, the school RSE policy was far more comprehensive, responsive to pupils needs and the community, and more closely aligned with expert guidance on RSE than in schools where these staff members lacked this expertise. With regard to the second point, I have demonstrated how government policies have constrained educators who have expertise in RSE, such that they have been unable to make the policies they felt were necessary for their pupils. This was often due to ambiguity and/or specific restrictions in the official government guidance (DfEE, 2000) or in the interpretation of those guidelines.

I suggest that in order to improve RSE, the UK government has a responsibility to equip schools with appropriate policy and guidance, and with appropriate human resources. I recommend that the government¹³ should:

- Create a skilled workforce for RSE by providing subsidised training opportunities for teachers in training and those already in service. This could involve re-instating government subsidies for the CPD professional certificate in PSHE, for example, which was contributing trained RSE providers to the teaching workforce prior to having its funding cut (House of Commons Education Committee, 2015). Given the responsibility that government has delegated to schools in the area of RSE (e.g. distinct from other subject areas), the government may also wish to explore creating minimum staffing requirements. For example, that each school's RSE programme must be overseen by a staff member who has completed a professional certificate in PSHE or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience.
- Appoint specialist RSE advisors in all local authorities and provide opportunities for primary schools to access ongoing support to mitigate the low level of specialist expertise for RSE among staff (evidenced not only by my study but by the literature review). Many of my respondents noted the benefits of shared learning and experience at PSHE network meetings, organised by local authority RSE advisors, and some noted expertise gained from exchanges with these advisors. Hadley et al. identified the presence of resourced and joined up coordinators/advisors within each local authority as pivotal to the success of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, 2000-2010 (2016:2). The House of Commons Education Committee report also suggests that schools in areas with specialist RSE/PSHE advisors have stronger RSE and PSHE programmes and more qualified staff (2015).
- Promote confidence – among parents, educators and the public – that schools are appropriate and qualified institutions for delivering RSE to pupils. In addition to the steps outlined above, governments can effectively 'authorise' schools to lead RSE through public statements of support and the dedication of financial resources for RSE curricula and support. Another opportunity for generating confidence and clarity in

¹³ These recommendations are primarily directed at the national government, but failing action at the national level, regional or municipal governments could explore these policy responses to improve RSE in primary schools.

RSE is to offer specific guidance and minimum standards that schools should offer, particularly in relation to the most controversial topics in RSE (e.g. gender identity, sexual identity, learning about sex) where RSE educators experience the greatest uncertainty and anxiety (e.g. Abbott et al., 2015; Corteen, 2006). Given the politically sensitive nature of these topics, the Department for Education may wish to consider appointing an independent, expert group to consult with appropriate groups and make these decisions.

Recommendations for primary schools

This study suggests that educators lack opportunities to reflect on the purpose and teaching of RSE, and to engage with new learning and good practice in RSE. Schools have established frameworks for measuring and documenting what they are doing without a clear understanding of what constitutes good quality RSE. To improve their RSE policies and practices, I suggest that primary schools:

- Invest time and resources in hiring and/or training educators in PSHE, including RSE. My findings and the literature suggest that specialist expertise in RSE is critical for good quality RSE.
- Create opportunities for RSE educators to interact with each other, with parents, with wider members of the community and other interested parties, to reflect on RSE and discuss concerns and questions. Data from Latimer Primary, in particular, suggests that when RSE leaders and educators have more knowledge about families and communities in the local environment, they are better able to offer RSE in ways that are relevant and responsive to pupils.
- Create time and space for staff to reflect on and refine the school ethos, taking into consideration not only obligations to the government but accountability to pupils. RSE policies and practices may be strengthened when educators reflect on what they can offer children in relation to their personal, emotional and social development.

7.4. Reflections and limitations

I have drawn attention to the fact that my findings are based on only three primary schools, and accordingly that my findings and recommendations should be received tentatively. I would also suggest that my recruitment strategy introduced some bias towards schools that

are supportive of social research and/or towards advancing RSE, as they were contacted through academic contacts and through the local authority special advisor for RSE. The schools also effectively self-selected (while many other schools declined to participate), which suggests some confidence and interest in RSE, and therefore they may represent schools that have exceptional RSE. Furthermore, the respondents at each school were selected by a central decision maker – either a member of the senior leadership team or the subject lead for PSHE – and these individuals may have perceived it to be in their interests to approach participants who would reflect a positive policy-making process for RSE, and to leave out others who may not. In addition, I found that the number of respondents at each school was not necessarily representative of the individuals who actually influenced the RSE policy. At Wingfield Academy, in particular, I felt that my key contact sought to ensure that I had six individuals to interview because I had stipulated that I wanted to interview ‘up to five or six’ individuals, despite the fact that only two individuals had in fact made decisions about the school’s RSE policy. Thus, I interviewed four individuals at Wingfield Academy who openly acknowledged that they had had no input to the RSE policy, including two parents, one administrative staff member and one teacher. While these interviews were interesting in some regards – for example, exposing alternative views of RSE from those who were not particularly interested in it – they did not necessarily contribute to my research aims.

While being cognizant that these are limitations, I would also argue that there is sufficient coherence across the data, and enough detail within it, to suggest that first, within each school, if and when there were alternative narratives or discordant views, then I did or would have detected them and brought them to light; and secondly, that my data and analyses are rigorous and credible enough to suggest that the phenomena I explored were not unique to these three schools. Tracy suggests that high-quality qualitative research is marked by richness, in both the data and application of theory, and this richness supports rigour, which provides face validity (2010: 841). That is, given the data and analysis, and the researcher’s methods and procedures, the study and its findings seem reasonable and appropriate (Tracy, 2010:841). It is a step further to suggest that my findings can be applied to other schools: Guba and Lincoln write that it is one of the great challenges of qualitative research to determine when research is strong enough that one can reasonably act on its implications (2005:205). Intuitively I feel that my findings have depth and meaning, and I believe that my research is credible and plausible enough to be relevant to other schools. Tracy writes, “qualitative credibility is... achieved through practices including thick description, triangulation... and multivocality” (2010:843). Despite my suggestion that the schools in this study may be

'exceptional' due to the recruitment process, the thick description, triangulation and multivocality present in the data provide strong rationale to believe that the experiences and pressures described by my respondents have been experienced by decision makers in other primary schools in England. Though many respondents critiqued public discourses around child innocence, for example, this discourse nevertheless overshadowed RSE policy making in all three of the schools, a ubiquitous force that acted upon their decision making. Neoliberal themes such as documenting and demonstrating progress, accountability and standardization were represented at all three schools. This study also documents and provides evidence that a school's daily practices, values and culture has an influence on RSE policy making: while the precise nature of these were distinct for each school, they uniformly affected their RSE policies. There is little reason to doubt that these findings are applicable to other schools in England, which are subject to the same regulatory mechanisms, governance structure and similar social norms and expectations.

In reflecting on the limitations of this study, I recall a core premise of Critical Realism: that what we see and understand in the world is fundamentally shaped by social processes and knowledge. I approached this study with an international perspective of international sexual and reproductive health and rights, and my experience had already persuaded me of the transformative potential of relationships and sex education for individuals and communities. While confident that my academic literature review reinforced my professional knowledge in this regard, someone approaching this study with a different view of RSE, informed by other assumptions, would likely have developed different research questions and analysed the data differently. Given my research questions, for example, my study focused on and was led by decision makers for RSE, another study may have focused more intensively on the experiences and perspectives of pupils; as my focus was on decision making, talk about practices and events furnished the majority of my data, whereas the data sheds comparatively little insight on the specific knowledge and skills that children are expected to engage with in RSE. Other theoretical approaches that could usefully be employed include the affective turn, autoethnography or personal narrative, and each would tell different stories. I am unapologetic for my own approach, but hopeful that other researchers will investigate RSE policy making through other lens' and help in scrutinizing the measure and utility of this work.

7.5. Future research

While this thesis confirms findings and suggestions that have been previously proposed in the literature, it also raises new questions and possibilities.

As mentioned earlier, I have a personal and professional interest in research that has a social justice imperative. As part of this, I am interested in research that promotes transparency and seeks to equalise power relations among the 'researched' and the researcher. My attempts to operationalise this research as a participatory action research (PAR) project were unsuccessful, but I feel intuitively that the subject of RSE is full of potential for PAR. In addition, some of my respondents reflected, during interviews, that their participation in this research was one of the only opportunities they had had to think closely about RSE, and that these reflections would contribute to improving their own practice. My experience suggests that it is difficult to reconcile the demands of PAR (including substantial time for relationship building, and collaboration on research questions and methods, for example) with the timelines normally expected in doctoral research projects, but given appropriate funding and planning, and the identification of educational partners who are equally committed and interested in exploring RSE, PAR could produce social change as well as fascinating new findings about RSE, for both practitioners and the research community. From a methodological perspective, building on the insights offered by this thesis, I also suggest that multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary approaches to RSE offer significant potential for new knowledge in this field.

Based on the data and findings of this study and my literature review, it appears that RSE policy on its own (understood comprehensively to include policy in practice, for example, as well as written policy) may be an inadequate mechanism for ensuring good quality RSE. There are other important conditions that are needed. While a number of reviews and studies of PSHE and RSE have suggested that a 'whole-school approach' to RSE is helpful in ensuring good quality RSE (e.g. House of Commons Education Committee, 2015; Ringrose et al., 2015), perhaps the underlying lesson is that RSE, and wider pastoral and emotional support for pupils, is facilitated by a holistic orientation towards education that recognizes the role of schools in fostering community, mutual respect and care for other people. This theme is not part of my literature review, so it is possible there is already valuable work in this area that could be linked up with work around RSE. Failing that, I would suggest the need for research that explores how educators and members of school leadership teams can be supported to engage with both theoretical and practical ideas about how education can serve and represent community, and foster positive relationships among its members, in all their diversity.

Building on and related to this, however, my study suggests that where there is cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in the community and within the school, the school is more likely to face challenges in relation to RSE. The work required to develop RSE policies and programmes that are acceptable to everyone, and that support underlying goals of mutual respect and positive relationships, is almost certainly greater in such contexts. There is additional research to be done on how educators can ethically and productively engage with relevant audiences in their community to address value differences as they relate to RSE. One approach to this research could be further interrogation into the utility of the 'personal' in educational policy making – recalling and further developing my third research question – including personal relationships among educators, school leaders, pupils and families, and/or exploring affective aspects of RSE policies and practices.

7.6. Last word

The picture I have presented in this thesis is one which decision making about relationships and sex education is fraught with tension and complexity. The knowledge and values that characterise RSE policies and policy processes are accordingly discordant. While a few authoritative voices – e.g. neoliberal education policies, public discourses around child safety and protection – have cut a rough shape for RSE policies across the three schools, the findings of this study emerge from a rich, heterogeneous triptych of policy-making stories. I have identified a range of frames from which specific criteria and values are drawn to inform RSE decision making. Threads of knowledge from government, public opinion and popular conceptions of childhood, the commercial sector, communities, colleagues and pupils have contributed ideas, procedures and assumptions, and these have been layered and thatched, contested and rebuked. This knowledge continues to be resolved as policy is re-negotiated and re-contextualised in practice.

Educators tasked with developing RSE policy have carefully navigated the landscape, with varying levels of understanding regarding what freedom has truly been delegated to them, what good RSE practice actually looks like, and how to affect the outcomes that they may (or may not) conceptualise. Inspired by Morriss' dispositional theory of power, I conceptualised decision makers' power in terms of their abilities – both epistemic and non-epistemic – and in terms of 'ableness', that is what authorisation, qualification and practical skill they had to undertake and complete the task of developing an appropriate RSE policy. In this process, I have explored knowledge related to RSE content and purpose – employing the Social Realist concept of cognitive goals and Macmurray's typology of knowledge in education –as well as

knowledge embedded in regimes, processes and practices – where Social Realist cognitive interests and norms, and Macmurray’s personal and functional relations have come into play. The argumentative turn has aided my analysis of the arguments put forward to advance policy preferences, particularly Goodnight’s distinction of argumentative strategies, public, personal and technical. Stewart’s socioscientific controversy (2009) offered a starting point for theorising the interplay of discourses and texts that emerged from the data.

While I have recognized that the RSE policies of the schools that participated in this study continue to be re-defined as educators implement RSE in their classrooms, they are also likely to be more significantly reviewed and revised in light of upcoming national policy changes to what is now called ‘relationships education’, in the *Children and Social Work Act 2017* (c. 16). Schools and educators await confirmation from the Department for Education on what ‘relationships education’ will entail, and this will likely only take place in 2019, once the government has received and analysed responses to its consultation on the draft guidance it has issued (DfE, 2018). While I feel that the draft guidance is not sufficient in its depth or detail for what schools need, and have concerns about its positioning and language, I am yet guardedly optimistic about RSE in England. Statutory status is a significant positive move forward, it is a gesture on the part of the government that increases the authorisation and legitimisation of RSE in schools. Public support for RSE is unparalleled, compared to what has come before, which creates opportunities for schools and local governments to make braver moves forward in promoting and offering more progressive, comprehensive RSE. In addition, there are a number of issues related to children and young people’s development and social experience that are now regularly reported in the media and which are therefore challenging public perceptions of children’s sexual development and interest in sexuality. These include interest and reports about children’s development of gender and sexual identity (e.g. transkids), concerns about children’s ability to conceptualise and to give and receive consent (foremost in discussions of sexual relationships, but relevant to relationships of all kinds), and young people’s participation in the #Metoo movement. I interpret these trends as indicative that the public – at least in some quarters – is engaging with how children learn about themselves and others as sexual, emotional and social beings. This all contributes to progress towards the kind of RSE that is more consistent with rigorous studies that document what entails good quality, comprehensive RSE and which children and young people need and want.

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APPENDICES

ANNEX A: Interview schedule on personal attitudes, values and experiences related to relationships and sex education

Interview Schedule 1: Personal experiences, attitudes, beliefs and values

Thank you for your participation. As you know by now, I'm conducting research on the experiences of decision makers in primary schools to better understand how they develop and agree the school sex and relationships education policy.

If there are any questions in the interview that you'd rather not answer, just let me know. If you have any questions for me, please feel free to ask them at any time.

As mentioned in the information sheets that you have seen, all data will be anonymised in any sharing or reporting I do.

1. Introductory phase

To begin with, can you tell me a bit about yourself.	- Do you have children? If so, how many and what ages
What is your role here at the school?	- What kinds of decision making have you been involved with?

2. Substantive phases

<i>In general...</i>	
How would you define sex and relationships education?	-
What is your impression of school-based sex and relationships education as it stands now?	- 1) in relation to your school specifically - 2) in general, across all primary schools
What is the governing body's role in relation to sex and relationships education?	- Or, who governs sex and relationships education here?
Does the school council perform any role in relation to sex and relationships education?	- What kinds of decisions does the school council get involved with?
What is your understanding of sex and relationships education that takes place out of school?	-
<i>Your experiences of sex and relationships education</i>	
Can you recall any personal experiences of sex and relationships education (or whatever it was called when you were at school)? Any anecdotes or stories to share?	- What do you remember? - Who delivered the SRE – was it through school? Family? Friends? - What did you learn about?
Reflecting on your own experiences of SRE, how do you feel about it?	- How do you feel about the quality of the SRE that you received?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does thinking about your experiences of SRE bring back any strong emotions or feelings?
To what extent do you believe your experiences of SRE influenced your opinion about how SRE should be delivered?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In what ways?
<i>Imagining your perfect SRE programme in your primary school</i>	
I would like you to think about an ideal scenario for SRE in your school. If there were no barriers, including resources, time or differences of opinion, what kind of SRE programme would you like to see at your school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you describe it for me. - What kinds of values would underpin this SRE programme? - What content would be included? What about XX (depending on what is mentioned, I might highlight a couple of areas that are included in some curricula, eg CWP, Living and Growing, RSE Hub's 15 dimensions of SRE)? - Who would deliver the programme? How? - Would it be distinctly different from regular school lessons? If so, how?
What kinds of content (if any) do you believe should not be included in SRE in primary school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why not?
Other than as learners, would children be involved in the SRE programme that you have described in any way?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E.g. as evaluators, as peer educators, in contributing to the programme design...
Have there been any events, either in the news or that have happened to you in particular, that have influenced your thinking about SRE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E.g. any training you have attended, news about child abuse, children's access to images and information online, child sexual exploitation, conversations with your child(ren) about sex and relationships, etc

<i>Exploring values and attitudes towards SRE further</i>	
<p>You talked about the following attitudes/values in relation to SRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (example) - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you elaborate on these values? - What do they mean to you?
<i>Personal attitudes and values related to SRE in the policy making process</i>	
<p>Whose values and beliefs do you think should be reflected in the SRE policy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E.g. should SRE reflect the Department of Education's ethos, or the school's, or head teacher, parents, governors... - What kind of balance (if any) should there be in the SRE policy, in terms of whose values and opinions are included?
<p>How do you feel about bringing your personal experiences, beliefs and attitudes towards SRE to your school, when it is revising or discussing its SRE policy and programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you comfortable talking about your own experiences, attitudes and values related to SRE with other governors and school decision makers?
<p>In relation to other kinds of materials related to SRE (such as expert guidance, professional practice, curriculum, etc), how do you think personal values and attitudes to SRE should be reflected when your school is making decisions about SRE?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - E.g. should personal attitudes and values be more important, less important... should all materials have equal weight?

3. Closing

<p>What are your expectations about how the process will play out, for discussing and revising your school SRE policy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How long do you think it will take to develop and agree the policy? -
--	--

Do you have any other reflections or ideas on this issue that you would like to mention?	
--	--

Thank you. Would you like to have a transcript of this interview? You are welcome to redact or amend it if you would like.

ANNEX B: Interview schedule on the policy-making process for relationships and sex education

Interview Schedule 2: SRE Policy Process

If there are any questions in the interview that you'd rather not answer, just let me know. If you have any questions for me, please feel free to ask them at any time.

As mentioned in the participant information sheet that you saw, and the consent form you signed, all data will be anonymised in any sharing or reporting I do. You will no doubt be aware, however, that because of the few people who participate each school, participants may be able to figure out what came from who. Because of this, I will share the complete transcript of this interview with you afterwards and you can decide what will be shared and what will not.

1. Introductory phase

Last time we met, we discussed your expectations about the policy making process for the school sex and relationships education policy. Did the process meet your expectations?	- Or how did they differ?
What is your understanding of the role of the governing body? (generally)	-
What is your understanding of the governing body's role in relation to sex and relationships education?	-

2. Substantive phase

<i>Sex and relationships education</i>	
How would you define sex and relationships education?	- What is the purpose?
Before you participated in developing the current SRE policy, do you recall how you felt about the sex and relationships	-

education that was being delivered at the school?	
<i>Sex and relationships education policy process</i>	
Can you tell me the story, or process, of how the sex and relationships education policy was developed and agreed upon?	I am interested in the whole process, from when it was first brought up or put on the agenda, to when it was signed off and disseminated.
<i>The following questions all further explore the story that the respondent has relayed, above. I anticipate that some/many of these will be covered by the respondent in their account of the process, but will bring focus where needed.</i>	
How did the SRE policy come onto the agenda? (what brought attention to it)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What was the mandate? - Were there any conditions or specific objectives that you/the group sought to meet in developing the SRE policy?
Who was involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How was it decided who would participate in developing the policy? - How did you get involved? What motivated you to get involved? - Did everyone contribute evenly or would you say that anyone led the discussions? - Was anyone in charge of writing the text of the policy?
Do you think the policy process worked well?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think others were satisfied with the process? Were there any grumblings? - Do you think it was a fair process? Creative? How would you describe it?
What resources were used in developing the SRE policy?	<p>What about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Previous SRE policies or SRE policies from other schools - Curricula - Experts or advisors - Books

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Websites - DVDs - Experience or professional expertise among teachers or parents - Pupils or young people <p>- Were there any resources (other than those that were used) that you think would have been useful?</p>
What do you think about involving pupils in developing the SRE policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Or evaluating the SRE they receive?
<i>Present the agreed SRE policy for discussion.</i>	
<p>Looking at the policy, I can see that there is a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topic areas? - Pedagogy? - Involvement of outside experts? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did the group decide to focus on these areas? - How did the group distinguish between really important content from content that didn't really need to be there? - What other aspects were discussed but not included in the policy? Why? - Were there any particular differences of opinion with regards to the content?
How do you see this policy, politically?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More right- or left-leaning?
How did the group deal with disagreements or conflicts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was it easy to disagree or raise a concern or what would happen in this situation?
Were personal values and beliefs discussed as part of the policy making process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What about personal experiences of SRE? - How did the other decision makers involved respond to this?
Did the group/governing body discuss allocating financial resources for SRE?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training teachers? - funding visits from outside groups - curriculum
In developing the SRE policy, did you have a sense of being accountable to any specific body, group or individual?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was there anyone (or any group) you were concerned about satisfying? - - Was there anyone you particularly did not want to disappoint?

Were there any other events that happened at the time –in the school, in the community, or in the media – that may have influenced the SRE policy?	
On the whole, how satisfied are you with the SRE policy that was agreed and signed off?	- Is there anything you would have liked to have seen included in the policy? Is there anything you would change?

3. Closing

Compared to other policies you have been involved in developing at the school, would you say this policy process was fairly typical or not?	
Do you have any other reflections or information about the SRE policy process that you would like to mention?	
What advice or suggestions could you offer to others – at other schools – who are undertaking the task of revising/developing their SRE policy?	-
Having gone through the process of developing the SRE policy process, what would you change about the way that SRE is organized in the education system?	- Do you think it is a positive thing that each school decides its own SRE policy or ideally, how should it work? - Who should be making SRE policies?

Thank you.

Would you like to have a transcript of this interview? You are welcome to redact or amend it if you would like.

ANNEX C: Information sheet and consent form for participants (adults)

<p style="text-align: center;">Study: Policy making about sex and relationships education in primary schools</p>

This study aims to explore how a selection of primary schools have undertaken the task of developing or revising their sex and relationships education (SRE) (also referred to as relationships and sex education) policy or programme. It is conducted by Rachel Wilder, a PhD student in the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol.

Who will be involved?

The research will focus on the experiences of those who are involved in deliberating, advising and making decisions related to sex and relationships education policy in primary schools. These 'decision makers' may include head teachers, PSHE leads and other teachers, school governors, parents, community representatives, external consultants, local authority advisors and others.

What will the research investigate?

The study will look at the kinds of information, resources and expertise that are available to decision makers, and how they are used. It will look at how institutional and cultural characteristics influence decision makers' actions related to sex and relationships education policy. The study will also consider how decision makers' own experiences and attitudes contribute to sex and relationships education policy.

What is involved for those who participate in the research?

Those who agree to take part will be asked to participate in up to two individual interviews, each 45 minutes to one hour in duration. These will be scheduled at times and locations that are convenient for the participant, at separate times (not back-to-back). The interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder, and the researcher may also take some hand-written notes. Participants will have the opportunity to review, reflect and discuss the preliminary findings of the research related to their school, in conversation with other participants from their school (if affiliated with a school). This is not required, but it is an opportunity to respond to the researcher's observations and analyses, and may strengthen the results of the research.

The interviews

The first interview will focus on the participant's own experiences, attitudes, beliefs and values related to sex and relationships education, with the intent of exploring how these influence each decision maker's contributions to and ideas about the school SRE policy or programme.

The second interview will focus on the specific process that the school undertook to revise and/or develop its SRE policy and/or programme. Topics to be discussed include the timeline and steps involved in the process, who was included and why, any relevant guidance from regulatory bodies that structured the policy/programme, the kinds of information and evidence that were consulted, and general reflections on the process.

How will the research data be stored and protected?

All research data will be kept confidential. All individual identities and contributions will be anonymised. During the research process, any hard copies of the data will be stored in a locked cabinet and as soon as possible the data will be transferred and stored safely on an encrypted disk drive. Research participants are welcome to withdraw their data from the research project for a period of one month after the second interview has taken place. In accordance with the *Data Protection Act 1998*, all data will be stored for 10 years and then destroyed. All interviews will be conducted in strict adherence to ethical considerations of anonymity, confidentiality and respect for respondents. The Research Ethics Committee for the School for Policy Studies (University of Bristol) has granted ethical approval for this research.

How will the research be shared and published?

The results of the study will be included in my PhD thesis, and I will also write a concise version of the results to share with all research participants and their schools, and with other interested parties. I may also seek to publish the results of the study in academic and popular media.

This PhD research is funded by the Economics and Social Research Council.

Contact for further information

If you would like to discuss this study and/or need any further information, please contact Rachel Wilder, the researcher, at rachel.wilder@bristol.ac.uk.

**Study: Policy making about sex and relationships education
in primary schools**

Participant Consent Form

Name: _____

Best way to get in touch (telephone/email): _____

Please initial (do not tick) each of the following points in order to give consent.

I have read and understood the participant information sheet.	
I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the research.	
I have received enough information about the research and my role in the study.	
I agree to participate in the interviews.	
I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research project at any time, without giving reason.	
I understand that I can withdraw my data from the research project up to one month after the second interview has taken place.	
I agree to have the interview, and any discussions about the research, recorded (e.g. digitally and through note-taking).	

I agree that preliminary findings of the research, with individual contributions anonymised, can be shared among the research participants associated with my school, for the purposes of providing feedback to strengthen the research and, if participants choose, to discuss among themselves.	
I agree that findings of the research can be included in the researcher's thesis.	
I agree that the findings of the research may be disseminated publicly, such as in presentations and/or published articles.	
It is ok to call or email me in order to schedule interviews.	

Signature

Date

ANNEX D: Interview schedule for local authority advisor

Interview schedule for local authority advisor (Malcolm):

SRE policy development and advisory role for primary schools

Thank you for your participation. As you know by now, I'm conducting research on the experiences of decision makers in local primary schools to better understand how they develop and agree the school sex and relationships education policy.

If there are any questions in the interview that you'd rather not answer, just let me know. If you have any questions for me, please feel free to ask them at any time.

As mentioned in the information sheets that you have seen, all data will be anonymised in any sharing or reporting I do.

1. Introductory phase

To begin with, can you tell me a bit about yourself.	- Do you have children? If so, how many and what ages
What was your role at City Council?	- What did you do in relation to sex and relationships education? - What were your responsibilities in relation to SRE? - What were you expected to deliver? - What kinds of decision making have you been involved with?
How did you develop an interest in sex and relationships education?	What did you do before working for the City Council?

2. Sex and relationships education – definitions and ideals

<i>In general...</i>	
How would you define sex and relationships education?	

What is your impression of school-based sex and relationships education, as it stands now, in schools across the city?	
What is your understanding of sex and relationships education that takes place at home or otherwise outside of school settings?	
<i>Your experiences of sex and relationships education</i>	
Can you recall any personal experiences of sex and relationships education (or whatever it was called when you were at school)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you remember? - Who delivered the SRE – was it through school? Family? Friends? - What did you learn about?
Reflecting on your own experiences of SRE, how do you feel about it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you feel about the quality of the SRE that you received? - Does thinking about your experiences of SRE bring back any strong emotions or feelings?
To what extent do you believe your experiences of SRE influenced your opinion about how SRE should be delivered?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In what ways?
<i>Imagining your perfect SRE programme in your primary school</i>	
<p>I would like you to think about an ideal scenario for SRE in a given primary school. If there were no barriers, including resources, time or differences of opinion, what kind of SRE programme would you like to see at primary schools?</p> <p>This might stem from guidance you actually gave to schools, while you were advising them...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What content would be included? - Who would deliver the programme? How? - Would it be different from regular school lessons?

What kinds of content (if any) do you believe should not be included in SRE in primary school?	- Why not?
Other than as learners, would children be involved in the SRE programme that you have described in any way?	- E.g. as evaluators, as peer educators, in contributing to the programme design...
Have there been any events, either in the news or that have happened to you in particular, that have influenced your thinking about SRE?	- E.g. any training you have attended, news about child abuse, children's access to images and information online, child sexual exploitation, conversations with your child(ren) about sex and relationships, etc
Do you think that SRE should be made statutory?	
<i>Personal attitudes and values related to SRE in the policy making process</i>	
Whose values and beliefs do you think should be reflected in the SRE policy?	- E.g. should SRE reflect the Department for Education's ethos, or the school's, or head teacher, parents, governors...
How do you feel about bringing your personal experiences, beliefs and attitudes towards SRE to your work in advising schools on SRE?	- Are you comfortable talking about your own experiences, attitudes and values related to SRE with other governors and school decision makers?
In relation to other kinds of materials related to SRE (such as expert guidance, professional practice, curriculum, etc), how do you think personal values and attitudes to SRE should be reflected in schools' SRE policies?	- E.g. should personal attitudes and values be more important, less important... should all materials have equal weight?

3. Your role at the local authority and advising [Fleming Primary School] on their RSE policy

I would like to ask some more questions about your role at City Council and, more specifically, your role in relation to [Fleming Primary School's] SRE policy.

What is the role of the local authority in relation to individual schools' SRE policies and programmes?	
You talked a bit about the beginning about your role, can you tell me a bit more about...	
<i>Advising the school...</i>	
Can you tell me the story, or process, of how the sex and relationships education policy was developed and agreed upon at [Fleming Primary] School?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you know how the SRE policy came onto the agenda? - Who was driving it? - Did the school (or the 'driver') have any particular objectives or mandate that they wanted to achieve with the new policy?
What did you do to advise the school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Were you involved from beginning to end or just for a period of time? - Would you say that your involvement with [Fleming] – in advising and supporting them – is quite typical? Is this exactly the sort of support you have offered to other schools?
Who was involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who was writing the policy?
Did you have any difficulties or challenges that you had to work through?	
Do you think there was anything particularly different about how [Fleming] approached SRE policy, as an independent school, compared to state-maintained schools you have worked with?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anything distinctive or notable that is not related to their independent status?
Do you think the process of developing the new policy went well?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you describe the process? - Do you think everyone was satisfied in the end, with the process? With the policy?

Do you recall what your impression was, of the SRE policy that [Fleming] adopted?	- In the context of the range of policies that you have seen, what did you think of it?
---	---

4. Closing

Now that you are no longer at the local authority, what reflections or thoughts do you have about the City Council's role in advising and supporting schools on sex and relationships education?	-
What advice or suggestions would you offer to your successor at City Council?	

Thank you.

ANNEX E: Child-friendly interview schedule

Interview Schedule for Pupils:

Relationships and sex education policy making at your school

Thank you for your participation. As you will know from the information you received already, I'm conducting research about relationships and sex education at school. I would like to talk to you about how you have been involved in this and what you think about it. Before we start, if there are any questions you don't want to answer, or anything that's confusing, just let me know and we can skip it or hopefully I can explain it a little better.

As mentioned in the information sheets that you have seen, all data will be anonymised in any sharing or reporting I do. That means that I will give you a pretend name, and your school and the city will have pretend names, so anybody reading the results will not be able to identify you or anything you say. There is one important exception to this, however. It is important for you to know that if you tell me anything that suggests that you may be subject to harm, now or in the past, or if anyone else is being harmed, I do have a legal obligation to talk to another adult about that.

1. Introductory phase

Please can you tell me something about yourself.	- Your name, a hobby, how long you have been attending school here, etc
Is there anything you want to ask about me?	
You were invited to participate in this research because your head teacher put your names forward. Why do you think she suggested you?	-

2. Substantive phase

<i>Pupils contributions to school decisions</i>

How do pupils normally get involved in helping to make decisions about the curriculum?	- Or about other things that happen around the school
What happens when pupils make suggestions?	- Do you feel that the school responds to pupils' suggestions and ideas?
<i>Sex and relationships education</i>	
In your opinion, what is relationships and sex education?	- What is it all about? - How do you feel about it?
What do you learn in relationships and sex education lessons?	- What do your teachers talk about in the lessons? - What topics do you cover?
Do you like relationships and sex education lessons?	-
What about after you have had the lessons, do you talk about it with your friends and peers?	- For instance, at home, or in the playground? After school and outside of class?
Why do you think that relationships and sex education is taught in school?	-
What do you think about the lessons themselves?	- Are pupils comfortable in class? Does it get embarrassing?
Do you give your teacher, or anyone else, any feedback about the lessons?	-
How do the lessons normally go? What do you do?	- For instance, do you have worksheets or do you watch video clips, do you have a class discussion.
<i>School process to revise the sex and relationships education policy</i>	
Did you realise that your school had decided to change the way that it delivered sex and relationships education?	-

Did you know that there is a document – called a policy - that says how the school does relationships and sex education?	-
Do you know why the school decided to change the way it delivers sex and relationships education?	-
Did your teachers, or your head teacher, ask you to be involved?	- How?
(How) did you share your feedback or ideas about relationships and sex education?	- Did other students also share their views and opinions?
What changed as a result of your ideas and suggestions?	-
How did you feel about that?	- Are there other ways that you would have liked to share your ideas? - Do you think others should have been involved more, or differently?
Whose opinions are most important in deciding what should be taught in relationships and sex education?	- E.g. yours? Your parents? Your teachers? The national government? The city council? Doctors? Friends?
<i>SRE content</i>	
Are there any specific subjects or issues that you would like to see included in sex and relationships education classes, but which aren't as of yet?	- Like what? Tell me more...
Were there any topics that were included, that you wished had not been?	-
Are there other classes where you talk about issues that relate to sex and relationships education?	-

What do you think about the worksheets and exercises and other things you were asked to do in the lessons?	-
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3. Closing phase

Do you have any comments or thoughts about relationships and sex education that you would like share with me?	
Do you have comments or ideas about how pupils could share their thoughts and ideas for relationships and sex education with teachers and the head teacher?	
Is there anything else you would like to mention or talk about?	-

Thank you.

If you would like, I can send a copy of this interview to your teacher (in a sealed envelope) and she can share it with you. Then, if you have anything else you would like to add, or if you want to change anything, you can do so and send it back to me.

ANNEX F: Sample summary of an interview

Summary of first interview (personal perspectives and opinions related to RSE)

Iris, Latimer School

Iris has been a teacher at Latimer School for 28 years, she is a PSHE lead and teaches all aspects of RSE.

Key ideas of interest

- Some to-and-froing about personal desire for RSE to be more detailed and less secretive, with checking these personal opinions with what she thinks is acceptable to others
- Future-oriented perspective of RSE, it is mostly to prepare pupils for when they are older.
- Keeps returning to the school's success in engaging with parents (compared to other schools), developing positive relationships with them and ensure they know about RSE
- Importance of school ethos in informing RSE at the school – esp. emotional literacy
- Highlights need for better resources for RSE, physical resources such as models of anatomy
- RSE should reflect the diversity of the community, thus should be a consensual all-stakeholder process for agreeing content. RSE should also reflect the group of children, where they are at, they trust that you will not introduce anything they aren't ready for.

RSE at Latimer School

The governing body 'have a statutory duty to the children, to make sure that [RSE] happens and that it happens at the appropriate level'. They need to agree the content, but are essentially guided by the teachers and staff, who 'can influence what [the governing body] hear and what they say'.

Defining RSE: begins with younger children, hygiene, looking after yourself. Progresses to being able to say 'no' to unwanted, inappropriate behaviours. At older end, equipping boys and girls with knowledge to prevent pregnancy.

RSE is done very sensitively at Latimer School, 'we engage with the parents before it actually happens' (first point). Later points out the head, deputy head and herself engage with parents almost every day at the school gate, so they already have an established relationship, but if/when parents aren't happy about RSE they are invited in to go through content in detail and discuss. RSE is 'successful in that it comes from what the children know', also delivery 'depends on the children you are working with and the kind of relationships you have with them'. When dealing with embarrassing situations, 'we've kind of got a stock phrase, that if

there is someone we don't want to answer ourselves, we kind of pass it back and say "I think that is something you might want to talk to mummy about, or daddy, or whomever".

Personal perspective and opinions

Minimal personal SRE – At school , Tampax in a glass of water, condom on a cucumber; lots of pupils present, no discussion, no follow up, no questions, purely health-related, inc pregnancy prevention.

Applying personal experiences to her attitude to SRE – 'it's made me want to make it better for other people, particularly when I see young girls, sort of nine, ten, and I'm thinking, actually, I, if I had a crystal ball, I could probably tell you where you're going to be in five years' time'.

However, also guarded about letting her own experiences and biases influence how she delivers RSE. 'All of us have got baggage of some sort... you have to leave that at the door'.

Ideal RSE programme

Iris mainly talked about the need for better resources to teach RSE. Physical things that children can look at and explore, for example 3D models of body parts. She said relying on video resources is not helpful. In talking about the purposes of RSE, Iris retained narrative of children learning about their life path, 'predominantly is about exploring yourself and your own body and your emotions... how you might, as an adult, see yourself progressing'.

She seemed aware that what she was suggestions was more progressive than what other people might be willing to accept: 'But maybe that's a little bit too early for junior school, I don't know. I'm not sure. It might be nearer secondary'. She also suggested children may not feel comfortable: 'having built up relationships with the children so that they know what you're doing is for their own good and its what's appropriate, and you're not going to take them anywhere that they don't feel safe in going'.

Need to engage with diversity of community: '... we live in a society that's, sort of very, I don't know, gender-creative, if you like': she continues to say that children should have opportunities to engage with diverse types of gender identities, sexuality, relationships. Unless many other participants, she does talk about children themselves exploring non-normative identities, expressions: 'we have children here who are not sure of their identities yet, whether they are female or male, and you have to give people a chance to explore'. This is one exception to her future-oriented approach.

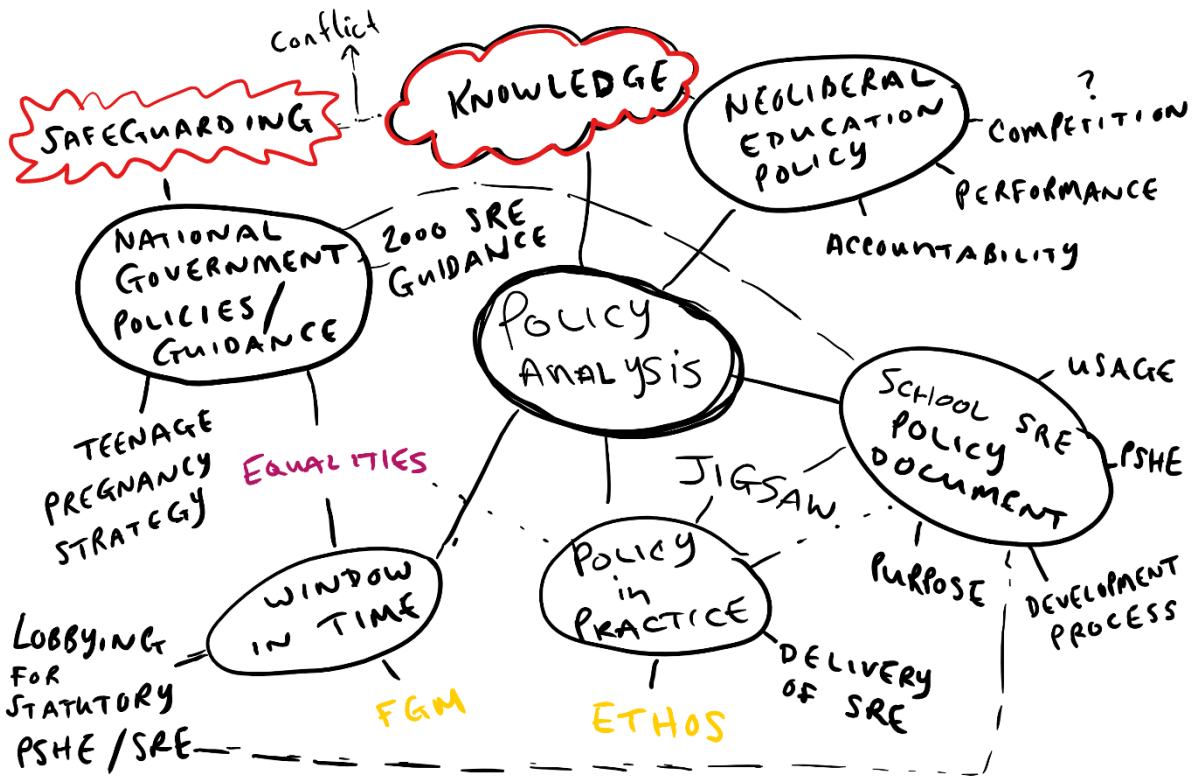
Revising the policy

Iris suggests it will bring in more of the FGM (prevention) process, and also look at how to support children to avoid getting involved in undesirable groups, 'cults and things like that and looking at it's widest context. So how we can best prepare our children to live healthy and sustainable lives'.

'I think it has to be an all-stakeholder decision, really...' Iris says people from all areas should be involved, including medical/scientific authorities, LGBT, also the government and local authority.

Suggests that Bristol City Council could play a bigger role in making sure that the school resources changes with the times. "We are in a progressive society – or that's what we're led to believe – but still it is the Channel 4 thing that we're encouraged to us, and it is really old."

ANNEX G: Examples of visual mapping of emergent themes



FLEMING

EMILY +
MARION,
PUPILS

PAMELA
STEVES,
OWNER

DELIVERY
OF SRE
POWER
MAP

SIMONE DANFORTH,
PRINCIPAL, teacher

AUDREY
FORSYTH,
teacher

MURRAY
SMITH,
CITY COUNCIL
ADVISOR

LENA
NEVILLE,
PARENT,
ADMINIST-
RATOR

WINGFIELD

FAYE REED,
PARENT, ACADEMY
AMBASSADOR

ANNETTE
MORRIS,
Yr 6 teacher,
deputy head

KIRSTEN GREEN,
PSHE LEAD,
Yr 1 teacher

EMMA
CROWTHER,
Yr 1 teacher

PATRICK
WRIGHT,
HEAD

JULIA ARCHER,
PARENT,
REGIONAL
COORDINATOR

LATIMER

WILLA
GRACE,
LEARNING
MENTOR

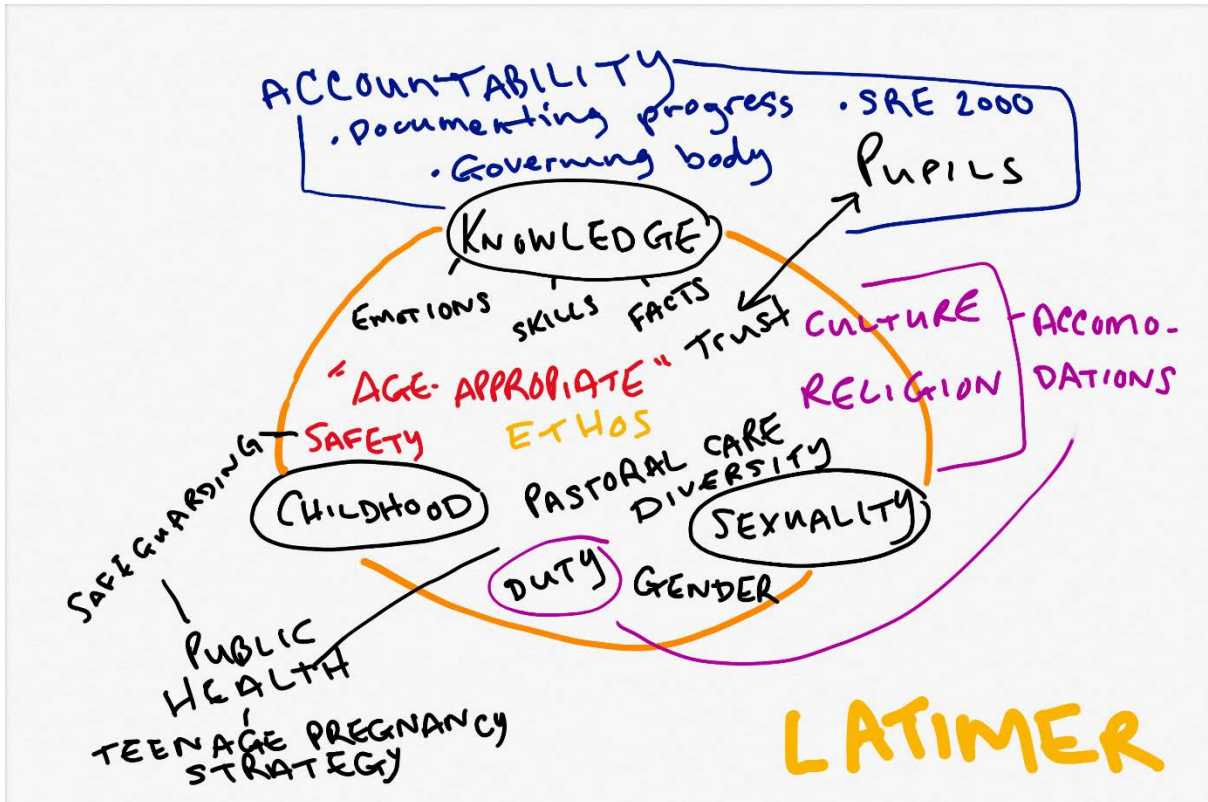
KATE DUNSTAN,
PSHE LEAD

SARAH
KIRK,
HEAD

IRIS
FITZGERALD,
LEARNING
MENTOR

LAUREN
MOBY,
DEPUTY
HEAD

AMY
OBERON,
SENCO



ANNEX H: Documentation provided to the Research Ethics Committee

SCHOOL FOR POLICY STUDIES: RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPLICATION FORM

- This proforma must be completed for each piece of research carried out by members of the School for Policy Studies, both staff and doctoral postgraduate students.
- See the Ethics Procedures document for clarification of the process.
- All research **must** be ethically reviewed before any fieldwork is conducted, regardless of source of funding.
- See the School's policy and guidelines relating to research ethics and data protection, to which the project is required to conform.
- Please stick to the word limit provided. **Do not** attach your funding application or research proposal.

Key project details:

1. Proposer's Name

Rachel Wilder

2. Project Title

Policy making about sex and relationships education in primary schools

3. Project start date

April 2015

End date

Interviews to be completed by
October 2015, submission est.
October 2016

Who needs to provide Research Ethics Committee approval for your project?

The SPS REC will only consider those research ethics applications which do not require submission elsewhere. As such, you should make sure that your proposed research does not fall within the jurisdiction of the NRES system:

<http://www.nres.nhs.uk/applications/approval-requirements/ethical-review-requirements/>

If you are not sure where you should apply please discuss it with either the chair of the committee or the Faculty Ethics Officer who is based in RED.

Currently NRES are not expected to consider applications in respect of activities that are not research: ie. clinical audit, service evaluation and public health surveillance. In addition REC review is not normally required for research involving NHS or social care staff recruited as research participants by virtue of their professional role. Social care research projects which are funded by the Department of Health, must always be reviewed by a REC within the Research Ethics Service for England. Similarly research which accesses unanonymised patient records must be reviewed by a REC and NIGB.

Do you need additional insurance to carry out your research?

Whilst staff and doctoral students will normally be covered by the University's indemnity insurance there are some situations where it will need to be checked with the insurer. If you are conducting research with: Pregnant research subjects or children under 5 you should email: insurance-enquiries@bristol.ac.uk

In addition, if you are working or travelling overseas you should take advantage of the university travel insurance.

Do you need a Criminal Records Bureau Check?

Please see the current guidance to determine whether you are required to obtain a CRB check:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/agencies-public-bodies/crb/about-the-crb/eligible-positions-guide?view=Binary>

If you think you need a CRB check, employed staff should contact Personnel, all students should check the University countersignatories page for information: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/legal/disclosure/countersigs.html>

4. If your research project requires REC approval elsewhere please tell us which committee, this includes where co-researchers are applying for approval at another institution.

Please provide us with a copy of your approval letter for our records when it is available.

N/A

5. Have all subcontractors you are using for this project (including transcribers, interpreters, and co-researchers not formally employed at Bristol University) agreed to be bound by the School's requirements for ethical research practice?

Yes

No/Not yet

Not applicable

X

Note: You must ensure that written agreement is secured before they start to work

6. If you are a PhD/doctoral student please tell us the name of your research supervisor

Debbie Watson, Ailsa Cameron

ETHICAL RESEARCH PROFORMA

The following set of questions is intended to provide the School Research Ethics Committee with enough information to determine the risks and benefits associated with your research. You should use these questions to assist in identifying the ethical considerations which are important to your research. You should identify any relevant risks and how you intend to deal with them. Whilst the REC does not comment on the methodological design of your study, it will consider whether the design of your study is likely to produce the benefits you anticipate. **Please avoid copying and pasting large parts of research bids or proposals which do not directly answer the questions.** Please also avoid using *unexplained* acronyms, abbreviations or jargon.

1. **EXPECTED DURATION OF RESEARCH ACTIVITY:** Please tell us how long each researcher will be working on fieldwork/research activity. For example, conducting interviews between Feb 12 – July 2012. Also tell us how long participant involvement will be. For example: Interviewing 25 professional participants X2 for a maximum of 1 hour per interview.

I will interview members of the governing body, and external consultants, for up to five primary schools in [city]. I aim to interview each person twice, and each interview will not exceed one hour, for a maximum total of 48 hours of interviewing (based on 24 participants). Fieldwork will take place between May and October 2015.

I also aim to engage participants in two group sessions (introduction and discussion of results), no more than one hour each, at each of the schools. These group sessions are a desirable but not essential aspect of the research design.

2. **IDENTITY & EXPERIENCE OF (CO) RESEARCHERS:** Please give a list of names, positions, qualifications, previous research experience, and functions in the proposed research of all those who will be in contact with participants.

I will be the only person conducting the research. I will be liaising with primary schools to seek their participation in the study and all subsequent communications, and I will be interviewing research participants. I hope to present the research findings to the participants in a group setting and, with their permission, to the wider community connected to sex and relationships education (e.g. parents, educators, education administrators and policy makers, social workers and others).

Qualifications

I have an MSc in Research (Social Work), completed at the University of Bristol in 2013, and an MSc in Health, Society and Population, completed at the London School of Economics in 2009. I completed a BA in Communications at Simon Fraser University (Canada) in 2004.

Research experience

My masters dissertation (2013) involved liaising with a local town council, which commissioned the research, designing a research project, coordinating the research with youth workers and conducting photo elicitation research and focus groups with children ages 11 and 12 years. I analysed the data and reported the results separately to the town council, and in my masters dissertation.

I have also volunteered for two research projects. Supporting Dr Christine Barter and Dr Nadia Aghtaie, I conducted surveys in secondary schools in Bristol as part of a project that aimed to assess the levels and type of domestic violence that young people experience in their intimate relationships. I also supported Dr Afroditi Stathi and Dr Janet Dabbs, at the University of Bath, in Project Ace: Active, Connected, Engaged. This involved interviewing older adults who had volunteered to befriend and support other older adults who are less mobile and engaged, and conducting functional mobility assessments (e.g. strength, walking speed and agility) among research participants.

I also have experience interviewing vulnerable individuals, health personnel and social workers in developing countries, and translating the interviews into stories and testimonials for communications and advocacy activities. I gained this experience while working for international development NGOs.

<p>3. STUDY AIMS/OBJECTIVES [maximum of 200 words]: Please provide the aims and objectives of your research.</p>

The aim of this research is to explore how decision makers negotiate what ‘knowledge’ contributes to sex and relationships education (SRE) policy for a selection of primary schools in [city]. The study will investigate what criteria decision makers, as individuals and as a potential collective, use to assign value to different kinds of information and how decision makers use these knowledge(s) to create a case and to negotiate with other decision makers to advance their political persuasion and preferences with regards to SRE policy.

The research study has four research questions: 1) what kinds of, and whose, knowledge influences policy deliberations about sex and relationships education?, 2) how do power structures, such as institutional, hierarchical or cultural discourses, exert influence and authority to legitimise, or dismiss, knowledge(s) in the policy-making process?, 3) how are decision makers’ personal values, attitudes, emotions and beliefs expressed and addressed in the policy-making process?, and 4) how are knowledge(s), and social relations that affect the legitimisation of knowledge, embedded in the written sex and relationships education policy in the school?

‘Knowledge’, in this study, refers to any information, material or ideas that come into policy making for sex and relationships education.

4. RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLING STRATEGY [maximum of 300 words]: Please tell us what you propose to do in your research and how individual participants, or groups of participants, will be identified and sampled. Please also tell us what is expected of research participants who consent to take part (Please note that recruitment procedures are covered in question 8)

I will conduct in-depth interviews with the individuals, including school decision makers as well as external consultants who contributed to the SRE policy, for up to five primary schools in [city]. The interviews will be conducted in places that are convenient to the interviewees.

I have used purposive sampling to identify a short list of schools. Five schools were identified based on the results of a mapping survey (conducted by the City Council) to assess the SRE policies of primary schools in [city]. The survey results enabled me to identify five primary schools that have engaged in a deliberative process to agree their SRE policy in the last 12 months. I have identified three additional primary schools that did not respond to the mapping survey, but which have also engaged with SRE policy decision-making in the past, according to information from personal colleagues and contacts. One of my supervisors and another academic colleague have contacts within these schools, which would help me to facilitate access.

The head teacher of each school, who agrees to take part, will identify the individuals to be included in the study. Interviews with these decision makers may identify additional individuals who should be included; they will subsequently be invited to participate.

Participants will be expected to take part in two one-hour interviews. The first interviews will provide a space for participants to provide an account of how the SRE policy was developed, and to critically discuss and comment on this process. The second interview will focus on individual experiences, opinions and beliefs regarding SRE.

The purpose of having two separate interviews is because I hope to go into depth in each topic area and because of the potentially sensitive nature of the topic area, it will be necessary to build some trust and rapport, and establish the context. For example, I may begin the first interviews by asking the individual to tell me about his/her school, about his/her decision to be a governor (if relevant), his/her experiences and feelings about how the school makes decisions more generally (in order to assess whether there is a general pattern of decision making, which could help identify whether the decision-making process related to sex and relationships education is unique, or simply another iteration of the decision-making pattern), and how she/he became involved in the policy deliberations related to sex and relationships education. The focus of the first interview is to assess the contextual and structural features of the decision-making process, including hierarchies, dominant personalities, etc. The second interview will take a different angle, looking in depth at each individual's experiences, attitudes and beliefs with regards to sex and relationships education. Issues regarding particular content may emerge, for example there are clear differences of opinion about pedagogy (e.g. single-sex or mixed classes, films vs interactive activities) and specific content areas (e.g. gay rights, sexual consent). I feel that it is important to conduct two separate interviews because they will be distinct in their focus and each focus is complex. In addition, I

would not want to conduct them back-to-back because participants may lose their focus and it may be more difficult for participants to attend a two-hour interview.

5. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND TO WHOM: [maximum 100 words]** Tell us briefly what the main benefits of the research are and to whom.

The research will provide insights that could support primary school decision makers to improve their SRE policies, which, most importantly, may enable primary school pupils to access better quality SRE provision. Early, high quality SRE can support children to be more confident and knowledgeable about their physical, emotional and social development and relationships. The results of the research could indirectly contribute to these outcomes by supporting local authorities, NGOs and others to improve the guidance that they offer to schools to develop appropriate SRE policies and programmes; and it could also inform relevant future central government guidance or policies. Currently, SRE is a hot topic in the public sphere, which could lead to greater demand for knowledge about decision-making related to SRE.

6. **POTENTIAL RISKS/HARM TO PARTICIPANTS [maximum of 100 words]:** What potential risks are there to the participants and how will you address them? List any potential physical or psychological dangers that can be anticipated? You may find it useful to conduct a more formal risk assessment prior to conducting your fieldwork. The University has an example of risk assessment form: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/policies/>

RISK	HOW IT WILL BE ADDRESSED
<p>Participants may be distressed if they feel that the research is underpinned by an assumption that they have not created an adequate SRE policy, and/or have concerns that their position in relation to SRE will not be respected.</p>	<p>All participants are school governors, employees or external consultants, and as such I assume that they are emotionally robust and unlikely to regard research interviews negatively. However, I will host an introductory meeting, before conducting interviews, to provide details about the research project and to explain my position. I will be open about my own values and assumptions, and aim to create an atmosphere of openness by acknowledging that among us, researcher and participants, there are different views and that we can, and likely will, disagree on some points, without causing offence or harm.</p> <p>I will also conduct a Structured Ethical Reflection process (Brydon-Miller, 2012), in which I will work with participants as a group to agree the values that should underpin the research process from beginning to end.</p>

<p>Participants may disclose something illegal or potentially harmful.</p>	<p>This is unlikely. However, should it happen, I will make it clear that confidentiality is limited in such circumstances. I will also make sure I can provide information about support services in case the participant feels the need to consult a professional about a personal trauma.</p>
<p>If I am unable to recruit enough participants at each school, the possibility of anonymising the identities and data of participants may be limited.</p>	<p>I will clearly explain the situation to participants and ensure that if they give consent to participate in this situation, they understand the risks related to their identities and data being known among those who read and/or engage with the research. If they do not want to participate in this context, I will widen the parameters of participants to include more teachers, parents and others at the school with an interest in sex and relationships education policy, but who may not have participated in the decision-making process.</p> <p>I will clearly explain to participants that even though their contributions and identities will be anonymised, with few participants at each school others may be able to guess who said what (as presented in the data). In order to gain informed consent, I will share with participants what I propose to include in the material that is shared (examples of the kinds of quotations to be include) and offer to share with them the complete transcripts of their interviews in case there are specific things they do not want to be included. They will be asked to give consent on this basis. If they do not want to give consent, their direct quotes could be removed from any material that is shared with others at the school. I will ask separately for consent to include their data in my thesis.</p>

7. **RESEARCHER SAFETY [maximum of 200 words]:** What risks could the researchers be exposed to during this research project? If you are conducting research in individual's homes or potentially dangerous places then a researcher safety protocol is mandatory. Examples of safety protocols are available in the guidance.

I do not anticipate that I will face any significant risks during this research project. The research participants are active in or known to the primary schools that will be selected for the research, in voluntary or professional capacities, and they will have been identified by the head teacher or others as appropriate for the research. As such, it is unlikely they will be dangerous or pose any significant risk to the researcher.

I would like to conduct the interviews in places where the participants are comfortable, such as the school or their place of work if different and appropriate, which may also include their homes. I may have less control over my environment in a private home, and it may be difficult to seek help if needed, compared to a public places or a school, so I have attached a protocol for researcher safety.

8. **RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES [maximum of 400 words]:** How are you going to access participants? Are there any gatekeepers involved? Is there any sense in which respondents might be “obliged” to participate (for example because their manager will know, or because they are a service user and their service will know), if so how will this be dealt with.

I will write to the head teacher of each potential school site to explain the research project to him/her and invite the school to participate. I will follow this up with a telephone call the following week to discuss further and provide further details. If the head teacher expresses interest in participating, I will ask him/her to contact individuals who were involved in developing the SRE policy and obtain their permission to share their contact details.

With permission, I will send each individual (including the head teacher if relevant) a participant information sheet and a consent form and invite them to participate. I will follow up this letter with a telephone call one to two weeks later, in which I will ask the person if they have read the letter and if they have anything they would like to discuss, and whether they are interested in participating. I will make clear to them that at a minimum, their participation will involve individual interviews, but they will be invited to participate in group sessions with others who were involved with developing the SRE policy, and most likely all participants will know who else was involved in participating (whether they attend the group sessions or not). Thus, while their identity will be anonymised in presentations of the research outside of the school, it is unlikely they will be anonymous among the other participants at their school. If there is interest from a majority of the individuals contacted for a particular school, I will invite all individuals (including the head teacher if relevant) who have expressed interest in participating to a group session (this could follow a meeting that is already scheduled, for instance a school governors meeting) where I will manage expectations about the research, ask individuals to sign consent forms, discuss options for participants to be involved in the research process (e.g. contributing to analysis of preliminary findings) and facilitate a structured ethical reflection where participants will agree the values that will underpin the research project. If any participants were not able to, or unwilling, to attend the group session, I will ask the group to discuss and agree what content of the group meeting (if any) they are happy to be shared with these participants. For individuals who are not available to attend the group session, I inform them of any content from the group session that the group decided could be shared, I will send them a consent form, and I will provide my phone number in case they would like to discuss further.

The head teacher is a gatekeeper, but I will aim to overcome this by asking all participants, in the first interview, to identify all individuals who were involved or consulted in developing the SRE policy. If new

individuals are identified, I will ask the participant who provided the name(s) if they can provide contact details so that I can approach this person(s) to participate, but if they do not have these details I will contact the head teacher for these details.

In addition, due to school hierarchies, the individuals the head teacher names might feel pressured or obliged to participate in the research. I will ensure that the participant information sheet and consent form make clear that it is the decision of each individual whether to participate or not. I will ensure that they are aware they can withdraw consent at any time.

9. **INFORMED CONSENT [maximum of 200 words]:** How will this be obtained? Whilst in many cases written consent is preferable, where this is not possible or appropriate this should be **clearly justified**. An age and ability appropriate participant information sheet (PIS) setting out factors relevant to the interests of participants in the study must be handed to them in advance of seeking consent (see materials table for list of what should be included). If you are proposing to adopt an approach in which informed consent is not sought you must explain in detail why this is not considered to be appropriate. If you are planning to use photographic or video images in your method then additional/separate consent should be sought from participants which adheres to the relevant data protection legislation. Current guidance is that consent forms should ask participants to initial rather than tick the consent boxes on the consent form.

Please tick the box to confirm that you will keep evidence of the consent forms (either actual forms or digitally scanned forms) in accordance with the data protection legislation, securely for ten years.

As discussed above, I will send potential participants information sheets about the research and a consent form, and follow this up one to two weeks later with a phone call to provide further information, to answer questions, and ask for their verbal consent to participate. I will then ask each participant to sign a consent form and give it to me, either by post or at a face-to-face meeting. The participant's information sheet and consent form will clearly state factors relevant to the interests of participants (see attached).

I will clearly explain to participants that even though their contributions and identities will be anonymised in any material that is shared, with few participants at each school others may be able to guess who said what in the data that is shared with other participants at a given school. In order to gain informed consent, I will share with participants what I propose to include in the material that is shared (examples of the kinds of quotations to be include) and offer to share with them the complete transcripts of their interviews in case there are specific things they do not want to be included. They will be asked to give consent on this basis. If they do not want to give consent, their direct quotes could be removed from any material that is shared with others at the school. I will ask separately for consent to include their data in my thesis.

10. **DATA PROTECTION:** All applicants should regularly take the data protection on-line tutorial provided by the University in order to ensure they are aware of the requirements of current data protection legislation.

University policy is that “personal data can be sent abroad if the data subject gives unambiguous written consent. Staff should seek permission from the University Secretary prior to sending personal data outside of the EEA”.

Any breach of the University data protection responsibilities could lead to disciplinary action.

Have you taken the mandatory University data protection on-line tutorial in the last 12 months Yes

https://www.bris.ac.uk/is/media/training/uobonly/datasecurity/page_01.htm

Do you plan to send any information/data, which could be used to identify a living person, to anybody who works in a country that is not part of the European Union?

Yes

No

(see http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection/the_guide/principle_8.aspx)

II. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY:

	YES	NO
All my data will be stored on a password protected server	X	
I will only transfer unanonymised data if it is encrypted (For advice on encryption see: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/encrypt/device/)	X	
If there is a potential for participants to disclose illegal activity or harm to others you will need to provide a confidentiality protocol.	n/a	

Please confirm that you warned participants on the information and consent forms that there are limits to confidentiality and that at the end of the project data will be stored for 10 years on appropriate storage facility.

<https://www.acrc.bris.ac.uk/acrc/storage.htm>

Confirmed

12. **SHARING DATA AND DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS [maximum 200 words]:** Are you planning to send copies of data to participants for them to check/comment on? If so, in what format and under what conditions? What is the anticipated use of the data, forms of publication and dissemination of findings etc? If you plan to archive your interview transcripts then ensure that consent is obtained.

I plan to share a synopsis of preliminary findings for each school to the participants at that school only. All participant data will be anonymised, however because the number of participants at each school will be small, it may be difficult to ensure that no data cannot be traced to any individual. Thus, I will seek consent from each of the participants to share the preliminary findings in this way after the interviews have finished (in addition to the initial consent form). I will also share a synopsis of final research results, which incorporates the results from all schools, with the participants. I will deliver hard (paper) copies of the preliminary findings and final results by hand to participants either at a governing body meeting or at their home address, or through a password-protected website online.

The purpose of sharing these documents is to solicit participants' own reflections and analyses of these findings. I will convene the participants of each school in a group session (one per school), 2-3 weeks after I have sent them the documents, to present the findings/results and facilitate group discussion. The purpose of this is to strengthen the analysis, to engage participants themselves in a group reflection process (which may or may not stimulate conversations and motivation for improving their SRE policy and/or policy-making practice), and to provide participants with the opportunity to have some ownership over the research results. I hope to publish a brief version of the research results for education practitioners and others involved in SRE, as well as to publish the results in an academic journal.

13. **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** Please identify which of the following documents, and how many, you will be submitting within your application: Guidance is given at the end of this document (appendix 1) on what each of these additional materials might contain.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL	NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS:
Participants information sheet (s)	1
Consent form (s)	1
Confidentiality protocol	
Researcher safety protocol	1
Recruitment letters/posters/leaflets	1
Photo method information sheet	
Photo method consent form	
Risk assessment form	
Support information for participant	
3 rd party confidentiality agreement	
Other information	

Please DO NOT send your research proposal or research bid as the committee will not look at this.

SUBMITTING & REVIEWING YOUR PROPOSAL:

To submit your application you should create a **single PDF document** which contains your application form and all additional material and submit this information to the SPS REC admin. Zaheda Tariq, Zaheda.Anwar@bristol.ac.uk

If you are having problems with this then please contact Zaheda to discuss.

Your form will then be circulated to the SPS Research Ethics Committee who will review your proposal on the basis of the information provided in this single PDF document. The likely response time is outlined in the 'Ethics Procedures' document. For staff applications we try to turn these around in 2-3 weeks. Doctoral student applications should be submitted by the relevant meeting deadline and will be turned around in 4 weeks.

Should the committee have any questions or queries after reviewing your application, the chair will contact you directly. If the committee makes any recommendations you should confirm, in writing, that you will adhere to these recommendations before receiving approval for your project.

Should your research change following approval it is **your responsibility** to inform the committee in writing and seek clarification about whether the changes in circumstance require further ethical consideration.

Failure to obtain Ethical Approval for research is considered research misconduct by the University and is dealt with under their current misconduct rules.

Chair: e.williamson@bristol.ac.uk

Date form updated by committee: March 2012.

ANNEX I: Child-friendly information sheet and consent form

Research project:

How does your school make decisions about relationships and sex education?

My name is Rachel Wilder and I am a doctoral student at the University of Bristol. I am doing a research project to explore how primary schools have created their relationships and sex education policy and/or programme.

To be clear, a policy is a written statement that sets out the important principles, aims and elements of a school's programme. The programme is the plan of lessons that are delivered in the school. The policy helps guide teachers to plan their lessons and to measure pupils' progress. The policy may include some details like what pupils should learn in the programme, in different years, and/or materials that teachers should use to teach the programme.

Who will be involved?

The research project will focus on the experiences of people who have contributed to decisions about relationships and sex education at their primary school. This includes you!

How will I interact with you to involve you in the research project?

I will ask you to take part in two group interviews with me and other children at your school. I will ask questions and lead a group discussion. These group interviews will take between 45 minutes to one hour, and they will take place at your school. I will record the interviews using a digital recorder and I may also take notes by hand.

What questions will I ask?

In the first group interview, I will ask you about how you were involved in contributing to decisions about relationships and sex education. I would like to know about what kinds of information that you shared to help develop the policy/programme and about what opportunities you had to take part. I would also like to know how you feel about the role that you played.

In the second group interview, I will ask you about life experiences that that affected your contribution to your school's relationships and sex education programme or policy. For example, maybe you had conversations with your parents/carers, or an experience with your friends or peers that made you want to learn more about specific topics. Maybe you saw something on the internet or on TV that you have questions about and would like your teacher to address in relationships and sex education class. Perhaps there are also things you think should NOT be included in relationships and sex education at school. I would like to know your opinions.

What will happen to the information that you share?

I will keep all the information about you private. I will keep any records of your name and your information locked up in a cabinet or on a secure, password-protected computer.

I am planning to analyse all the information that I gather and I hope to share valuable lessons that I learn by writing about it for others to read. However, you will not be identified by name and any information about your identity will be kept private. If I refer to anything you said, I will use a pretend name for you.

If you change your mind about participating in this project after the group interview(s), you can tell me within 30 days and I will delete all of the information I have about you. If you are happy to participate, I will destroy all the information I have about you after 10 years. (This is required by the UK *Data Protection Act 1998*.)

How will I share my research findings?

I will write about the research in articles and will try to publish them in journals and in popular media. I will also write a big report that I will give to the University of Bristol for my doctoral degree. I will write a short report for you and other children who take part.

This research is funded by the UK Economics and Social Research Council.

Contact for further information

If you would like to discuss this study and/or need any further information, please contact me, Rachel Wilder, at rachel.wilder@bristol.ac.uk.

Research project:

How does your school make decisions about relationships and sex education?

Name: _____

Best way to get in touch (telephone/email): _____

Have you read the 'Information Sheet for Young Research Participants'?

Have you been able to ask questions about the research?

Have you received enough information about the research?

Do you agree to participate in the research?

Do you understand that you can change your mind and decide to *not* participate in the research project at any time, for any reason?

Do you agree to have the interviews and discussions recorded?

Do you agree that the findings of the research can be included in the researcher's report (called a 'thesis') to the University of Bristol?

Do you agree that the findings of the research may be published in a journal or newspaper?

Date

Signature

For further information, contact the researcher, Rachel Wilder, at rachel.wilder@bristol.ac.uk.

ANNEX J: Outline of the Andromeda curriculum

The Andromeda curriculum is designed to cover personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education as a whole and therefore includes six topic areas, one of which is the relationships and sex education (RSE) component.

The stated objectives of the RSE component are to support children to:

- Understand and respect their bodies, and be able to cope with puberty without fear or confusion
- Develop positive and healthy relationships appropriate to their age
- Have positive self-image and body image, and to understand pressures around them
- Make informed choices when they are considering starting a sexual relationship, so that they keep themselves safe

Content:

Andromeda addresses a range of issues related to physical development and relationships, including body image, life cycles, reproduction, assertiveness, self-respect, safeguarding and transitions to secondary school.

By year group:

Foundation	Growing up, changes as we grow older
Year 1	Boys and girls bodies, body parts
Year 2	Boys and girls bodies, body parts and privacy
Year 3	How babies grow and how boys and girls bodies change as they get older
Year 4	Internal and external reproductive body parts, body changes in girls and menstruation
Year 5	Puberty for boys and girls, conception
Year 5	Puberty for boys and girls, understanding conception to birth of a baby