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"We don't get into all that": An Analysis of How Teachers Uphold Heteronormative Sex and Relationship Education

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Abstract:

In light of literature that highlights the heteronormative nature of secondary school Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) (Ellis & High, 2004; Stonewall, 2007); this study examines how teachers account for their provision as inclusive of young people's sexual diversities. These accounts construct young LGB people and those who engage in same-sex sexual practices as isolated cases and therefore outside of the remit of mainstream SRE provision. The strategies used involve problematising same-sex sexuality and only accounting for inclusivity in terms of homophobia.The implications of accounting for inclusivity in this way, particularly as it serves to uphold heteronormative provision, are discussed.

Key Words: sex and relationship education, heteronormative, discursive psychology, homophobia

Introduction:

The issues present within secondary school Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) have long been highlighted in many studies exploring this area of education (Corteen, 2006; Measor et al, 2000; 2004; SEF, 2011), predominantly emphasising the way SRE fails to meet young people's needs and falls short of their expectations (e.g.

Biddulph, 2006; Corteen, 2006; UK Youth Parliament, 2007). The history of SRE then, has been fraught, with many of its problems arising as a result of the socio-political climate and a lack of consensus regarding role of SRE and its 'values' (Thomson, 1994). More broadly however, the issues surrounding SRE appear to reflect the political nature of sexuality and struggles over ideas relating to sex, sexuality and young people. These concerns have only intensified over time in reaction to rising rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), which have in turn resulted in a plethora of initiatives aimed at containing young people's sexual activity (e.g. the teenage pregnancy strategy launched in 1999 launched by the Department of Education [DoE] promised to halve the under 18 conception rates by 2010) along with a string of prohibitive legislation not only aimed at regulating young people's sexual behaviour, but their sexuality. The Conservative Government's political stance on homosexuality during the 1980's (i.e. Section 28, which prohibited the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools) is an example of such legislation.

While the legal and policy context that applies to SRE is complex, throughout its history, policy has been written against a political backdrop that has ultimately served to shape the nature and scope of provision. This has resulted in largely contradictory policy, which continues today under the Coalition Government. While the Labour Government (1997-2010) took positive steps towards improving SRE (such as plans to make SRE statutory and replace the existing SRE guidance as outlined in the Children, Schools and Families Bill, 2009), these policies were thwarted in the midst of the change in Government and opposition (mainly from the right wing Conservatives). As such, the guidance that still applies to SRE remains that which was published over 10 years ago (2000), which despite some attempts at outlining the

importance of inclusive provision, features a number of contradictory discourses

which undermine any real commitment towards diversity (see Atkinson, 2002).

Largely in response to the political and social climate and more notably, certain

public health imperatives, the content of SRE has often developed predominantly

within a biological and health model. As such, it has adopted a broadly health

promotion approach and thus remains narrow in scope, with the content limited to

delaying incidences of first sex, decreasing the number of sexual partners and

increasing sexual 'safety' through contraceptive use (SEF, 2008; Thomson 1994). As

such, provision has focused predominantly on (hetero)sexual health and

(hetero)sexual activity (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, 1998; Corteen, 2006), where

heterosexuality and procreative sex are marked as 'normal' (Moran, 2001) and where

'real' sex is defined narrowly as penis-in-vagina intercourse between a man and

women.

SRE then, is criticised for not only limiting young people's knowledge and repertoires

about sex and sexuality (Harrison & Hillier, 1999: Jackson, 1999) but also for the way

it leaves those who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) with little to no sex

education that reflects their experiences (Hunt & Jenson, 2007). The implication of

this is that young people are prevented from receiving specific information necessary

to practice safe sex and develop sexual competence. Moreover, the lack of language

within SRE for discussing LGB sexuality and indeed, same-sex sexual practices and

desires, acts as a barrier for the sexual health, of individuals with these needs. As such,

diversity in sexual identities and practices is largely absent from the content of SRE, a

position further illustrated by the omission of information regarding non-penetrative

sexual practices such as mutual masturbation, oral and anal sex as alternative sources

of sexual pleasure (Forrest, Strange & Oakley, 2004). More problematically, research indicates that when LGB sexuality is included in the formal curriculum, it is often fraught with problems and is regarded by pupils as largely unhelpful (Ellis & High, 2004; Mac an Ghaill, 1991). Sex between males in particular is typically discussed in reference to HIV (Epstein & Johnson, 1994), through pathologising discourses, or delivered as a stand-alone topic which presents LGB sexualities as 'other' which work to reinforce a discourse of difference (Atkinson, 2002).

Largely as a result of an unsupportive policy context, vague SRE guidance and most predominantly, as a non-statutory part of the curriculum, SRE content is chiefly determined at the level of schools: Individual teachers have no restrictions when deciding both their approach to, and delivery of SRE. This is then subject to the influence of more localised factors such as STI and pregnancy figures within the region, and by stakeholders such as parents, school governors and senior management. While beneficial in some ways, this contributes to a varied and often value led approach, in addition to provision that ultimately serves the interests of key interest groups rather than young people themselves. Research has shown that teachers face many barriers in the provision of SRE (Atkinson, 2002; Buston et al, 2002; Chambers, 2004). While the teachers play a crucial role in the provision of SRE, the role they play in shaping the nature of provision is largely under-researched within this context. Their increasingly larger role in determining provision is of particular importance given SRE's non-statutory status and the current vague policy context. While the current Coalition Government's plans for SRE policy remains unclear, what is clear is the responsibility of schools to provide inclusive provision under the National Curriculum for England and Wales (DfEE, 1999) and particularly the Equality Act (2010).

Despite working under legislation that requires their provision to be inclusive of young people's diversities, it is unclear how teachers implement this; particularly in light of current policy, which is subject to interpretation and individual ideology. As such, this is an important avenue for current research, particularly in light of extensive literature that signals the heterosexist nature of SRE. It is important to identify the nature of current barriers that prevent the recognition of diversity, particularly those that relate to the cultural context of heterosexism and homophobia. This is also pertinent, given that young people now appear to engage in a wider range of sexual practices outside and in addition to penetrative intercourse, regardless of sexual identity (Carpenter, 2001; Hirst, 2004; Stone et al, 2006). In addition, there is considerable flux in sexual practices across different sexual identities (Diamond, 2008; Jackson, 2004). Together, this has important implications for provision which often fails to acknowledge sex outside of penis-in-vagina intercourse.

The focus of this research is therefore in line with an increasing body of research that documents the heterosexist nature of provision (Ellis & High, 2004; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Stonewall, 2007) and attempts to provide insight into how young people's sexual diversity is accounted for by SRE teachers. This focus is in light of increased expectations for developing provision that is inclusive, and meets young people's diverse needs.

Method:

The analysis and extracts presented in this paper are derived from a larger research project examining young people's sexuality within SRE, involving 8 semi-structured interviews with SRE teachers in secondary schools across Yorkshire, England. SRE co-ordinators were invited to participate based on their formative role within this

context and their assumed knowledge of the various legislative requirements that impact on provision. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes and were carried out on school premises (classroom, office or staffroom). An interview schedule broadly specified topics to be discussed, informed by the literature as pertinent to the content and delivery of SRE. Examples of the topic areas included SRE approach content and policy; barriers to provision and teacher evaluations. The excerpts shown here are predominantly responses to a pivotal question regarding whether teachers fulfil their policy obligations to provide inclusive SRE provision, particularly around sexual diversity. The following excerpts are taken from two interviews that highlight the ways in which teachers attempted to account for such diversity, despite actually lacking provision that does this. As such, these excerpts and the subsequent analysis not only highlight teachers' attempts to justify this lack of provision, but also in a way that they appeared to incorporate these issues. This therefore represents an attempt to explain away the importance of such issues in provision. The interviews were transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984), a format suitable for detailed discursive analysis.

Participants

Both teachers presented in this analysis were White and of British nationality. They were full-time PHSE co-ordinators, teaching in co-educational public schools. The time each had spent teaching PSHE (and SRE specifically) varied between 8 and 15 years. Both teachers varied in terms of their training related to this subject; while they both reported attending some short courses related to PSHE, some of these related to the leadership element of the role. One of the teachers (Carl) has an external role as an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) status, which involves outreach work in other schools

in order to share good practice in PSHE. Additionally, Carl has established PSHE as a department within his school. In contrast, Heather had completed a short SRE course involving the formulation of Peer Activities in Sexual Health (PASH). In line with the content of provision and the nature of teachers' descriptions, both teachers' SRE provision can be broadly classed as a health promotion approach.

Analytic Framework and Procedure

A discourse analytical approach was applied to the data, based on the work of Potter & Wetherell (1987), and informed by Discursive Psychology (DP: Potter, 1996; Potter & Edwards, 2001). DP is a broadly constructionist approach which applies the ideas from discourse analysis to 'respecify' a range of traditional psychological topics such as memory and attitudes, as discourse practice (Edwards, 2005; Potter, 1998). Discursive psychology treats talk and texts as social practices, and focuses on how these practices are performed in interaction. As such, work in DP "considers how that interaction is done, and what resources it draws on, and how these things relate to broader questions in social psychology" (Potter, 1998; 235). Discursive practices are thus examined for the way they inform the researcher about the rhetorical and social actions being achieved in the talk, such as the way particular discursive practices reveal the way people manage certain interests within a particular context.

Discursive psychologists have illustrated the many ways in which people's accounts of various events and descriptions show continual utterances which fit the rhetorical demands of the moment (i.e. Potter & Wetherall, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The emphasis on accountability has been a significant focus for discursive psychologists (e.g. Wooffitt, 1992). Investigations within DP have included the production of racism and prejudice (Edwards, 2003; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and

how sexism and heterosexism is accounted for (Riley, 2002; Speer & Potter, 2000). The often-subtle rhetorical organisation and accomplishment of this particular talk has increased feminist engagement with DP. The aspects of discourse that frequently illustrate rhetorical and social action include variability in talk, hesitations, repairs and a range of discursive resources (Potter, 1998).

For this research, DP was selected for the way it enables focus on both the constructive and functional dimensions of teachers' discourse around provision. In light of concerns towards identifying how teachers account for inclusive provision, focus is placed on examining how this is accounted for within teachers' accounts of their provision, in addition to the discursive processes through which sexual diversity amongst students is represented. As such analytic focus is placed on identifying the discursive practices and resources that underlie interaction, which also reveal the interactional work being done in discourse. The analysis of teachers' interviews therefore focused on both the micro-and macro features of talk (Potter, 1996). This is in line with the aims of the analysis, which set out to explore the constructive and action-oriented nature of talk (i.e. what is being done in the talk and why). As all the teachers participating in this research had sole responsibility for the content and delivery of their provision, a focus on the rhetorical features of their accounts is important for the way it reveals how the talk is rhetorically organised to justify certain elements of their provision.

With this in mind, the analysis sought to identify the discursive strategies teachers employed in their accounts and the function of those strategies in that discursive context (i.e. to defend, justify their provision). In this instance, a focus on the discursive strategies teachers use in their accounts can reveal the way teachers

manage issues of stake and accountability. Reponses to questions asked around the inclusivity of provision were included in the analysis, particularly those instances where teachers engaged in justification. In light of this focus, coding focused on identifying features of teachers' talk, most notably instances where teachers used a variety of discursive resources and practices.

Analysis:

We will now highlight some of the ways in which teachers account for their provision as being inclusive of young LGB people. We focus on three excerpts that highlight strategies teachers employed; the strategies deployed included reinstating the presumption of heterosexuality, problematising same-sex sexuality and accounting for inclusivity in terms of the work done around homophobia only. These strategies ultimately involve constructing young LGB pupils as isolated cases within the school context which functions as a means of accounting for their SRE needs as lying outside of the remit of mainstream provision. As the question implies the importance of providing provision that is inclusive of sexual diversity, it is important to point out that teachers invariably sought to respond to this in a way which presents their provision as fulfilling this (legislative) obligation. This appeared to be the case even when the provision provided did not appear to cater for those who may be (or go onto identify as) LGB or alternatively, to those who may engage in same-sex sexual practices. As such, the analysis presented attempts to highlight how these accounts reflect such concerns, along with the resources teachers used to accomplish inclusive provision and ultimately, discount heterosexist practice.

Accounting for inclusivity by reinstating a heterosexual presumption and problematising same-sex sexuality

Within teacher's accounts of their sexual health programmes, young people were constructed as almost always heterosexual. While this perception is implicit in much of their descriptions around their provision, it appears more explicitly when accounting for how their provision acknowledges and caters for sexual diversity. While many of these teachers acknowledge that there may be a number of gay pupils in their classes, given their perceived minority status, these SRE needs appear only as secondary to heterosexual pupils. This was most evident where teachers set about constructing certain sexual health imperatives within their provision, namely those related to teenage pregnancy. While this worked towards establishing danger for the majority, it also provided a means through which to argue that young LGB pupils were anomalous cases. As these teachers are certainly aware of the importance of implementing inclusive provision, they inevitably attempt to account for how their own provision fulfils these criteria, predominantly in spite of the fact that such provision is not considered to be staple aspects of SRE. The following excerpts highlight the various ways these teachers account for their provision as being inclusive of young people's sexual diversities.

Excerpt 1 [p.12 &13]

396   Carl: well in terms of the promotion of sort of homo:sexuality and (.) lesbianism (.) we

397   <do:nt really> get into al:l that (.) its (.) <something that we sa:y> (1) if you have concerns

398   about it we have the parachute drop in clinic (1.5) with er:m (3) the school nurse (.) so if you

399   wanna talk to somebody individually and on a confidential (.) basis (.) that micro approach of

400   <one to one>

401   Interviewer: umm

402   Carl: is available to ya (.) and we basically ↑sign post them in the right direction (1) and they

403   within there (.) have got all the literature that you need and so on (1) the ↑problem we:ve got

404   is that you're dealing at the mac- (.) what I call the macro level (.) where you're teaching

405   <u>thir:ty</u> kids (1) and you've only got them for that fifty minutes and you know that you've

406   gotta get these key messages out (.hh) so often (2) the concerns of individuals (.) or the fears

407   that individuals have got (.) you can't deal with in that allocated time spot (.)

In asking Carl about how his provision caters for diversity, specifying diversity in sexuality, we can see that he immediately reformulates the nature of this issue as he refers to the inclusion of information for LGB pupils as *"promotion"* (Line 396). By reformulating this as a "promotion" issue, Carl can be seen to be setting up a more suitable position from which to more easily dismiss this as something covered in his provision. Interestingly, the way in which the inclusion of LGB sex and relationships information is framed as the 'promotion' of LGB sexuality, is reminiscent of the discourse used within Section 28, and as such has dialogical element to it. Here we can see that Carl appears to be orienting to a particular discourse previous used in previous policy, and one that opens up issues around this aspect of provision. This reformulation then works to downplay both the nature and importance of this information; it suggests that, within this context, promotion would be problematic and inappropriate (as it was indeed, classified as such in Section 28). Accordingly, this appears to function as an act of resistance against having to cover this kind of material. Certainly, the fact that Carl's provision doesn't include material for LGB individuals suggests that this resistance comes from having to refuse this fact (a dispreferred response). This is further highlighted in the nature of this refusal, as it is both vague and dismissive in nature: *"we don't really get into all that"* (Lines 396-397). Again, the formulation of "*all that*" is interesting for the way it suggests that aspect of

provision is considered as separate to SRE and as such, is not considered to be a basic part of young people's SRE needs. Furthermore, the use of this phrase also suggests that *"that"* is not something you should wish to get 'into'.

In building some justification for why this information is not covered in SRE, note the way Carl constructs an LGB identity as a troubled one, as he constructs these pupils' need for information only in terms of the concerns they have about their sexuality (line 397). Considering the needs of these pupils only in this manner ignores the many different subject positions of LGB young people and indeed, their general SRE needs. Most significantly, it sets LGB people up as being in need of specialised and confidential services, which Carl himself prescribes as part of his mainstream provision (Line 397-400).

In problematising the LGB pupil (and indeed, a non-heterosexual identity), Carl can be seen to be creating important grounds from which to suggest that these pupils need "one-to-one" and "confidential" support (Lines 399 & 400). Also, by making it outside of the SRE teachers' expertise, Carl is providing important justification for not including this support in the SRE classroom. This is something he frames as being in the pupils' best interests as it spares these pupils from having to disclose their 'fears' in front of the rest of the class (Lines 406-407). In addition to this, Carl further justifies his decisions in terms of pragmatics: Within this stretch of talk Carl implicates time restrictions as an additional reason for why he can't cover these issues in class where he states *"key messages"* (Line 406) have to take priority. Implicit within this remark however, is the assumption that LGB issues and same-sex sexual practices are not considered to be part of mainstream provision. This is evident where Carl frames this information (that on same sex sexuality) as relevant only for those

who identify as LGB and not for all pupils. Here Carl produces an account that displays his knowledge around sexuality and a heterosexual presumption. This is highlighted in Carl's talk where referring to the *"macro level"* approach (Line 404), where the assumption remains that LGB issues are not for the majority of pupils who are presumably heterosexual, and therefore do not need to know about non-heterosexual sexual practices.

It is clear from the nature of this account that Carl is attempting to justify what is inherently a lack of provision for LGB pupils within his teaching, without dismissing the notion of having some aspect of provision for LGB pupils. As such, the nature of his arguments highlights the rhetorical function of Carl's account as it works to avoid the implication that his provision isn't catering for sexual diversity (and therefore fulfilling legislative requirements). The rhetorical nature of this account is most evident from the justification Carl offers where he frames this lack of provision as being in pupils' best interests. While such a justification could be heard as a particularly noble enterprise, we see that Carl's commitment to this issue is later undermined within subsequent talk. In this excerpt Carl can be seen to be building further justification around his decision to exclude provision around LGB sexuality.

Excerpt 2 [p.18 &19]

594   Carl: who don't promote it (3) <u>since the repeal</u> (2.5) I wouldn't say we go and do (.) an open

595   promotion where it's (.) ah (3) a lesson in itself on homosexuality (.) we don't (.) we don't do

596   tha:t (1) what we do (.) as I said (.) as I said earlier (3) it's alluded (.) >°its not alluded (.) it's

597   the wrong word<° (.) <u>we signpost the</u> kids (1) in the places where we feel (.) their individual

598   needs can be best met

599   Interviewer: umm

600   Carl: they (.) their individual needs expressed within a classroom is not the best environment

601   to do it

602   Interviewer: umm

603   Carl: (5) the notion of (1) I think it comes back to this notion of confidentiality (.) really and

604   if (4) and if they openly want to discuss homo-(.) homosexuality and lesbianism and so on (.)

605   I <u>don't</u> think the classroom that (.) and the environment that we have within our school is the

606   best place to do it (.) I think they ne:ed to be looking at (2) having their views heard (.) and

607   understood (3) with other people (.) whether its (.) adults (.) or whether it's the sixth form

608   peer mentors (.) or what have you (2) so (3) I dunno it- it's (.) one of those where (1) the

609   climate within (2) school maybe different in four five years time (.) where it does become

610   part of (3) a total sex education (2.5) package if you like (.) °>that's probably (.) too< (.)°

611   Interviewer: yeah

612   Carl: within (.) within that context (2) so I can see it (1) becoming part and parcel of (2) of

613   the programmes of study (1) but at the moment (3) that is (4) sign posted elsewhere (.)

614   because we don't feel that (.) within the PSE team (.) we're probably the best people to deal

615   with the students needs (.) on that (.) on that basis

616   Interviewer: yes

617   Carl: I dunno if that's

In this excerpt Carl can be seen to be building further justification around his decision to exclude provision around LGB sexuality (and same-sex sexual practices) in response to another intervention made by the researcher inquiring if Section 28 affected his teaching practice. In reinforcing this account then, Carl builds his justification in an almost identical fashion to that seen in the previous excerpt, where he mobilises a heterosexual presumption in order to construct young LGB people as

not only isolated but specialist cases (based on their perceived minority status) that require specialist services. We can see most clearly where the decision taken to "signpost" pupils with concerns over their sexual identity is again framed in terms of the pupil's best interests (Lines 597-607). While the justification offered is not new, how he goes on to account for their exclusion is. Here we can see that the omission of LGB sexuality in the classroom is justified through claims that this provision is beyond the SRE teachers' expertise. While the issue of confidentiality is mobilised as a way of further strengthening this approach (Line 603), it is here where Carl actually undermines his claims that this happens in the pupils' best interests. This is evident in the following talk, where contrary to earlier claims that this redirection of pupils to external services is based on concerns over confidentiality and expertise, these issues are undermined as he downgrades those who are qualified to deal with these pupils. Here we can see that those qualified to deal with these 'views' are not those of an expert but rather anyone else other than the SRE teacher: "whether it*'s* adults or *whether it's the sixth form peer mentors or what have you"* (Lines 607-608). Despite then strong rhetoric around pupil best interests, the issue of LGB sexuality appears to be one that is problematic for the SRE classroom and therefore, not considered to be a staple element of young people's SRE entitlement. While this method of dealing with pupils who deviate from the heterosexual norm works on their clear exclusion from provision, it is justified here as a method which ensures inclusivity.

In fashioning this justification in this way, we can see this functions as a means of presenting Carl as sensitive to pupil's needs and not as unresponsive to diversity issues. In line with many discursive studies around racism and sexism, this highlights the way speakers manage talk that portray them as caring and egalitarian (Billig, 1991, Edwards, 2000, Potter & Wetherell, 1992). Accounting for omissions in provision this

way, can be seen as a strategic method for managing issues of stake and what may be construed as potentially heterosexist talk. As an SRE coordinator and indeed, an advisor to other schools, Carl is aware of the importance of accounting for what are considered to be elements of good practice in SRE. This is why his talk evidences various attempts at managing his response in a way that ensures it is rhetorically persuasive.

Accounting for inclusivity in terms of work done on homophobia

In a similar vein, when accounting for their SRE provision as inclusive of sexual diversity, many teachers did so by referring to the work they do on homophobia, particularly the emphasis they place on changing intolerance amongst young (heterosexual) people. Within these justifications then, teachers mobilise a discourse of fixity in sexual identity as they infer a heterosexual/homosexual binary. Through these accounts then, teachers continue to mobilise a heterosexual presumption within SRE provision, where SRE appears to reinforce non-heterosexuality as a minority issue.

Similarly to Carl, Heather also accounts for inclusivity in her provision but in contrast, does so by drawing on the work she carries out around homophobia. The general level of intolerance around gay sexuality amongst pupils also appeared to be a concern in Heather's accounts. In dealing with this climate of intolerance around gay sexuality, a discourse of fixity in sexual identity is used not only as a means for young people to understand sexual orientation, but also more strategically, as a basis from which teachers attempt to reduce homophobia.

Excerpt 3 [p. 9 &10]

331   Heather: yeah I do do yeah (.) sort of a focus of a lesson and I look at (.hh) erm stereotypical

332   views (.) so I just take some really horrible quotations that you know (.) and we look at them

333   (.hh) and we talk about why people might say things like that (.) so (.) you know (.) that often

334   says 'oooo' and they think they don't say things like that but in another context I know that

335   they probably do and maybe have (.) do you know what I mean? so I think sometimes you've

336   got to (.hh) you can't run away from it can you? I think you do have to face up (.) erm (.) and

337   I know that in another school (.hh) a colleague went to visit and she'd gone into a year seven

338   lesson and she sa-< I mean they were dealing with homophobia i:n year seven so the kids

339   were just fantastic about it you know (.hh) erm whereas (2) I think you know some of ours

340   are n:ot (1) erm but you've got to work at it haven't you? And I think a lot of the things that

341   you do in PSHE (.hh) are sort of you chip away a little bit (.) do you know what I mean?

342   Interviewer: yes

343   Heather: I think ones of the things we talk about quit- you know in year ten< is one of the

344   things they find really hard is that (.) people don't choose to be (1) but they are and I try to

345   make that very clear- (.) do you know what I mean?

346   Interviewer: Yeah

347   Heather: and I think they just think oh well no (.) coz its (.) and they find that re:ally ha:rd

348   (.hh) where as with the younger ones erm I know there's an exercise we do from that of the

349   rollercoaster pack (.) I dunno if you've seen that

350   Interviewer: oh right no I haven't

351   Heather: and that's from the sexual health centre (.hh) erm and its really about puberty (.) and

352   there's some little cards sort of trouble with teenagers and one girl feels a really strong attach-

353   attraction to her friend and one of the things (.hh) in early puberty is that you can feel a very

354   strong attraction to (.hh) the same sex as well as the opposite sex (.) It doesn't necessarily

355   me:an that you are lesbian or whatever (.hh) but I think later on (.) you've got   to deal with

356   the issue (.) differently you know as girls get older so (.hh) erm so I think that's probably one

357   of the ones that is is (.) more tr:icky (.) erm to [deal with]

358   Interviewer: [yeah I think

359   Heather: er but again I try to sort of take guidance on you know what current thought is and

360   how you should be dealing with these issues so (.hh)

Within this excerpt we can see that Heather responds to the question of whether her

provision caters for LGB pupils by describing a lesson she delivers on homophobia.

As Heather provides a description of the types of activities and discussions that take

place within these lessons, we can see that this talk serves as a way that Heather can

establish the importance of these lessons. The promotional nature of this sequence of

talk is evident in the rhetorical questions Heather poses, the function of which serve to

emphasise the importance of this type of work: ("*so I think sometimes you've got to*

you can't run away from it can you", Line 335-336, "*erm but you've got to work at it*

haven't you?", Line 340). The use of rhetorical questions employed by speakers as an

effective persuasive device is well established within the literature (Frank, 1990; Ilie,

1994). In this case, both these questions serve as a subtle but persuasive means of

emphasising her commitment to this issue (homophobia) and therefore, in the face of

being asked about how she includes information of LGB sexuality, where she can be

seen to be addressing this issue through this work. As we can see the effect of these

questions depends on a shared sense of agreement on the importance of this issue

(working hard at tackling homophobia) between Heather and interviewer. The use of

the phrases such as "work at it" and "*can't run away from it*" highlights their

rhetorical effect and their use here as felicitous (Rohde, 2006). Essentially, these

rhetorical questions have an important communicative function here as they follow an

admission that there is a problem with homophobia. They work to affect the outcome

of the interaction by softening what is essentially an admission by Heather about an undesirable element of her provision or at least an undesirable aspect of pupils' attitudes (namely high levels of homophobia). Overall however, it highlights the way in which Heather is building important justification for this work done on homophobia.

The importance and indeed success of this work is also clarified by Heather's reference to the success of another school, where the approach involved tackling homophobic attitudes at an earlier age, rendering the issue of same-sex sexuality and sexual practices as normative to these pupils (Lines 338-339). Here, Heather seeks to emphasise the exceptional nature of this provision as it features as early as year 7. The nature of this talk highlights the fact that dealing with homophobia at an early age in is considered as the exception with SRE provision rather than the rule. It also functions as a means of bolstering the importance of this aspect of provision as it establishes this issue as difficult and pervasive amongst young people. This is further illustrated by Heather's comment in Line 341, which emphasises the way producing change on this may be a slow and arduous process: "you chip away a little bit".

In order to further emphasise the importance of addressing homophobia, Heather also makes a number of claims regarding why young people are homophobic. Here, the issue of fixity in sexual identity becomes pertinent in Line 343-345, where Heather asserts that young people struggle with understanding gay sexuality. While this is presented as a pupil concern, it is also appears as a point of educating young people about sexuality (Line 344-346). Thus, within this stretch of talk lies the assumption of fixity in sexual identity (heterosexual/homosexual binary) based on an understanding of sexuality as biologically determined. The focus within Heather's provision then, becomes about building an argument for young people around biological determinism

of sexuality and around fixity in sexual identity, as a means of negotiating, convincing, and changing young people's minds. This way of educating young people centres on discourse of tolerance gained through establishing cause (and removing choice) rather than through one that emphasises acceptance on the grounds of diversity. This argument is one often used in the political sphere in formulating arguments for equality and comes at the expense of other arguments that emphasise choice, freedom and values (Waites, 2005).

The imposition of this argument, namely, where gay sexuality is still in effect being problematised through the discussion of cause and blame, can be seen in subsequent talk where Heather refers to the way this provision also includes reasserting a heterosexist presumption of young people's sexual attractions. This is underpinned in her description of an activity used to explore the temporary nature of same-sex attraction in adolescence (Lines 353-357). The importance of what these feelings may mean for young people is apparent here and again represents the heterosexual presumption. The issue of gay sexuality as problematic is implicit here, particularly through reassurance of their heterosexuality as any inconsistent feelings are explained away as a momentary 'lapse' or misplaced feelings.

As Heather's talk functions to establish a need for the work she does on homophobia, we can see that this is used to account for how her provision caters for LGB pupils. In accounting for inclusivity this way her account acknowledges issues related to sexual identity primarily (but notably only for those who are 'heterosexual') as opposed to matters around sex and relationships. Interestingly, this then functions to desexualise LGB people as it fails to acknowledge their sexual practices and desires. Of course, this is problematic in this context as it continues to reinforce the place of this information as being outside of the remit of provision.

Discussion

Our intention with this article was to examine how teachers account for inclusivity and more specifically, pupils' sexual diversity within their SRE provision. This focus helps to highlight some of the barriers that prevent inclusivity being realised, particularly at the level of the Individual educator and those that relate to the cultural context of heterosexism. The findings of this research mirrors previous research documenting the predominantly heterosexist nature of SRE (Ellis & High, 2004; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Stonewall, 2007). Additionally, this research highlights they way in which teachers' attempt to account for their provision in ways that, despite its heterosexist nature, present it as being inclusive of young people's sexual diversities. As such, when trying to account for the inclusion of sexual diversity, teachers' claims appear to be largely rhetorical.

In accounting for how their programmes cater for sexual diversity, the analysis revealed how teachers employed a number of strategies for accounting for their provisions as inclusive, all of which construct young LGB people and those who engage in same-sex sexual practices as isolated cases and therefore outside of the remit of mainstream SRE provision. These strategies used involve reinforcing the presumption of heterosexuality, problematising same-sex sexuality and accounting for inclusivity in terms of homophobia only. As part of this, teachers reinforce a hetero/homo binary and promote fixity of sexual identity as a basis from which to tackle homophobia. As we can see, these strategies of accounting (and justification) effectively deny the idea that their provision may be heterosexist and invariably functions to 'explain away' issues around same-sex sexuality as a key part of

provision. It is clear that barriers such as this prevent inclusive (and therefore comprehensive) provision. An example of this is when teachers mobilised heterosexual presumptions to uphold heteronormative provision, positioning LGB pupils as isolated cases. This effectively rebutted any notion of possible omissions in their provision and allowed them to be seen as responding to the needs of the 'majority'.

While this accounting practice functioned to position LGB pupils outside of the concerns of staple provision, it also served to establish them as needing alternative and specialised provision. Teachers therefore appeared to conflate LGB pupils' sexual identity with their SRE needs and more problematically, this was achieved in a way that ensured LGB pupils experienced their sexual identity negatively. This then appeared to create an effective position from which to justify excluding this provision as it constructed these pupils needs as being outside of the SRE teacher (and the classroom).

Additionally, by further disregarding the issue of sexual identity outside of the SRE classroom, we can see that rhetoric around homophobia was another accounting devise deployed by teachers. One teacher accounted for inclusivity by specifically referencing provision focusing on homophobia. Again, while this is deployed as a means of representing LGB pupils, it fails to address SRE needs. In each of these cases, it is clear that these claims towards inclusivity appear to be strategies employed by teachers to justify and defend their SRE practice. Despite clear claims for inclusivity however, there is a lack of SRE provision focusing on sexual health and practices within same-sex relationships. The strong rhetoric specifying 'pupil best interests' merely functions as a way of legitimising the existing heteronormative content of provision. Arguably, teachers' claims of inclusivity are therefore

rhetorically produced to meet the demands of the interaction, in this case, discounting claims that they are unresponsive to pupils needs.

These findings appear to highlight a lack of understanding around what real inclusivity constitutes in the context of SRE. Certainly, as it is currently articulated there are problems in acknowledging and addressing young people's diverse SRE needs, given that they are set amongst provision which privileges heterosexuality above other types of sexual identity and practice. This clearly has significant implications regarding the potential efficacy of SRE provision.

As highlighted in the analysis, it is clear that young people are taught about sexuality predominantly under a discourse of sexual fixity (hetero/homo binary). SRE provision needs to incorporate the increasing variability and fluidity of young people's sexual identities and practices (Dempsey et al, 2001; Diamond, 2008, Jackson, 2004). As it stands, current provision proscribes information on the basis that their (hetero)sexuality doesn't change and moreover, it makes certain assumptions around the types of sexual practices young people engage in. This is problematic for young people who move between sexual identities or relinquish these all together. As such, SRE needs to include a wider range of sexual practices outside of penis-in-vagina sex such as anal, oral sex and different types of masturbation. This will work to disrupt the conflation of sexual activity with penis-in-vagina sex only and open up the discourses used in teachers' communications with pupils.

Also highlighted in the analysis is the importance of examining how provision is constituted at a discursive level. The discursive barriers in teachers' accounts that prevent inclusivity and contribute towards the aforementioned inequality in provision are particularly subtle and thus require close scrutiny. These inquiries will allow us to

challenge instances of heterosexism and promote awareness of how teachers' discourses impact on young people's developing sexualities. The implications of heteronormative provision for young people are significant (Atkinson, 2002; Ellis & High, 2004; Holland et al, 1999; McLoughlin, 2008). Teachers' discourse has the potential to establish the many possibilities of sexual desire, practice and thought for young people at an influential time in their sexual development. If LGB sexuality and sexual health are considered peripheral or outside the staple concerns of SRE, then those who identify as LGB fail to receive any SRE provision which matches their experiences. Additionally, it also closes off a range of sexual practices and desires that young people may currently engage in irrespective of sexual identity. Certainly, the effects of delivering SRE within an essentialist model of sexuality presents further issues for being able to represent all young people's current sexual experiences. Teaching SRE under a more pluralistic understanding of sexual activity of course requires more understanding around such issues for teachers who currently understand and teach sexuality under the framework of sexual essentialism. This has important implications for the types of strategies they use for reducing homophobia that currently rely on these arguments, which in turn works to reinforce hetero/homo binary and promote fixity of sexual identity.

The findings of this research warrant the need for teachers to reflect on all aspects of their SRE practice and discourse. Such reflexive practice may not be easy, particularly for those responsible for SRE, many of which have an external responsibility around regional practice. It is crucial however, that time is spent reflecting and updating their knowledge on good SRE practice through avenues such as training and workshops. This is of importance given their formative role in establishing potentially inclusive provision. Individuals at policy level are also

important, as they can play a crucial role in establishing a clear curriculum framework from which teachers can gain clarity and confidence. The current evasive position of the Coalition Government is clearly failing to send a strong message regarding the significance of SRE (given its non-statutory status) and as such, is failing to ensure the presence of inclusive provision in the classroom. This is especially crucial in light of teachers' strong rhetoric and tendency to discount any suggestion that their provision could be improved.

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