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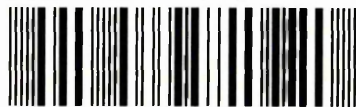
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Exploring the Construction of Young People's Sexuality  
within Sex and Relationship Education

Keeley Abbott

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2012

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis had not been submitted, either in the same or different form, to this or any other university for a degree.

Name: Keeley Abbott

Signed:

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> August 2012

## Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

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In light of a large body of literature highlighting its limitations, this thesis examines how Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) is discursively constructed within and for a secondary school context (i.e. at the level of policy, educator and pupil) to reveal how the nature of SRE, and indeed, young people's SRE needs are conceptualised. A number of changes related to the provision of SRE, mainly at a policy level, served as a rationale for this research. Firstly, a textual analysis of draft SRE guidance was utilised to examine how SRE is formulated and negotiated at a socio-political level, through SRE policy making (chapter 4). This highlights a number of problems that curtail the development of SRE and its ability to meet young people's needs, which are evident in the way it is driven by political and social concerns and serves key interest groups (religious groups, school governors and parents). This chapter provides the socio-political backdrop through which subsequent analyses of how SRE is constructed within the school context could be examined. Chapter 5 moved on to examine the way SRE is constructed at the level of the individual SRE teacher. This analysis documents the considerable variability in the nature of provision accounted for by SRE teachers. Their accounts reflect different concerns around what SRE should include, which were in turn based on their understanding of young people's SRE needs and was driven by political discourse. As such, provision is predominantly problem focused (as characterised by a discourse of danger), heteronormative and gendered. Chapter 6 extends the focus on teachers' accounts of their provision; with particular emphasis on the way they negotiated SRE as a 'controversial' subject. Despite strong (positive) rhetoric around provision, their accounts inadvertently highlight SRE as a site of struggle, where issues inherent to SRE are considered problematic. The level of struggle was also evident when accounting for decisions at a policy making level and when negotiating with dominant stakeholders. The final analysis chapter examines how young people experience their SRE, along with the messages they receive within their individual programmes. It highlights differences between the types of evaluations pupils made according to the specific programmes in which they are located, and more specifically, according to the type of discourses mobilised within that provision. The accounts of pupils located with problem-focused approaches revealed a disjunction between the types of discourses they mobilise around sex and relationships and those presented within SRE provision. This also appeared to affect and limit their conceptualisations of SRE. Implications of these discrepancies are discussed in chapter 8, with particular focus on the discursive barriers that exist in teachers' accounts, which work to curtail the development of a more comprehensive and inclusive provision.

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# **1 Young People's Sexuality within UK Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)**

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## ***1.1 Introduction***

This chapter aims to establish the socio-political context by mapping out the legislation and policy background established for Sex and relationship Education (SRE). The content of sex education has been heavily, if not solely, affected by the moral and political agenda relating to young people's sexuality. Development of legislation and policy in this area therefore reflects the tensions and controversies presented by young people's sexuality and the attempts governments make in trying to contain young people's sexual activity. This background provides important context for understanding the nature of current provision, in particular the socio-political backdrop against which SRE has been shaped.

## ***1.2 The History of Sex and Relationship Education***

Since its inception within UK schools, sex education has been a highly contentious subject (see Blake, 2008; Lewis & Knijn, 2002), primarily for the way it is often perceived as being inseparable from personal values. The controversies surrounding sex education are most visibly documented in the media (Selman, 2000), where various stakeholders (predominantly parents and religious groups) mobilise a number of arguments concerning young people's 'vulnerability' and 'early sexualisation'. While early arguments centred on whether the school context is an appropriate environment for sex education, the debate extended to concerns over the content of sex education. These arguments have most commonly arisen in response to conflicts generated from the various approaches taken to sex education. Such arguments most fundamentally centre around what Thomson (1993) a prominent sociologist, refers to as the competing discourses of sexual moralism and public health pragmatism.

It was from around the 1960s that sex education became established more firmly as part of the school curriculum (Moran, 2001). During this time however, policy development has been problematic given the diverging political ideologies. Driven by concerns around social stability, sex education within schools emerged with the dual aim of reinforcing both 'acceptable' sexuality (i.e. sex within marriage) and health promotion (addressing the negative consequences of sexual behaviour). In light of these imperatives, sex education

emerged firmly within a biological and health model, alongside a moral framework. Sex education has for a large part of its life, therefore focused on preventing disease and pregnancy, providing young people with a moral framework for normative sexuality as proscribed by the sexual politics of UK society. Thus, the turbulent history surrounding sex education owes much to the lack of political consensus regarding whether the primary role of sex education is to address either health or moral concerns (Thomson, 1994). These political tensions have influenced sex education policy and the scope of provision considerably.

### **1.2.1 The Socio-Political Context**

Perhaps the most salient factors that have impacted on sex education in the UK are the high rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), which have created a social and political concern for young people's sexuality. The UK currently has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe (UNICEF, 2007). In the UK the birth rate for young women (aged between 15-19 years) was 27 per 1000; in contrast to 5 per 1000 in the Netherlands and 14 per 1000 in Germany (UNICEF, 2007). STI rates amongst young people (< 25) in England have risen considerably in the last ten years. Moreover, while there has been a decline in the number of new STIs diagnosed since 2008, this follows a sustained increase in diagnosis over the past decade (HPA, 2011). Changes have also been documented around young people's sexual behaviour, with the average age of first sex falling from 17 to 16 (Wellings et al, 2001) and an increase in the average number of sexual partners (Munro, Davis & Hughes, 2004).

The panic created over the social and health consequences of young people's sexual behaviours has sparked considerable political debate over preserving the 'morality' and 'innocence' of childhood (Monk, 2001). Framed firmly within a discourse of morality and danger, attempts at curtailing young people's sexual behaviour and 'preserving their innocence' within the political sphere have been both fraught and enduring. The moral panic surrounding young people's sexual behaviours became particularly poignant in the 1980s and 1990s, in response to the emergence and subsequent increase of HIV/AIDS. While the biological model underpinning sex education was evident before the 1980s, it was challenged during the 1970s and 1980s as a result of more social and rights based movements affecting local governments and sex education (Thomson, 1993). The biological model however became revived during this time within the conservative political climate where debates over

young people's sexuality, and particularly homosexuality, were highly contentious in the wake of the HIV/AIDS crisis. The right-wing sexual moralism of this time affected any recognition of equality in sex education by upholding traditional sexual values (Waites, 2003). The aim of sex education during this period was therefore to teach young people about traditional family values and to respond to the social problems within UK society (namely, the high rates of unplanned pregnancy and STIs). In light of these concerns, what followed was a plethora of initiatives and strategies aimed at containing young people's sexual activity. The significant role of government policy on sex education will be discussed in the subsequent section (1.2.2).

The prohibitive nature of government legislation, with its direct attempts at regulating young people's sexuality (particularly, the Conservative Government's politics of homosexuality during the 1980s), is perhaps most evident in the age of consent debates between 1993-2001 and those also around the same time relating to Section 28. In 1988, the Local Government Act produced a clause around homosexuality partially in response to the emergence and spread of HIV in the UK and amidst worries over a left-wing shift in local authorities' policy towards homosexuality in education. Most notoriously known as Section 28, it stated that "A local authority shall not (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish any material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote in teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" (Local Government Act 1988, 28:2A). This legislation stood as a direct reaction to what Weeks (2003:122) a leading sociologist, refers to as the "threat of a gay agenda" and remained until it was repealed in 2003 (in England and Wales). The political arguments in favour of Section 28 emphasised the apparent vulnerability of young people and their inevitable seduction into homosexuality. Concerns for society, and maintaining traditional family values were also emphasised; and the perceived threat homosexuality posed for undermining the institution of marriage was used as a political tool in supporting the Section under repeated repeal attempts. The effects of Section 28 have been enduring, most obviously for those young people identifying as lesbian and gay. Thus, despite instructions stating that Section 28 should not hinder discussions of homosexuality in the classroom, it created a climate of fear and confusion amongst teachers when including LGB identities and same-sex sexual practices in their SRE programmes (Douglas et al, 1997; Epstein, 1994; Warwick et al, 2001) (The effects of Section 28 at an educator level is discussed in section 1.4).



Amid the furore around the repeal of Section 28, there were similar debates stemming from another of the UK's laws, 'the gay age of consent'. These debates arose as a result of campaigns aimed at reducing the age of consent for sexual acts between men from 21 to 16 (thus, equalising it to the age of consent between heterosexuals and women). This unequal age of consent (set since 1967) also reflected attempts at governing young people's sexualities. Like the debates surrounding Section 28, resistance to a reduction in the gay age of consent during most of the 1990's was sustained by those mobilising fear-based arguments regarding the spread of HIV/AIDS and the 'problems' associated with LGB lifestyles. The arguments put forward by those sexual conservatives associated with the political right, were reliant on emphasising the role the law plays in "upholding traditional sexual values" (Waites, 2003:639). In examining the nature of the arguments used in parliamentary debates and the media (by opponents of the amendment to equalise the age of consent), Ellis & Kitzinger (2002) found that a combination of moral and 'fact' based arguments were used to override arguments of equality. Examples of these arguments included the construction of homosexuality as both 'abnormal' and a 'sin', in addition to claims of majority opposition. Other key arguments mobilised included those which emphasised the 'vulnerability' of young men from older homosexuals and the so-called 'health risks' of a homosexual lifestyle. The nature of these arguments (and their limits) within mainstream politics illustrates the enduring nature of inequality that continues to operate within the public sphere and which continue to shape the lives of young people in a potentially negative way (Waites, 1999; 2005).

Although claims that sexual identity becomes fixed prior to adulthood (fixity claims) have become effective arguments used to achieve political change (namely to grant equality around the age of consent), such arguments have been utilised at the expense of more fluid acknowledgements around sexualities. The nature of such arguments, particularly as they are used as a basis for achieving equality, has raised concern amongst many theorists for a number of reasons (Waites, 2005). The first concern are the way they reaffirm a hetero/homosexual binary using fixity in sexual identity, thereby contributing to producing discrete social groups and reinforcing hegemonic heterosexuality. Also, they raise concerns more broadly within gay politics regarding the perceived compromise to LGB people when utilising sameness and difference arguments irrespective of their political sway (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996; Waites, 2005).

While the Labour election in 1997 witnessed a series of successful attempts to change laws addressing the regulation of sexuality, the impetus for changing young people's attitudes, and more significantly, their sexual behaviours, still remains. Various initiatives and strategies highlight the responses of government and other agencies in trying to shift young people's sexual behaviour. An example of this is the government-funded Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS) for England and Wales launched in 1999 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). This initiative came about as a reaction to the significant teenage pregnancy rates and promised to halve the number of under 18 conception rates by the year 2010. Both before and after the launch of the TPS there has been a continued focus on initiatives aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy rates, such as the launch of the Health of the Nation strategy (DoH, 1992), Our Healthier Nation (DoH, 1998) and the more recent publication of Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004). The aims of such initiatives are to target the sexual health of young people in Britain by providing frameworks through which government can tackle health inequalities and make a number of health improvements, of which included reducing the levels of unwanted pregnancy amongst young people. Within such legislation, sex education has also been expected to play a significant role in meeting various targets laid out around improving young people's sexual health (i.e. Circular 5/1994-discussed in the section 1.1.2).

While legislative frameworks around these issues are complex, they reflect the political nature of sexuality and the significance policy-making has on young people, based on their locations within political discourses and as shapers of their sexual subjectivities. The nature of these political discourses are particularly important for the way they have contributed to the construction of the 'homosexual' and most problematically, the way LGB people became linked to amorality and disease, particularly in the public sphere (Stacey, 1991). The impact of legislation around young people's sexuality is important for the way it defined the content of sex education (Measor, 2000). This is nowhere more visible than in research (e.g. Corteen, 2006; Chambers et al, 2003) that documents the impact of Section 28.

As highlighted in the above, within the public and political sphere young people's sexuality is considered a social problem. From this, it is clear that young people's sexual behaviours, practices and experiences have a history of being politically and socially problematised. The various political interventions around sexuality reflect ways in which heterosexuality is maintained and how other forms of sexuality became prohibited.



### 1.2.2 The Policy Context

Along with sex education guidance, sex education policy has notoriously prescribed a restrictive and moralistic framework through which sex education should be taught. This tone was set firmly within the 1986 Education Act, which stated that sex education must be taught within a 'moral framework'. Also outlined within this Act was a shift in the control of sex education from Local Education Authorities (LEA) to school governors. This transfer of control had a significant effect on the provision of sex education as all non-statutory sex education remained solely at governors' discretion (Corteen, 2006). Provision therefore varied considerably as it reflected the particular policies of individual governing bodies (Epstein & Johnson; 1994; Thomson & Scott, 1991). Following this, in 1987 the Department of Education and Science (DES) issued guidance to school governors, which further outlined the nature of this moral framework. This stated that "pupils should be helped to appreciate the benefits of stable married life and the responsibilities of parenthood" (DES 1987:4).

Regarding LGB sexualities within sex education, the message was clear: "homosexual practice is not morally acceptable" (DES 1987:22). While the guidance had non-statutory status, following the introduction of the national curriculum from 1988, some aspects, mainly those limited to reproduction and disease, were included in the Science Curriculum.

The next significant change in policy came with the 1993 Education Act (Department for Education (DfE)). This Education Act made sex education (delivered within National Curriculum Science) compulsory in secondary schools, outlining the responsibility of school governors in producing a sex education policy although guidance for sex education provision remained vague. All 'non-biological' aspects such as HIV/AIDS, STIs and aspects of human sexual behaviour were however, removed from this provision. Also included in this legislation, was the parental right of withdrawal, which gave the parents the freedom to remove their child from all or part of sex education outside of the National Curriculum. This policy move reflected what Thomson (1994:53) referred to as a "complicated and compromised position". Another compromising aspect of this legislation was that which outlined new restrictions around teacher confidentiality. It stated that caution should be exercised by teachers when providing contraceptive advice to pupils under 16. Furthermore it stated that where teachers believed pupils to be in breach of the law, they had a responsibility to inform the head teacher who should then notify parents. Pupils therefore had no right to confidentiality regarding their sexual activity from teachers. Both this and parents right to withdraw their children from SRE have been particularly problematic elements of this policy.

The importance of a moral framework prescribed in the statutory legislation became more explicit as the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) issued a circular providing a moral context for young people's sexual behaviour (DfEE, 1993). This placed sex within the boundaries of both marriage and fidelity; stating that

"pupils should accordingly be encouraged to appreciate the value of stable family life, marriage and the responsibilities of parenthood. They should also be helped to consider the importance of self-restraint, dignity, respect for themselves and others, acceptance of responsibility, sensitivity towards the needs of others, loyalty and fidelity" (DfEE, 1993: 8).

The notion of a moral framework was however, despite this guidance, rather ambiguous and more significantly, open to interpretation. The Act received much criticism; particularly from teachers who found the prescriptive morality restrictive and felt that in imposing such values young people's realities were unacknowledged (Measor, Tiffin & Miller, 2000).

Despite evident tensions between policy and practice, the Education Act in 1996 (which consolidated previous legislation and a moral framework for sex education to work within) still prevailed. It wasn't until 1999 that the definition and scope of sex education changed, where it became known as Sex and Relationship Education (SRE). This shift in definition became extremely important particularly for the way it opened up the scope of SRE provision to include the more emotional sides of sexual relations alongside more biological elements. Also during this time, the introduction of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) as a recommended framework for SRE was published. Being part of a broader health education programme held promising prospects for the future of SRE. As Martinez (2009:4) the coordinator of the sex education forum stated, such changes "reflected the growing appreciation that young people do not compartmentalise their lives according to sex, drugs, alcohol and health, but rather all these elements are interwoven". SRE received further support with the launch of the National Healthy Schools Programme (NHSP) a joint initiative introduced by the Department of Health (DoH) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) aimed at reducing health inequalities and committed to supporting SRE. The PSHE framework became one of the four requirements that schools have to meet when trying to achieve healthy school status. With the introduction of the NHSP came an established national framework aimed at directly supporting the implementation of SRE within a wider health education programme.



As research (e.g. Alldred et al, 2003; SEF survey, 2008) consistently documents the low priority given to SRE in comparison with national curriculum subjects, the changes made in support of SRE were welcomed based on their potential in moving towards standardisation for SRE (Sex education forum, 2008). For example, the PSHE framework in theory grants more space for the social and cultural aspects of young people's sexuality to be addressed within provision (Martinez, 2009), although pressures felt elsewhere have often curtailed such developments (De Silva & Blake, 2006). An example of this is where SRE was expected to play a preventative role as part of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS).

As the need for effective SRE gained impetus, the need for clarification and support within SRE became crucial. In response to these changes and requests for further information, the DfEE published the first national guidance, 'Sex and Relationship Education Guidance' in 2000. The publication of this guidance represented a promising milestone in the history of SRE; for many the guidance was more progressive and clearer than anything that had been published before it. Although published over 10 years ago, this policy has yet to be replaced or updated, it therefore remains the current guidance for SRE. While it reinforced the statutory elements of SRE it also endorsed many of the changes proposed for SRE at the time of its introduction, namely the framework of PSHE. It states that "SRE should be firmly rooted within the new framework of PSHE and in accordance with the National Curriculum for England and Wales launched in 1999" (DfEE, 2000:3). The guidance further outlines the importance of social aspects of SRE for young people in its definition of SRE as "the teaching of sex, sexuality, and sexual health" and includes "earning the value of respect, love and care" (p.5) along with "developing young people's confidence and "self esteem" (p.4). It also provides the foundations for SRE that is non-discriminatory and inclusive where it calls for respect in social, cultural and sexual diversity.

In keeping with the new National Curriculum for England and Wales (DfEE, 1999), at the time of its inception, this guidance offered new headway by acknowledging sexual diversity among young people in schools by stating that: "Young people, whatever their developing sexuality, need to feel that sex and relationships education is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs" (p.12). Additionally, it addressed the important role that teachers played in SRE by including the following statement "teachers should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation" (p.13). In addition to this, the guidance also responded to the high

level of homophobic bullying present in schools by explicitly stating, "schools should be able to deal with homophobic bullying" (p.13).

While the aforementioned developments indicate some recognition of non-heterosexual relationships in both the national curriculum and national guidance, educational research (e.g. Atkinson, 2002; Corteen, 2006) uncovers a number of competing forces that ultimately undermine same-sex relationships. One of the biggest factors which compromises provision, is the status of both SRE and the national guidance, as non-statutory. With no legal weighting, the guidance carries little power in determining what is taught in the classroom. This is highlighted in research (Corteen, 2006; Epstein & Johnson, 1994, 1998) which illustrates that a majority of SRE teachers and head teachers have very limited knowledge of SRE guidance and in many cases fail to fulfil their SRE policy responsibilities.

Despite a more progressive position adopted within this guidance, the document itself features a number of contradictory discourses which undermine any real commitment towards diversity (Atkinson, 2002). For example, the guidance reinforces curtailments around discussions of non-heterosexuality within SRE and reinstates the power of parents by outlining certain considerations schools should adopt on this issue. It does this as it states "sexual orientation and what is taught in schools is an area of concern for some parents. Schools that liaise closely with parents when developing their sex and relationship education policy and programme should be able to reassure parents of the content of the programmes and the context in which it will be presented" (p. 13). Despite research (SEF, 2011) which illustrate how parents often report feeling ill-equipped to teach their children about SRE, the importance of parental consultation and involvement in SRE is reiterated throughout the guidance, as it stipulates the role they are expected to play as "key educators" (p. 5). Moreover, the philosophy underpinning the guidance remains health orientated, principally concerned with the reasons for "'delaying sexual activity' and preventing 'unplanned teenage pregnancy'" (p. 5). Specification of the 'value' of marriage for family life and bringing up children advocates the traditional family as being the appropriate context for (heterosexual) sex and child rearing as emphasised in previous policy documents relating to SRE. Whilst the prohibitive nature and non-statutory status of the guidance are certainly factors in the way in which SRE has been curtailed, there are a number of other competing factors that have also served to undermine progress in SRE and its commitments to diversity. These competing



factors include pressures of the National Curriculum and standards, along with the lack of training available to teachers (Buston et al, 2002).

#### *1.2.2.1 The Current Policy Context*

The highly precarious nature of SRE practice and policy has continued of late, particularly in the face of government change in 2010. Over the thirteen years where Labour was in government (1997-2010), a number of positive steps were taken towards improving sex education, particularly through new policy discourse focusing on social exclusion and inequalities. The most promising changes in the context of sex education came in their proposals to make SRE statutory. While moves towards making PSHE (and therefore SRE) statutory after a government review of SRE in 2008 had gained impetus and a date proposed for its implementation set for 2011, after a change to a coalition government this was thwarted. The Labour Government proposal to make SRE statutory in every school (contained in the Children, Schools and Families Bill (2009)) supported by Secretary of State Ed Ball and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) was affected most significantly by this change. When passed, this Bill would have reformed school SRE in line with the proposal to make SRE statutory for all children between the ages of 5-16 and remove the parental right of withdrawal for children over the age of 15. Significantly, it also stated that religious schools must teach young people about contraception and abortion. Despite the imminence of these changes, the Clause making SRE statutory was dropped in order to rush to get the bill through before parliament dissolved for the election. The opposition these proposals generated (again mainly from the right wing Conservatives) reflect a continued political struggle around SRE and a failure to reach consensus around the role of SRE. Other significant progress disrupted by the change in government included the failed execution of new SRE guidance drafted and put out for consultation by the DCSF. The publication of this new guidance was planned for the 2011, in line with the launch of statutory SRE. Its publication would have replaced existing guidance (DfEE, 2000) and its draft status posed a promising (albeit, still limited) number of changes, particularly, as it outlined a more detailed and uniform framework for SRE.

In the context of the present government, the legal position of SRE within secondary schools is that SRE remains non-statutory. The current legal framework for SRE in England is set out within the Education Act (1996) and the Learning and Skills Act (2000). In summary, while

SRE outside of the National Curriculum is non-statutory, sex education elements within National Curriculum Science such as biological aspects of puberty, sexual reproduction and the spread of viruses are mandatory for all pupils within primary and in addition to this, HIV/AIDS, in secondary schools. Other elements of SRE are delivered within non-statutory PSHE as set out in the SRE guidance, of which school governors are by law expected to give 'due regard'. All schools are legally obliged to have an up-to-date SRE policy outlining the content and organisation of SRE outside of the Science Curriculum. This policy should be available to parents. Under this policy, parents have the right of withdrawing their children from non-statutory SRE until the age of 19. In line with previous legislation, The Learning and Skills Act (2000) states that "young people learn about the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and bringing up children" and "protected from teaching and materials which are inappropriate, having regard to the age and the religious and cultural background of the pupils concerned" (2000:148). The Equality Act (2010) covers the way the curriculum is delivered and as such, schools must ensure equal opportunities in the education they provide and prohibits schools from discriminating against pupils because of their sex, race, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

As established, the legal and policy context that applies to SRE is complex and represents a number of competing and contradictory voices in society which reflects struggles over ideas relating to sex, sexuality and young people. SRE policy has been written against a backdrop of fierce political debates and therefore reflects the lack of consensus on this subject, particularly around 'values' in SRE. The result of this has been a highly contradictory policy context, which is largely ambiguous and most dangerously open to considerable interpretation. The implications of this policy context, and indeed the political controversy, are important for SRE provision and practice, and of course for young people positioned by this policy. As SRE teachers attempt to navigate their way through this confusing and difficult terrain, this policy and legislative framework has implications for the types of message delivered in or absent from the classroom. The following section examines the content and practice of SRE, of which political and policy pressure have played a significant role in shaping.



### ***1.3 The Content and Practice of SRE***

As outlined in the previous section, the content of SRE has been curtailed by the prohibitive policy and legislative context related to SRE. Perhaps more dramatically, SRE has also been influenced by more localised factors within the school context such as senior management, school governors and SRE teachers. The ensuing section will examine the nature of current SRE and the plethora of factors that have shaped provision.

#### **1.3.1 Sex as Risky Business**

Largely in response to public health imperatives, the content of SRE has been framed firmly within a biological and health model and as such, has a history of being limited to the physiological and biological aspects of sex. As a result of this, SRE has focused on equipping young people with knowledge around puberty and how to protect themselves from the negative outcomes of their sexual behaviour, namely unwanted pregnancy and STI's (SEF, 2008; Thomson 1994). The approach described here is most commonly known as a health promotion approach (also referred to as a comprehensive approach) and is focused on equipping young people with knowledge to protect their sexual health. Within this approach, the potential benefits of delaying sexual activity is emphasised and focus is placed on educating young people about the use of contraceptives and STIs so that they can protect themselves when they become sexually active. While the majority of schools' SRE fall broadly within this approach, another common approach is the abstinence approach, characterised by teaching young people about the benefits of abstaining from sexual activity until marriage. In contrast to health promotion, an abstinence approach opposes the promotion of contraceptives except in instances where teachers emphasise statistics around their failure rates, in addition to prevalence rates of HIV and STIs (Batchler, 2004; Blake & Frances 2001). Therefore the message delivered is one that promotes abstinence from sexual activity as the only definite way to avoid pregnancy and STIs. While abstinence approaches are both favourable and prevalent within the USA, within the UK they often remain limited to some faith-based schools.

The approaches taken to SRE typically polarise between health promotion approaches and abstinence approaches<sup>1</sup>. There have been some attempts to reconcile the lack of information

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that while two broad 'approaches' of SRE are identified here due to their prevalence in current SRE practice, researchers use a number of alternative terms for describing approaches taken towards

given around contraceptives in abstinence approaches with the launch of 'abstinence plus'. This particular approach serves as a rapprochement between the two approaches as it combines abstinence with information around contraception. Despite their predominance in schools, both health promotion approaches and abstinence approaches remain problematic, mainly for the way information delivered within SRE is inherently negative and limited. Similarly to the aforementioned messages regarding contraception, messages about sex and sexuality within abstinence approaches are extremely negative, as they are often talked about alongside a discourse of shame, guilt and even death. Topics such as abortion and same-sex sexual practices in abstinence programmes are also addressed in an extremely damning manner (Maher, 2005). While research conducted in the US (e.g. Cheesbrough et al, 2002; Kirby et al, 2005), continues to promote the strength of comprehensive approaches over abstinence approaches, the nature and scope of these programmes despite being framed as 'comprehensive' (characterised by the inclusion of contraceptive information) like those in the UK, remain focused only on the 'dangers' of sexual activity. Therefore, the current content of many of these programmes is arguably not what the term comprehensive suggests, mainly for the way this approach often fails to be comprehensive in terms of the range of content it covers<sup>2</sup>. While SRE provision is often categorised in terms of its overarching approach within the literature, there is often a level of variability in SRE practice which can result in a number of distinctions within these approaches.

In the absence of a unified framework from which to approach SRE, and the contrasting tenets of the different approaches, SRE provision has a long history of being patchy and variable. Nevertheless, provision within the majority of schools has been taught largely within a biological model and has therefore adopted a broadly health promotion approach. Within this model, SRE has remained 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. As sexual safety has taken precedence within this framework, information around contraception makes up a large part of the programme and in some instances, can be the only SRE young people receive (Measor et al, 2000). Within this model,

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SRE. Many refer to models of SRE or conversely, to political approaches (see Aggleton et al, 1989; Carson, 1993; Kehily, 2002; Lees 1993).

<sup>2</sup> In light of this argument, the term health promotion will be used throughout this thesis when referring to this particular SRE approach, based on the way it is preferable over the term 'comprehensive' approach.



a discourse of danger and risk around sex is utilised within the classroom when addressing young people's sexual activity (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). These dominant discourses are indicative of the drive towards reducing young people's sexual activity and can be seen most explicitly in the majority of SRE content. For example, many strategies involve the use of scare tactics such as presenting pupils with (gruesome) pictures of STI symptoms to deter them from having sex. Messages such as 'just say no' are also indicative of this discourse of danger. While this particular mantra is most commonly utilised within abstinence approaches, it has also been adopted within many health promotion approaches (for example, via programmes such as APAUSE<sup>3</sup>, a popular SRE programme in the UK). This 'technique' often involves young people performing role plays, where in the face of peer pressure (typically young women) pupils practice 'just saying no' to sex. The assumption inherent to these assertiveness techniques is that young people find it difficult to resist unwelcome pressure as they lack effective refusal skills (i.e. the confidence to refuse sex).

While refusal skills training is often heralded as an effective way in which to prevent young people's sexual activity, it can be problematic, particularly in schools where it is delivered in place of contraception information and where it has little relevance for some young people's current sexual realities (i.e. those who by choice are engaging in sex). Moreover, the literature on young people's sexual negotiation and refusals highlights the problematic nature of this approach, for the way such a refusal (i.e. that which is done directly and unapologetically) runs counter to the normative way of doing refusals, which are by comparison, more indirect and complex (Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; O'Byrne et al, 2006). While this approach is founded on the assumption that unwanted sex is a result of miscommunication and misinterpretation between the sexes (more specifically, women not being confident enough to communicate their refusal effectively), research (e.g. Kitzinger & Frith, 1999) illustrates that both young women *and* young men, have a sophisticated understanding and appreciation of even the subtlest of refusals. Additionally, while this approach is difficult conversationally, it is also unrealistic on a more personal level. Young women in particular, report finding this 'just say no' approach problematic based on concerns they hold around their sexual reputations and relationships which this approach threatens to disrupt (Frith, 1999; Kitzinger & Frith, 1999). On a more political level, the problem with

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<sup>3</sup> APAUSE: Added Power And Understanding in Sex Education. An external SRE programme with resources developed for use within secondary schools.

such an approach rests in the way it teaches young people that unwanted sexual activity is the result of poor communication which effectively removes responsibility from those doing the pressuring, therefore reinforcing the issue of gendered power relations and sexual coercion.

Whilst the aforementioned strategies are aimed at discouraging young people from sexual activity, they fail to account for the fact that many young women now negotiate more autonomous and active sexualities (Jackson & Cram, 2003). Changes in society render concerns around chastity and abstinence largely irrelevant (or at least significantly diminished) for young women's sexual health needs. Notably, these techniques are commonly utilised in conjunction with more contraceptive-based information, where provision focuses on equipping young people with knowledge particularly around contraceptive use. While this approach acknowledges young people's sexual realities, the current nature of this approach is not without its problems. For example, the content of many SRE programmes is primarily limited to learning about contraceptive methods, STI symptoms and human anatomy. While these are important elements of SRE, they are often presented at the expense of many other important facets young people need from their SRE; such as discussions around sex and sexuality (Epstein, 1999; Forrest, 2000).

In light of vague SRE guidance and a lack of a more directive framework for SRE in policy, the content of SRE is determined at the level of individual SRE teachers. While some teachers create their own programmes, others rely on pre-packaged SRE resources developed by a number of external organisations, each of which reflect various assumptions and values. As an under prioritised subject, with little support or training for teachers in the school context, these programmes can be considerably attractive to the newly appointed SRE teacher for the way they offer 'readymade' provision. While the nature of these resources vary considerably, as a non-statutory part of the curriculum, schools ultimately have free reign in deciding both their approach to and delivery of SRE, including in some cases, a lack of any SRE at all (SEF, 2008).

While the aforementioned research highlights the prevalence of a risk reduction approach, small pockets of more 'progressive' approaches have emerged. These approaches reflect those promoted by national authorities on SRE as 'good practice'. This particular approach to SRE is developed in line with the framework laid out by organisations such as the SEF, where a more holistic approach to SRE provision is advocated. Within these 'progressive' frameworks SRE is defined as "learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of



growing up, relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health” (National Children Bureau (NCB) for the SEF, 2010:1). Such approaches acknowledge the recognition that there is more to sexuality and indeed to sexual health, than simply avoiding the negative outcomes of sexual behaviour<sup>4</sup> (Boyle et al, 2007; Hirst, 2008). Therefore, inherent to these approaches is more diverse content underpinned by a 'value framework'. Advocated as part of this value framework is the notion that that SRE should contain a range of information about sex, sexuality, the law and sexual health in order for young people to make informed choices. It also states that SRE provision should be inclusive of young people's diversities (including age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, culture, religion or belief or other life experiences particularly HIV status and pregnancy). Additionally, it is argued that SRE should include the development of skills to support healthy and safe relationships and ensure good communication about these issues, alongside promoting critical awareness around the many different attitudes and views on sex and relationships. It also stipulates that SRE should ensure that young people are informed of their rights (i.e. how to access confidential advice and sexual health services) and that provision should nurture personal values based on individual respect and care. It also outlines elements of good practice around the delivery of SRE, such as: SRE as age relevant, developed in consultation with young people and delivered by competent teachers in a learning environment that is safe (SEF, 2010).

As highlighted above, this approach towards SRE covers a much wider knowledge base than those typically delivered under both health promotion and abstinence approaches. While these organisations advocate the delivery of SRE within a value framework, the concept of values within this context is radically different from those traditionally prescribed for SRE; the values deemed important for young people are those that promote equality and respect, as opposed to values in terms of morality.

The work of organisations such as the SEF, certainly indicate a move beyond the biological model of SRE and represent a shift towards a progressive provision which acknowledges

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'negative outcomes' is commonly utilised in the literature around young people's sexual health and reflects the view that adolescent pregnancy is problematic. While the notion of adolescent pregnancy is for many young people a 'negative outcome', particularly in the cases where it is unwanted; there are many young people who plan pregnancy and for whom adolescent pregnancy is a positive life event (Cater & Coleman, 2006; Spear & Lock, 2003). This reflects the social construction of young people's sexuality as it is often conceptualised on a social and political level as socially problematic.

young people's sexuality through an affirmative discourse. The central position of sexuality within SRE is advocated by Corteen (2006:96) who suggested that SRE should in fact be renamed Sexualities Education based on the potential this renaming offers in "comprising a radical and inclusive agenda, informed by children's rights, which reflect the material realities of young people's lives and the diverse society in which they live". Despite the potential of such a proposal, the prohibitive nature of SRE policy and practice has for the most part, prevented such an approach. Implicit within much SRE is an 'anti-sex rhetoric' most evident in the messages which emphasise the risks associated with sex, and which are reinforced through a discourse of danger (Fine, 1988). As a result, research (e.g. Corteen, 2006; Forrest, Strange & Oakley, 2004; UK Youth Parliament, 2007) consistently documents the limited nature of much SRE provision within the current policy context, particularly the way in which it fails to meet young people's varying sexual health needs.

### **1.3.2 Provision as Heterosexist**

As SRE primarily continues to increase sexual safety, reduce teenage pregnancy and STIs, the content of provision has focused predominantly on (hetero)sexual health and (hetero)sexual activity (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, 1998; Corteen, 2006). Therefore teaching about sex in SRE is done so in relation to reproduction (Diorio & Munro, 2000), 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. In presenting sex as heterosex and as a reproductive activity, SRE reinforces normative heterosexuality and is criticised for limiting young people's knowledge around sex and sexuality (Harrison & Hillier, 1999). Whilst this reflects constructions of sex and sexual practices in the broader social and cultural context, it is problematic for the way it leaves young people without alternative language for discussing a range of diverse sexual practices and desires (Jackson, 1995). The extent to which the heteronormative content shapes young people's experiences is evident in the literature which reveals that young people who identify as LGB receive little to no sex education that reflects their experiences or needs (Hunt & Jenson, 2007; Epstein et al, 2003). Moreover, when LGB sexuality does make it on to the formal curriculum it is often fraught with problems and is regarded by pupils as largely unhelpful (Ellis & High, 2004; Mac an Ghaill, 1991). LGB sexuality 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). The lack of language within SRE for discussing LGB sexuality and indeed, same-sex sexual practices and desires, acts as a barrier in protecting young people's sexual health, particularly those who currently identify as LGB or engage in same-sex sexual practices (i.e. men who sleep with men (MSM) and women who sleep with women (WSW)). These young people in particular are prevented from receiving specific information necessary to practice safe sex and develop sexual competence. As such, diversity in both sexual identities and practices are largely absent within the content of SRE, a position further illustrated in the omission of information taught around non-penetrative sexual practices such as mutual masturbation, oral and anal sex in SRE programmes (Forrest, Strange & Oakley, 2004). These practices are rarely taught alongside penis-in-vagina sex as alternative sources of sexual pleasure.

The most regulatory force in the 'policing' of heterosexuality is a consequence of section 28 (both during and after its repeal). The act signalled the disapproval of non-heterosexual identities, reinforcing a biological and reproductive model of sexual relations, in which LGB sexuality is constructed as 'abnormal' and 'deviant'. During its reign, research (e.g. Corteen, 2006) has shown that many teachers included similar discriminatory statements within their SRE policy and utilised the Section when defending the absence of LGB sexuality within their programmes. While some teachers positioned themselves in line with this policy others expressed 'confusion' and 'unwillingness' to address the needs of LGB pupils in an attempt to 'play it safe' in their professional role (Douglas et al, 1999; Warwick et al, 2001). Teachers spoke of anxiety in 'supporting' LGB sexuality based on fears that this behaviour may constitute 'promotion' (Chambers et al, 2004). The lack of management support and training available to teachers saw even individual efforts plagued due to lack of confidence and uncertainty surrounding legislation and policy. In some cases this caution was motivated from fear of losing state funding for schools and more personally, individual teachers' jobs. There were, however, many teachers who remained in opposition to LGB sexuality and same-sex sexual practices being dealt within in the school context, particularly those with religious and moral beliefs. For these teachers, Section 28 enabled them to mobilise their prejudices within the classroom (Ellis & High, 2004).

### 1.3.3 Provision as Gendered

With a firm focus on sex as risk and danger, SRE has mainly focused on young women and the biological aspects of reproduction with emphasis on the former stemming from anxieties regarding the increased (pregnancy) risk for women over men. There has been however, a small body of research, both psychological and sociological (e.g. Buston & Wight, 2006; Chambers et al, 2004; SEF, 2009) that also identifies the problems young men experience in having their needs met by SRE provision. This literature documents how young men are often sidelined within SRE as they are often viewed as peripheral to messages such as the prevention of unwanted pregnancy (Hirst et al, 2006). This is reflected in the attitudes held by teachers who see discussions around SRE with young men, both as fruitless and disruptive (Chambers et al, 2004; Davidson, 1996). While young men are often considered expendable to the SRE endeavour, this is inherently problematic for the way it fails to acknowledge the role they play as the potential source of young women's risk (and in some cases their victimisation) and their involvement in unwanted pregnancies as young fathers.

In addition to a predominant focus on young women, SRE also constructs young people's sexuality as gendered, built up around discourses that construct an active male and passive female sexuality. Diorio (2001), an educational researcher, argues that this stems from the assumptions held within sex education (and those held in wider society) of sexuality as dependent upon reproductive differences between the sexes. As differences between the sexes are emphasised within SRE, and any notions of similarity are lost, young people invariably learn about the meaning of their bodies solely through their biology. While male sexuality is constructed as 'uncontrollable' and as driven by sexual desire mainly naturalised through the 'male sex drive discourse' (Hollway, 1984, 1989), female sexuality in contrast is constructed as the absence of sexual desire and is characterised by passivity. This is supported by research (e.g. Raymond, 1994) that emphasises the way discourses within sex education grant access to forms of empowered male sexuality which is concurrently denies female sexuality. This has particular consequences, particularly for the way these discourses work to position males and females unequally. As males are constructed as active and desiring subjects and females are constructed as passive, female sexuality is constructed as risky in comparison. While females are often cast as the gatekeepers of male desire as a result of these constructions, they often thought to bear the brunt of being sexually responsible (Holland et al, 1999; McLoughlin, 2008). As such, where messages of safe sex are delivered in the classroom, young women are, for the most part, assumed to be the principle recipients.



Delivered in this way, young women are taught to adopt different responsibilities around contraceptive use as a result of their female sexuality.

While the construction of gendered sexuality within SRE is reinforced most explicitly through formal content (i.e. the 'authorised' curriculum), it also occurs through the more informal discourses utilised by teachers in the classroom, for example through their interactions with pupils. At both the formal and informal level, what is taught within SRE contributes towards legitimising certain behaviours in males it simultaneously denies females. This is seen most explicitly in the way it constructs female 'sexuality' as problematic (i.e. their sexual behaviour) while in comparison constructs male sexuality as largely unproblematic. As such, much of the content of sex education has invited criticism based on the disempowering discourses mobilised within the SRE lessons and lack of recognition present with SRE curricula around female sexuality (Fine, 1988).

#### **1.3.4 Without Pleasure**

As highlighted throughout the literature, SRE has been largely characterised by a discourse of danger. It is therefore not surprising that a discourse of pleasure has been absent. This is understandable, given that the inclusion of both pleasure and desire is perceived as at odds to a message of safe sex and the message that sex is bad for young people. The issue of giving and receiving pleasure within this context is considered inappropriate in line with a view of young people as non-sexual (Monk, 2001) and for the way it stands in opposition to the role of SRE in reducing young people's sexual activity. This is most evident in the silence in school SRE around the issue of masturbation. Masturbation is often only mentioned briefly in SRE and in relation to young men, reinforcing a belief that masturbation is not normative for young women (Jackson, 1998).

The silence around desire and pleasure within SRE has captured feminist attention over the years; particularly the implications these absences have upon young women's sexual subjectivities and sexual practices (Fine, 1988; Hollway, 1995; Tolman, 2002). While a discourse of desire has been largely absent in SRE (Fine, 1988), the role of pleasure within SRE has received increased international attention more recently for its public health link, namely the potential for influencing safer sexual practices and for improving young people's sexual subjectivities (Allen, 2008; Aggleton & Campbell, 2000; Boyce et al, 2007; Hirst, 2004, 2007). Much of this literature focuses on the benefits that incorporating a discourse of pleasure offers in disrupting what has been termed the 'coital imperative', namely, the idea

that real sex is penis-in-vagina intercourse (Jackson, 1984; McPhillips et al, 2001) and in light of its compliance with public health aims (Ingham, 2005). While there are often extensive efforts made by teachers in avoiding such topics, mainly for the way it is seen as intrusive, its value lies in the way it can increase young people's familiarity and comfort with their bodies (Ingham, 2007). The growing recognition of pleasure in SRE therefore poses a number of benefits for improving young people's sexual health and for producing a positive sense of self. Theorists emphasise the way in which the topic of pleasure challenges absent identities within SRE, such as LGB identities and young people with disabilities (Hirst, 2007). This is particularly important as little reference is made to pleasure for both these groups of young people. Hillier et al. (2005) commented on the way that the invisibility of LGB pupils within Australian schools makes the possibility of their sexual pleasure even more unfathomable in this context. In all, the struggles some teachers face in acknowledging sex as pleasurable within their SRE may be understood in light of their long-term commitment to emphasising sex as risk and danger (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Fine 1988) and in response to the widely held belief that pleasure within SRE is not appropriate (Allen, 2008).

#### ***1.4 The Importance of SRE Teachers***

The struggles inherent to SRE and the many barriers it faces have been well documented in the literature, particularly at the level of individual practice. Research has identified a host of factors that impact on the quality of SRE, for example, the attitudes of individual teachers and their approach towards SRE (Ellis & High, 2004; Hilton, 2003), confidence around delivery (Buston et al, 2002; Atkinson, 2002), and levels of expertise/knowledge (Chambers, 2004). This research highlights the crucial and significant role teachers play in SRE, particularly given their level of autonomy in its content and delivery (Buston & Wight, 2001). What this highlights is the way in which the fate of SRE is (precariously) determined at the level of the individual; from school governors, senior management, to SRE teachers (Corteen, 2006).

While it is recognised that those who deliver SRE have a crucial role in its success, focus has shifted towards exploring characteristics that are important for successful implementation of SRE, particularly those which encourage young people to promote their sexuality positively (Buston & Wight, 2001; Hilton, 2003). Within the context of New Zealand, Allen (2009) found that young people valued certain qualities in SRE teachers, qualities such as; being highly knowledgeable, professional and having the ability to relate to young people. The



values teachers exhibit within the SRE classroom (particularly those related to sexuality), are also identified as important for young LGB people (Biddulph, 2006; Ellis & Hill, 2004) mainly for the way such values are potentially influential in the lives of these young people. Moreover, the personal views of teachers become particularly important for the way they influence young people's sexual subjectivities. For example, teachers often prescribe gender-specific treatment of sexual morality which assigns young women greater responsibilities and accountability for their sexual activities than they ascribe young men (Chambers et al, 2004).

The teacher-pupil relationship is identified as being particularly important for the way it affects young people's evaluations of their SRE provision. In fact, the more interpersonal elements of teachers' teaching practices are identified as being particularly effective for the success of SRE (Biddle & Forrest, 1997; Schaalma et al, 2004). Additionally, the teachers ability to recognise and cater to young people's more localised sexual cultures as part of their teaching, such as the contexts within which sex takes place such as outside or within casual short term relationships is thought to be extremely important for the efficacy of the messages delivered to young people (Allen, 2009; Buston et al, 2002). The relationship a SRE educator forges with young people is considered to be particularly important within SRE, given the sensitive nature of the subject matter for both the educator and for young people (Buston & Hart, 2001). The teacher-pupil relationship helps shape the context for the practice of SRE and most crucially, offers the potential to disrupt what Kehily (2002), a prominent educational researcher terms, the teacher/pupil binary. Kehily's research highlights the way successful SRE is often dependent on a host of more complex factors facilitated at an individual educator level and as shaped by young people's localised context, as opposed to those prescribed on a national level.

While the formal elements of SRE are important for what young people invariably learn within the classroom, of equal importance are the discourses utilised by SRE teachers. It is these discourses that are responsible for further limiting or expanding the content of SRE and what is discussed within the classroom. For example, messages around acceptable (hetero)sexuality presented within the formal content are also supported by the discourses drawn upon by teachers in operation in the SRE classroom (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Reiss, 1998). While the heterosexist nature of provision is often upheld by educator discourse as a result of policy forces (as discussed in the case of Section 28), more unknowingly this is a result of their own culture, which is shaped by normative heterosexuality (Buston & Hart,

2001). For example, the issue of sexual diversity is a topic that teachers have notoriously found difficult to incorporate into the SRE curriculum (Kehily, 2002). In spite of having the freedom and a plethora of valuable resources at their disposal teachers leave issues of sexuality untouched (Trotter, 2001). As only recommended principles of practice, as opposed to statutory aspects of SRE, the use and knowledge of such resources remain at the mercy of educator discretion and autonomy. As highlighted by Walker & Milton, (2006) the integration of such issues appears to rest on the comfort levels of teachers being able to address these issues in the classroom. Levels of embarrassment amongst teachers also feature as a barrier in this area and more often than not, teachers have tended to simply ignore sexuality issues completely (Ingham, 1997). The result of which is often where sexuality is talked about; it is in fact heterosexuality that is actually meant (Jackson, 1999).

The moral interventions made by teachers have remained a contributory factor in preventing the expansion of SRE provision, particularly around the issue of LGB sexuality and same-sex sexual practices. As discussed in relation to Section 28, research (Atkinson, 2000; Ellis & High, 2004) has shown that many individual teachers demonstrate little censorship in imposing a number of their own moral beliefs and prejudices towards LGB sexuality. Despite the need for training and awareness amongst teachers around these issues, teachers often report not understanding the relevance of such training (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001). Moreover, although Douglas et al. (1999) found that many SRE teachers felt that the school context is inappropriate to provide teaching around LGB sexuality, Warwick et al. (2004) reported a lack knowledge and confidence around LGB sexuality. Perhaps more worrying, is the inaction of teachers in the face of incidents of homophobic bullying. Research (e.g. Nayak & Kehily, 1996; Stonewall, 2007) has found that teachers rarely challenge or intervene in the case of homophobic comments and bullying.

As indicated in the research outlined above, the content and messages delivered within SRE are significantly shaped at the level of individual practice. Despite the significant role teachers play in the success of SRE, there are relatively few studies that examine what actually happens in the context of the classroom, particularly between educator and pupil. In light of a more directive policy context and better access to resources that promote ‘good practice’, teachers have greater responsibility in this area, particularly in respect to child rights agendas and those outlined around inclusivity and diversity. Nevertheless, policy still fails to stipulate how exactly this is achieved. The result is that individuals (and schools) get



to define whether their practice meets such criteria, as they ultimately construct their own framework of SRE practice. The problems inherent to this practice are highlighted in instances where policy often fails to translate into practice, and in cases where practice set at the level of individual school policy, is not that which is delivered in the classroom (Corteen, 2006). While the more informal nature of the teachers' approach within the classroom appears to be complex, research highlights that this crucially determines the effectiveness of SRE (Allen, 2009; Kehily, 2002). As teachers have great levels of autonomy over all aspects of SRE, it is important for research to focus on those who have a role in setting the agenda for SRE, particularly as research has documented the many struggles teachers have faced in this area.

## ***1.5 Young People's Experiences of SRE***

### **1.5.1 SRE as 'Poor' and 'Patchy'**

Research shows that SRE fails to meet young people's needs (SEF, 2000, UK Youth Parliament, 2007). Young people have consistently evaluated SRE provision as both patchy and poor (Forrest et al, 2004; Measor et al, 2000) and despite a number of more promising steps forward in terms of the quality within provision, these messages continue as young people continue to describe their provision as "too biological", "too little too late", and "inconsistent" overall (SEF, 2008). Despite the statutory status of certain elements of SRE such as the teaching of HIV/AIDS, young people report gaps in this area, as one in four young people report learnt nothing about HIV/AIDS at school (SEF, 2011). The failings of SRE are particularly evident in reports from young LGB people, who report feeling excluded by much of the SRE content. The evaluations given by LGB pupils on the SRE they received are particularly negative, as they often report feeling that provision is not relevant to their needs (Hillier & Mitchell, 2008). Similarly, young men report feeling excluded within SRE, given that much of the content focuses on young women (Hilton, 2003, 2007; Measor, 2004). Despite only limited research which explores the views and experiences of SRE from young people with disabilities, research has found that they would like SRE more informative to their needs (CHANGE, 2007-2010).

### **1.5.2 The Gulf between Adult Aims and Young People's Needs**

Given the history of SRE in serving public health agendas, research has continued to uncover differences in the concerns of policy makers and those of young people (Measor et al, 2000). As pointed out by Allen (2008:574), “typically it has been adults (at the level of policy and classroom pedagogy) who have determined ‘acceptable’ and ‘useful’ content”. The importance of recognising what young people want from their SRE has thus become central within contemporary research and signals an attempt to move away from an 'adult gaze' in SRE provision (Warwick et al, 2001). Both young people's experiences of SRE and the meanings they ascribe to various aspects of their sexuality have become central to improving the nature of provision. Given that policy has prescribed a predominantly heterosexual environment through which young people learn to experience their sexuality, research has sought to contextualise young people's experiences of SRE as they exist within the institution of heterosexuality; and as they relate to gender and issues of inequality. Furthermore, in acknowledging the diversity inherent to young people's experiences, research explores young people's experiences of sexuality, in relation to gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, faith, and culture. What this research has highlighted is firstly, the importance of gaining understanding around young people's sexual subjectivities and in relation to the localised context; and secondly, the many discrepancies that exist between young people's experiences and understandings of sexuality and that prescribed within SRE (Buston et al, 2002; Hirst, 2004).

Previously, the measure of SREs success was primarily conceptualised in terms of the knowledge young people acquired as a result of their programmes, most fundamentally pertaining to the prevention of unwanted pregnancy and STIs. This focus on knowledge is conceived in terms of its links with behaviour; specifically the assumption that the knowledge young people gain from their SRE programmes will influence what they do in practice. While much weight has been afforded to this ‘logic’, exploration of young people's sexual subjectivities has revealed a number of tensions resulting from the incongruence between what adults prescribe and what young people actually want. The disparity is significant, most principally for the way the messages contained in SRE may ‘miss the point’ for young people. Specifically, while valid ‘knowledge’ within SRE is conceptualised in terms of ‘official’ information delivered by the teacher (mainly around sexual health and protection), in contrast, young people largely conceptualise sexual knowledge as that which is gained through first hand sexual experience (Hirst, 2008). This disparity is also evident in the difference in how young people talk about their sexual experiences compared to those constructed in SRE. This



is further highlighted in the different types of language used to talk about sex within SRE compared to that used amongst young people; despite the more biological and clinical repertoires present within much of SRE, young people themselves use more extensive sexual repertoires (Hirst, 2004).

Disjunction between the knowledge delivered in SRE and young people's own conceptualisations, is also evident where research (i.e. Allen, 2004; Forrest, Strange & Oakley, 2004) highlights the value young people ascribe the more 'unofficial' sexual knowledge not given space in the SRE curriculum, such as information around pleasure and sexual practice. Diorio & Munro (2003) found similar disjuncture within SRE when exploring the meanings given to puberty within SRE. They argued that despite the fact that puberty and adolescence exist as culturally defined concepts, they are often presented within SRE as biological facts. Given that young people's experiences of puberty acquire meaning outside of biology, and in the absence of reproduction, SRE often lacks relevance and social meaning for young people, particularly for those whose experiences occur outside of heterosexuality. As Diorio & Munro (2003:120) argue, "this conceptualisation of puberty constrains what we teach, not only about the meanings of bodily development but also about the nature and meaning of sexuality". The implication of this is significant for SRE, particularly with regards to its utility and the messages included. As highlighted by a number of scholars internationally, if young people don't feel like their SRE matches their own sexual experiences, it affects what they choose or find themselves able to act upon (Allen, 2001, Buzwell & Rosenthal, 1996). This substantiates what is already known about the effectiveness of SRE, which is, the more relevant SRE is for young people; the better they appraise it (Allen, 2001; Langille et al, 2001).

### **1.5.3 What Young People Say They Want**

Research (i.e. Strange et al, 2003) which aims to explore what 'works' in SRE have compared provision (often in a reductionist manner and quantitative nature) on a number of factors such as mode of delivery (e.g. peer versus adult-led delivery) in order to determine the success of programmes. These studies have produced a mixture of findings that mainly vary due to individual differences in their preferred delivery of provision. This research also often fails to account for context in identifying young people's sexual needs, which cannot be accounted for through the endorsement of a national 'one-size fits all' approach. Despite

various attempts made to uncover the perfect SRE ‘formula’, the plethora of studies in this area which prioritise young people’s voice, identify a number of factors young people want from their SRE. This research shows that young people want more SRE, which starts earlier and includes more detailed and explicit coverage of sex, sexual anatomy, desire and feelings (Measor et al, 2000; Hilton 2006). In addition to ‘staple’ aspects of provision (i.e. STIs, contraception and abortion) they also want to know more about love, relationships and sexuality (Forrest et al, 2004). Despite its absence in current SRE guidance and discussions within SRE, young people also wanted to address topics such as sexual pleasure and alternatives to sexual pleasure within their programmes (Forrest et al, 2004; Thomson, 2000). Requests for a more positive acknowledgement around young people’s sexuality in particular, calls for a move from the understanding of young people’s sexuality as dangerous and problematic. Placing greater priority to young people’s own conceptualisations is thought to encourage positive experience of their sexuality and promotion of sexual agency which in turn, is thought to form the basis for effective SRE (Hirst, 2004, 2008). As young people become more concerned with the relationship side of their sexual relationships, they undoubtedly want more information than that about pregnancy and STI prevention. In light of their own lived realities, young people say they want to know more about emotions, relationships and ‘real life dilemmas’ (Measor et al, 2000; SEF, 2000).

As highlighted in much research carried out in this area over the last twenty years, the reports given by young people highlight a dissonance between the concerns and interests they have in relation to SRE and those outlined in government policy and those who set the agenda for SRE more locally (namely, teachers, parents and school governors).

## **1.6 Summary**

This review has highlighted the controversy that has surrounded SRE throughout its history. Such controversy is largely attributable to a number of politically charged debates arising from the lack of inter-governmental consensus regarding the aims of SRE. This is aptly reflected in arguments surrounding the relative contribution of moral and public health approaches to SRE. In turn, the arguments reflect various political, religious and cultural values, which come together to dictate the content of provision. Perhaps one of the more influential factors shaping the nature of SRE is the socio-political context, which drives certain sexual health imperatives within provision.



The above confusions are reflected in SRE policy making, which is equally unclear and contradictory, leading to patchy and varied provision that is further exacerbated by SRE's lack of statutory status. As a result SRE is limited in terms of its nature, scope and content. Specifically, research has consistently shown that SRE fails to meet young people's needs, as it is driven by a public health agenda and delivered within a moral framework of normative reproductive heterosexuality. Furthermore, this illustrates a significant gulf between what young people want from their SRE and what they actually receive.

Largely due to an unsupportive policy context, SRE teachers also have a marked impact on the shape of SRE provision. Positioned under this unclear and often restrictive policy (e.g. Section 28), SRE teachers have notoriously struggled with the content and implementation of SRE. The role of teachers is of particular importance given the increasingly larger role they play in shaping provision, especially under non-statutory status. For example, what occurs in the classroom ultimately determines whether policy actually translates into practice.

As such, teachers are just one of a number of competing factors that continue to shape, influence and impede the development of SRE. This of course, occurs across a number of levels beginning with the wider socio-political context, ranging through the teachers and stakeholders and ending with the pupils. Most importantly, while the provision of SRE has been curtailed on a number of levels, the biggest impediment that SRE continues to face appears to be the attitudes held around young people's sexuality and SRE.

While the literature reviewed within this chapter highlights the way SRE fails to meet young people's needs, this thesis then, aims to examine how SRE is constructed for and within the school context. As such it aims to provide clarity around how the nature and scope of SRE is understood at a number of levels, namely, at the level of policy, SRE educators and by young people themselves. As such, this thesis attempts to provide clarity around how the nature of SRE is manufactured, negotiated and justified by those who play a key role in its provision, a focus left unexamined until now. These aims will provide valuable insight into the various barriers that prevent comprehensive and pupil driven provision.

In line with the stance often taken within critical psychological work, this thesis aims to uncover, and subsequently challenge, how knowledge is constructed. Specifically, this thesis will contribute to the critical social psychology literature, the primary concern of which is to provide a critique of that which has been historically left unexamined. The central themes of this are to uncover what is taken for granted within both psychology and culture in general, which results in the operation of inequality and oppression. This thesis achieves this by providing greater insight into how knowledge and understanding of SRE and young people's sexuality is constructed. It involves the examination of social practices (within and outside of the school context), which is of importance due to the way it impacts on how young people experience SRE.

Through its focus on practice within an educational context, this thesis also contributes to the psychology of education. It investigates issues commonly encountered within SRE and education more generally, including those linked to social structures and practices, such as the role of key stakeholders (e.g. teachers), curriculum content and development and how teaching occurs within the classroom. It also seeks to challenge traditional understandings of sexuality, which serves to uphold heterosexuality as the norm, given that schools are primarily heterosexist institutions. This is notably also a key focus of critical social psychology and is one of the problems encountered by young people, in addition to SRE content that is limited, patchy and doesn't match their needs. This thesis therefore aims to prioritise the needs and experiences of young people, through a critical examination of the institutionalised understanding of their sexuality that is perpetuated within this context.

In light of these aims, the subsequent chapter (chapter 2) begins by outlining the way in which young people's sexuality has traditionally been conceptualised within academic theory, along with more contemporary theoretical thinking. It will also examine the literature regarding young people's sexualities, particularly their sexual identities and practices. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach to data collection and analysis used in this thesis. In order to examine how SRE is constructed at a number of socio-cultural levels, the first of the analysis chapters (chapter 4) begins by exploring how SRE is formulated and negotiated at a political level. It focuses on draft SRE guidance issued under consultation, an important policy making process. Chapter 5 and 6 move onto examine how SRE is conceptualised within the school context through the teachers responsible for its provision: Chapter 5 examines how teachers formulate and justify their provision, whilst chapter 6 extends this focus, by further examining the highly rhetorical nature of their accounts in order



to highlight the controversial aspects of SRE. Chapter 7 provides insight into how young people conceptualise and experience their individual provision. More specifically, this chapter aims to examine how they evaluate their provision and the messages they receive from it. This analysis is important for exploring the way varying SRE approaches can shape young people's understanding of SRE and sexuality more generally. Chapter 8 draws the analyses together, outlining how SRE is constructed for and within the school context. It offers insights into the various barriers that hinder comprehensive SRE by focusing on all stakeholders that play a crucial role in shaping provision. This chapter all offers recommendations for how SRE can be better meet young people diverse needs.

## 2 Young People's Sexuality

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### 2.1 *Introduction*

As highlighted in the previous chapter, young people's sexuality within SRE is most predominantly conceptualised as problematic. While a substantial amount of research focuses on young people's sexuality almost exclusively as dangerous and risky, there is an emerging body of research that reconceptualises sexuality as a normative and positive aspect of their development. In line with contemporary theoretical thinking around sexuality, this work examines the social construction of young people's sexuality along with the ways in which young people's sexualities are conceptualised as problematic.

The following chapter will provide a brief overview of the history of sexuality by outlining the main theoretical constructions of sexuality within the literature, including more contemporary understandings as influenced by the emergence of social movements such as feminism and social constructionism. It will then continue to examine current literature around young people's sexual identities and practices, along with how their sexualities are shaped more generally within the school context.

### 2.2 *Conceptualising Sexuality*

Sexuality has a significant historical, political and theoretical trajectory. Sexuality as a concept takes on various meanings within modern contemporary society. As Jackson (2003:78) points out, while sexuality is most commonly and narrowly understood as sexual identity, based upon the hetero/homo binary; it is also more broadly understood as a social phenomenon which “encompasses a wider range of desires, practices and identities”. This distinction reflects theoretical thinking around sex and sexuality based on the divisions between sexual essentialism and social constructionism. It also reflects different commitments regarding ontology and epistemology between the different approaches. The ontological and epistemological underpinning of this work will be discussed along with contemporary thought in the field of gender and sexuality studies.

### 2.2.1 Essentialist Approaches

Early accounts of sexuality that emerged within psychology before the 1980's were based on essentialism. Essentialism is an orientation based on the belief that certain phenomena are natural, inevitable, universal and biologically determined (Irvine, 1990). As part of this belief, it is posited that people have an underlying 'essence' or 'foundation', fundamentally what is felt to constitute an innermost nature. Under essentialism, sexuality represents a biological drive, a fixed trait that is both rational and objective. In general, essentialist thinking around sexuality ascribes a universal and often biological basis for understandings sex acts and identities that exist within every individual as an innate 'inner truth' (Weeks, 1985:8). This notion is based on the early work of sexologists (e.g. Ellis, Kraft-Ebing, Freud) who first spoke of sexuality as the manifestation of an innate 'instinct'. These views were significant for the way they laid the foundations in 'naturalising sex' and the idea of fixed sexual identities, which lies at the foundation of modern essentialism. Based on the position that sexuality is innate, it is also argued that we are predisposed to be either heterosexual or homosexual and that concrete differences distinguish the two. Additionally, essentialist thinkers assume that sexual orientation is acquired early on in life (childhood or prenatally) and represents their biological 'truth', as articulated by Kitzinger et al. (1998: 530) as they state that "in acknowledging themselves as lesbian or gay, at whatever age, people are recognising their 'true selves'". Based on this view, sexuality or more specifically, sexual orientation is considered fixed, universally objective and apolitical. As such, sexual essentialism is the belief in the deep, unchanging, innate character of sexuality, such that its biological basis is viewed as independent of 'social and historical forces' (Weeks 1986:15). In short, exponents of sexual essentialism propose that regardless of current classifications, sexuality can be found in all humans societies and cultures, at all times (Hsueh-Hao Chiang, 2009).

As essentialism claims there is some underlying 'essence' to sexuality, an essentialist approach is oriented towards uncovering the true nature of sexuality based on the assumption that it can be measured scientifically and concretely. This particular approach can be seen most explicitly in research examining sexual behaviour and identity empirically; the assumption being that difference and similarities can be distinguished and attributed to sexual identity. For example, within psychology, researchers have prolifically measured lesbians, gay men and heterosexuals on a range of attributes in order to make a number of comparisons (and claims) about differences and similarities (Kitzinger, et al, 1998). This method utilises self-report measures, which require participants to specify their sexual identity in order to



capture prevalence rates or to compare behaviours and experiences. Overall, current psychological research and theory that (either explicitly or implicitly) assumes sexuality to be natural and biologically determined reflects an essentialist perspective. The scientific method to studying sexuality and sexual orientation has a long history in psychological work and represents the underlying assumption of essentialism.

Early essentialist theorists have thus played a critical role within the history of theorisation of sexuality for a number of reasons; most notably, for the way they created a version of sexuality as a 'natural' biological phenomenon with an established a number of essential 'truths'. In turn this resulted in the categorisation and division of sexual identities, and what we now refer to as a homo/hetero binary. Moreover, this approach is also significant for the way it established fundamental differences between men and women, particularly the construction of a biological basis of male sexuality and reinforcement of the notion of the 'uncontrollable' male sex drive (Jackson, 1994). Sexual knowledge and understanding have therefore been substantially shaped by sexual essentialist thinking. In sum, sexual knowledge has been shaped under sexual essentialist thinking. Its legacy remains today, particularly as it embedded in lay discourse around sexuality.

### **2.2.2 Constructionist Approaches**

While essentialist understandings of sexuality have long been the dominant mode of thinking in society; a number of alternative approaches have emerged. These approaches challenge naturalised conceptions of sexuality and are influenced by the theoretical orientation of social constructionism. Borne out of dissatisfaction with reductionist and foundational approaches of social life, this shift in theorisation has challenged previously taken-for-granted 'knowledge' around sexuality and produced a body of work that is both critical and political in nature. As such, social constructionism stands in opposition to essentialism, rejecting any notion that there are fixed absolute truths, and therefore, a natural and biologically determined sexuality. As prominent anthropologist Vance (1992:133) comments, social constructionism stands as a challenge to the "eternal, universal or natural status of gender and sexuality". Although writers diverge in their thinking, social constructionism remains a broad perspective underpinned by a number of critical features (Gergen, 1985). It firstly stands as a direct challenge to the assertion that objective knowledge exists and hence interrogates

implicit assumptions about the world. It also emphasises the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge, as understanding is considered both the product of, and dependent upon, particular cultures and history. Furthermore, knowledge of the world is produced and constructed between people through their daily interactions and not from the natural world. It is through these interactions that versions of knowledge become fabricated and many different constructions of the world emerge. Language becomes the vehicle through which the social world is constructed and becomes in and of itself a form of social action (Burr, 2003; Vance, 1992).

As part of the larger social constructionist movements that rejected deterministic and reductionist understandings of sexuality, theorists began to conceptualise sexuality as a historical and variable construct (Weeks, 2003). That is, social constructionists argue that far from being a product of innateness or biology, sexuality is shaped entirely by cultural influence. As such, social constructionism posits that people are not born gay or straight but influenced or ‘produced’ within social contexts. While the constructionist epistemology challenges the biological model of essentialism, this more variable understanding of sexuality also stands in direct contrast to essentialist views about the dichotomous expressions of sexuality and their divides. It also has implications for the way sexual identities and differences between these are conceptualised, as social constructionists argue that both are produced in language within particular cultures and historical periods. As such, categories are seen as discursive constructions, ways of talking about and comprehending who we are (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995) as opposed to being reflections of reality or true essences.

As social constructionists (and the theorists who utilise this framework) emphasise the influential role language plays in constructing knowledge around sexuality, research and theory carried out under this epistemological approach has focused heavily on examining how sexuality is constructed and with what effects (e.g. Carabine, 1992; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1993). This body of work has been not only important for challenging the naturalised and often stigmatising effects of essentialist thought, but also for highlighting the diversity in sexuality i.e. around sexual identity, desire and practice, and therefore in validating experience.

Within contemporary theoretical thinking, an understanding of sexuality as a social and historical construct with political dimensions is an assumption that now underpins the majority of the work in sexuality studies, in addition to work within lesbian and gay

psychology, and Queer theory. Within this framework, sexuality moves beyond simple understandings of sexual activity but encompasses all attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours that afford sexual significance (Jackson, 1996). The recognition of sexuality as both fluid and contingent inevitably highlights the variable nature of sexuality. Moreover, the conceptualisation of sexuality as being in a constant state of flux inevitably disrupts previous naturalised and stable notions of sexual identities.

In line with contemporary theorising and the theoretical tradition of social constructionism, sexuality is viewed within this thesis as a cultural phenomenon, negotiated socially and politically within specific historical contexts.

### **2.2.3 Feminist Approaches**

As there is greater recognition of sexuality as a historical and social construct, those who acknowledge sexuality focus on examining sexuality as it relates and intersects with gender (Jackson, 1999). As sexuality is typically understood in relation to the hetero/homo binary, it is itself underpinned by the gender dichotomy; the assumption that there are only two sexes (male and female), which overlap onto two corresponding genders-masculine and feminine. In line with essentialist views of sexuality, the construction of gender is based on the premise that men and women are fundamentally different as determined by their biological sex (Ellis, 2011). While these categories are not only regarded as distinct, they are also construed as oppositional and have been organised hierarchically, with masculinity being privileged as the assumed norm (Weeks et al, 2003).

For researchers in sexuality; central to any examination and understanding of the social ordering of sexuality, is its interrelationship with gender (Jackson, 1999; Vance, 1991). This is due to the fact that it focuses on ideas around ‘appropriate’ relationships between gender and sexuality that have served to legitimise women's subordination, privilege heterosexuality and therefore rendered non-heterosexual men and women as ‘problematic’ (Jackson, 1999; Weeks, 1991). Feminist theorists have taken the reign with this work, and have focused on how gender and sexuality are organised and interrelated within larger social relations (i.e. within everyday social practices). The intention of much of this work therefore has been to challenge the social distinctions and hierarchical relationship between men and women caused by such associations has been the subject of much attention by feminists. While the



majority of research within this framework has acknowledged the political nature of sexuality, feminist theorising has focused on these politics, based on dangers presented by female sexuality (particularly within work around gender relations and power). Resulting analyses have ultimately involved the separation of gender as its links with sexuality based on reproduction and gender roles, the nature of which has been to challenge women's subordination (Vance, 1991).

Emerging from this work were the first critiques of heterosexuality. For feminists, the basis of these critiques has been women's oppression within heterosexual sexual practices and relations. Through the influential work of Adrienne Rich (1981) the nature of this critique moved to heterosexuality as an institution. In her pioneering article '*Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*', she focused on the institutionalisation of heterosexuality and the subsequent oppression of women. She argued that far from being natural, heterosexuality is a socially compulsory and privileged regime, imposed on women in a way that masks their existing and potential connections with each other. Rich introduced the idea that through a number of their affiliations with other women throughout their lifetimes (for example through their friendships, solidarity and political resistances) all women were part of a lesbian continuum. The work of Rich around compulsory heterosexuality was particularly important and as it represents the beginnings of a body of work which challenged heterosexuality itself rather than heterosexual relations and practices.

Feminism has continued to problematise heterosexuality as both a privileged practice and a compulsory social institution (Jackson & Scott, 1996). As feminists challenge the implicit position of heterosexuality as normative, critiques have focused on two elements, heteronormativity and hetero-patriarchy. Critiques of heteronormativity focus on the various ways that non-heterosexualities are made marginal as a result of normative heterosexuality. A critique of hetero-patriarchy, examines heterosexuality as a male privileged system, and a site of women's oppression (Jackson, 2003). The critical analysis of heterosexuality and indeed heterosexism within many subfields of research that challenge social conventions such as feminist, lesbian and gay and queer theorists, has remained both consistent and relentless (Braun & Gavey, 2001; McPhillips et al, 2001; Peel, 2001). Heterosexuality has thus become widely accepted as an institution containing specific gendered sexual identities and practices, both of which result in a heterosexual experience that maintains gender divisions.

Examinations around how heterosexuality is upheld at both the macro level (social and

institutional) and micro levels (social practices) underpins much of the work within the sexuality field and represents an important political response to oppression and exclusion from which to produce change. The importance of this examination is made prominent in much feminist research and is considered vital for the study of sexuality as it continues to commit to theory and politics (Jackson, 1999; Kitzinger et al, 1992). Indeed, the analysis of institutionalised heterosexuality has become important for examining the role it plays in regulating both homosexuality *and* heterosexuality (Jackson, 1999; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993).

The recognition of sexuality and gender as socially, culturally and historically constructed has enabled a critical examination within many sub-fields of research regarding the ways in which sexualities are organised and institutionalised. As highlighted in this section, examining the way in which sexuality intersects with gender has become central to the organisation of sexuality and has been crucial in examining how normative heterosexuality is sustained.

### ***2.3 Young People's Sexuality***

The changes that have occurred around the representation of sexuality through the media present young people with a number of competing representations from which to disentangle certain information. For example, the media represents female sexuality in ways that simultaneously limit and empower; young women have to decipher what is most salient. As women tend to be valued most highly within narrow conventions around beauty, size, and sexuality, it is unclear whether young people will think critically about what is presented or simply accept sex role stereotypes as being realistic. The influence the media has on young people is therefore very significant, particularly in shaping their knowledge, attitudes and discussions around sexuality (Batchelor et al, 2004; Currie et al, 1997). Perhaps more significant however, is that a large number of young people cite various forms of media as being a major source through which they gain information about sex and relationships (Institute of Education, 2003). The effects of pornography on young people's sexual education is of particular concern in the literature, for the way it reinforces unequal gender sexual relations and shapes young people's understanding of 'appropriate' sexuality (Limmer, 2009; Holland et al, 1994).



Given the technological changes that have occurred over the last 10 years, which young people have become very much accustomed too, there have been more concerns regarding their increasingly earlier 'sexualisation' and the effect this has on their emerging development (McLellan, 2010). They are now more than ever, exposed to an over abundance of sexually explicit material through a wide range of media, such as; television, film, advertising, music videos, lads' mags and internet pornography. The nature of this material is of particular concern for the way it impacts on young people's developing sexual subjectivities, particularly young women. For example, this array of information often glamorises and presents a very distorted picture of sex, increasingly presenting hyper-sexualised images of women. There are concerns about the way in which young people are not only exposed to this imagery, but appear to have become the targets of much of this media. They are targeted at increasingly younger ages by such advertising, as seen in products such as the 'Playboy' range, which includes merchandise specifically aimed at teenagers (pencil cases and stationery). Young women in particular become target consumers of sexualised clothing and make-up through products such as pole dancing kits and 'push-up' bras, all of which are sold in popular high street chains. As such, the age at which marketers appear to be encouraging young women to present themselves in a sexualised way also appears to be getting younger (Papadopoulos, 2010). Organisations such as NSPCC (the children's charity) and mumsnet (a popular British community website for parents) have made a series of attempts at introducing policy aimed at controlling young people's exposure to sexualised products and imagery.

While there are concerns over the sexualisation of young people, evidence for an increased 'sexualised culture' appears everywhere in contemporary society. This is apparent in the emergence of sex shops such as *Ann Summers* on the high street and the popularity and mainstream television series such as *Sex and the City* and *The Secret Diary of a Call Girl*. While both of these examples contain sexually explicit subject matter (images, products and language), they serve as evidence for a more sexualised society, and a more relaxed attitude towards sex, both of which undoubtedly impact on young people. While the current TV watershed (regulated by Ofcom) is designed to protect children from such 'unsuitable' sexualised material in its restriction of 'adult themed' communications, this method only covers material that is classified as explicitly sexual (either in terms of language or imagery). Less overtly explicit (but highly sexualised) material, can still be viewed across a wide range of media and within a number of different contexts. This is apparent in the overabundance of



advertising, which uses sexual innuendo to successfully sell products, and many popular television programmes (i.e. Eastenders and Coronation street) filled with sexualised messages and discussions.

As the media is saturated with this type of material, young people are exposed to increasing amounts of sexualised imagery on a daily basis, and are therefore at risk of internalising these messages with damaging consequences. For example, the majority of the sexualised imagery young people see is male oriented (involving the objectification and eroticization of women or young girls) and sends out a number of messages containing ideals, expectations and values about sex and sexuality, many of which impact on young people.

The sexualisation of young women in particular is of academic interest, along with how young people make sense of these messages. Such research has placed particular emphasis on how women are depicted as actively celebrating sex-object status (Gill, 2007) across all types of media (e.g. Eaton, 1997; Ringrose, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006; ).

These narrow representations prevent young women from forging a sense of personal power and the development of an autonomous sexual subjectivity. This serves to position these women within the confines of male defined heterosexuality (Holland et al., 1998). In turn, this limits the range of possible opportunities and identities available to young women, such as being creative, intellectual or athletic (Coy, 2009). Instead, young women's identities appear to be positioned by this type of media representation. For example, research has shown that over half of 15-19 year old young women aspire to be a glamour model and 25% of these considered 'lap dancing' as more favourable than professions requiring academic achievement, such as teachers and doctors (Deeley, 2008).

Similarly, such narrow confines result in what is termed 'normative discontent' (McRobbie, 2007), by which it is typical for young women to feel anxious about their body, in comparison to those that are airbrushed and surgically enhanced by the media (Gill, 2007). Aspiration for this type of body is presented as women's key source of identity (Gill, 2007) and fosters both body dissatisfaction and a lack of confidence. This is highlighted by a substantial increase in breast augmentation procedures for 18-19 year old young women from 2006-2007, resulting from a desire to resemble celebrities (Templeton, 2008). Moreover, such monitoring of appearance and subsequent body dissatisfaction has been documented as a risk factor for depression and eating disorders (e.g. McKinley, 1999; Moradi et al. 2005).

Research also focuses on how these media constructions affect young people's relationships, sexual activity and expectations. For example, media has been shown to have a direct influence on young people's sexual behavior and values through the sexualisation of toys and product advertising (Department of Health (DoH), 2007). Additionally, research has demonstrated a relationship between lyrics in sexualized music and early sexual activity (Martino et al., 2006). Media constructions also reinforce gender inequality for young people, by representing women as primarily sexually available, whilst representing males in terms of sexual prowess (Coy, 2009). This, in turn influences their negotiation of heterosex (Holland et al, 1998) and safe sex practices such as condom use (Jackson, 2005; Moore & Rosenthal, 1998), again reducing the autonomy of young women.

The effects of this type of gendered media affects young males understanding of women, making them more likely to perceive women as sex objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). This is supported by evidence linking stereotypical attitudes to women's sexuality and sexist beliefs with aggressive sexual behavior (Dean & Malamuth, 1997; Murnen, Wright & Kaluzny, 2002; Vogel, 2000).

A number of theories provide suggestions for why the media exerts such powerful effects in this regard. Primarily, the media is regarded as a source of learning (Emmers-Sommer & Allen, 1999) and has also been described as a super peer (Levin & Kilborne, 2008): A credible message source outside of education and family. The notion of learning from the media is acknowledged in social learning theory (e.g. Bandura, 1971), which focuses on observing the behaviours of others and the outcomes and cognitive theories (e.g. Huesmann, 1998), which emphasise the role of cognitive scripts: How people learn to react to aspects of the social world. For example, research has shown that the media presents young people with a number of 'scripts' or 'stories' about (heterosexual) sex, relationships, negotiation and consent (Batchelor, Kitzinger & Burntney, 2004). Theories emphasizing internalization also acknowledge the role of scripts, specifically how such learned ideals and social pressures contribute to gendered norms and body dissatisfaction. Objectification theory (e.g. Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) also acknowledges learning, with media imagery encouraging focus on body parts and less emphasis on individual thoughts and feelings. Despite their emphasis on different factors, each of these theories highlight how young people are both emulating and internalizing what is being presented within the media. This is of importance given that relative to adults, young people are thought to lack the skills to effectively decipher such sophisticated messages (Mayo & Nairn, 2009).

Although a pattern of female sexualisation remains firm in much media, it could be argued that this is less consistent as the nature of this material is arguably more diverse than it has been previously. For example, young people are now exposed to women who are portrayed in a number of increasingly diverse ways, other than those only in specific sexual roles (i.e. those who play humorous characters), many of which are both successful and independent of men (i.e. Hermione from Harry Potter and the female lead roles seen in the popular TV shows such as Dr Who and Sex and the City). These characters and images are popular amongst young people and can therefore be thought to be countering those more dominant representations. Other significant changes that have also occurred around the representation of sexuality in the media include more visibility of LGB sexuality and same-sex desire particularly through the portrayal of a number of gay characters in TV and film. These changes are particularly important for the way they increase the representation of LGB identity and same-sex desire, which can have markedly positive impact on young people as they provide diversity around sexuality and counter the prevalence of images around heterosexuality only.

As highlighted, the media plays an important role in young people's lives and their more informal sexual education. The role it plays is felt to be particularly important for the way it may impact on young people's expectations around things such as sexual performance, body image and safe sex. Through its exaggerated eroticisation and glamorisation of sex, the media paints a distorted view, which in turn, undoubtedly shapes young people's sexual identities and subjectivities.

### **2.3.1 Young People's Sexual Subjectivities**

As highlighted in the previous section, representations around sexuality that feature in society, all influence young people in becoming 'sexual subjects' (Allan, 2005). These representations, along with various discourses in circulation around sexuality, have produced differences in the way we understand male and female sexuality and have contributed towards producing traditional constructions of female and male (hetero)sexualities. Within these constructions, male sexuality is understood as both active and uncontrollable in line with the 'male sex drive' discourse (Hollway, 1984, 1989), and female sexuality is by comparison, positioned as passive (Fine, 1988). As a result, young people become subject to the sexual double standard which affords them unequal entitlement around their sexuality, and compromises young women's sexual agency and expressions. This is evident in research that has found that while



males are encouraged to experience their sexuality as active, women learn to experience their sexuality within the restrictions of femininity (Lees, 1993; Thomson & Scott, 1991). Furthermore, research has consistently shown the dominance of the sexual double standard in young women's talk around their sexuality, particularly where talk around desire was related to male needs, bodies and desires (Allen, 2003; Holland et al, 1996). The expectations held around conventional femininity and masculinity unduly affect young women's communication and sexual decision making (Thomson & Holland, 1996). Holland et al. (1998), for example, found that young women found it extremely difficult to achieve agency in their relationships, particularly in the negotiation of heterosexual and safer sex practice. The implications of traditional framework of sexuality are considerable, particularly as it affects young women's sexual health. Griffin (2000) pointed out that a substantial amount of academic literature; particularly the safe-sex literature has reinforced the traditional construction of female sexuality as passive. Within this literature female sexuality is considered to be problematic and defined mainly in relation to 'responsibilities' in safer sex practices.

The social constructions of (hetero)sexualities remain significant in developing women's sexual subjectivities. For feminists, challenging the sexual double standard and sexual relations between men and women is regarded as central in acknowledging women's sexual agency and entitlement (Holland et al, 1992). Young people negotiating their sexuality within a society where an active female sexuality is present have the potential to disrupt the sexual double standard. There is some (albeit limited) evidence, both within and outside of the UK, to suggest that young women's sexual behaviours may be changing, that they are experiencing their (hetero)sexualities more actively (Allen, 2003, 2005; Jackson & Cram, 2003). This evidence suggests that some young women are becoming more assertive and initiating sex in pursuit of pleasure, producing what Stewart (1999) asserts is evidence that young women are reworking the 'givens' of heterosexual practice. This is evident in research which illustrates young women talking about sex in ways that were previously considered only suitable for men to talk, for example, where young women talk about sex as pleasurable (Hirst, 2004) and without romantic meaning (Tolman et al, 2004; Maxwell, 2006). While research highlights some change in the way young women experience their (hetero)sexuality, these changes appear to be limited as this 'resistance' often features as heavily tenuous and fragile (Allen, 2003, 2005; Jackson & Cram, 2003). This is highlighted in Allen's research where young people's talk involved both the accommodation *and* rejection of dominant

discourse of heterosexuality, where resistance was often dependent on contexts that made resistance possible.

The research discussed in this section indicates that young people's sexual practices are influenced by gender in a way that poses traditional heterosexuality as dangerous for young women for the way it affects their sexual agency. This research also highlights the way young people's sexuality and gendered identities are discursively constructed and their sexual subjectivities shaped.

### **2.3.2 Young People's Sexual Identities**

While sexual identities are most commonly felt to denote a particular sexual desire and practice, research highlights the problem with viewing (and talking about) young people's sexual identities in this way. While the majority of these debates around sexual identity are taking place within contemporary perspectives influenced by post-modernism (e.g., Weeks, 2003), the paradox of sexual identities was first made apparent by the work of Kinsey and colleagues in the 1940-50s with their work around sexuality. Based on extensive research into the sexual behaviour of young men and women in the US, Kinsey's work documented a huge variety of sexual practices and found that many people had a wide range of sexual experiences, including those with the same sex. This work was influential in the way it challenged dominant notions around identity categories being discrete (in terms of the heterosexual/homosexual binary) and permanent. Instead of being classified in terms of these discrete identity categories, Kinsey (1948; 1953) argued that people could be organised along a scaled continuum, which could better capture the diversity of sexual behaviour. Klein who published the '*bi-sexual option*' (Klein, 1978) also contributed towards capturing the complexity of sexual expression through a multi-dimensional scale (known as the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, KSOG), which comprised seven dimensions through which to assess sexual orientation. This was not only influential for highlighting the fluidity of sexuality across the lifespan but also for the way it also highlights the range of diversity within bi-sexuality. Most fundamentally, like Kinsey's, this research highlights the fact that people's sexual experiences are diverse, change over time and rarely fit neatly into sexual identities.

The nature of this work has implications for the way young people's sexual identities can be conceptualised. Despite various assumptions held around young people's (hetero)sexualities, research continues to highlight the variability and fluidity in their sexual identities and



experiences. Now more than ever, it appears that young people engage in a wide range of sexual practices, either in an exploratory or more regular way. For example, research illustrates that young people engage in a variety of sexual activities outside and in addition to penetrative intercourse, regardless of sexual identity (Carpenter, 2001; Hirst, 2004), showing considerable flux in sexual practices across different sexual identities (Diamond, 2008; Jackson, 2004). While there is little research showing this instability of sexual identities specifically in 'heterosexual' youth, many young people do report having same-sex desires and experiences. Furthermore, many young people appear to move between sexual identities and describe their sexualities in a number of different ways (Faberman, 1992). Same-sex experience is cited as a normal part of adolescence in young people's sexual development (Erikson, 1950) but this is principally accounted for as 'experimentation', or 'confusion' and is therefore regarded as only 'temporary', or a 'phase' which young people go through. Overall, the period of adolescence is considered a formative stage in young people's identity development, which involves affirmation of a fixed sexual identity. As the 'normal' transition of this identity formation is assumed to be heterosexual, same-sex experiences are often dismissed, the result of which is that same-sex desires and experiences, along with LGB identities are constructed as less affirmative. As a result, LGB identities become more difficult for young people to attain, or in the case of WSW/MSM, their sexual practices, be taken seriously. While most people tend to correspond their sexual identities with the types of sexual behaviours they most frequently engage in, this means that more anomalous experiences get disregarded in order to uphold the chosen identity.

To some extent, it is slightly easier to ascertain how young people resolve this problem and go on to secure their LGB identities, relative to how young people with same-sex desires and experiences don't go on to adopt a LGB identity. What is perhaps even more difficult to ascertain is the extent to which 'compulsory heterosexuality' is the cause for their silence and indeed, the 'temporary' nature of such experiences. It is reasonable to assume that while many young people question their presumed heterosexuality, this may remain hidden due to the potential ramifications. Certainly, the climate of heteronormativity creates an imperative that a resolution must be reached, and prescribes that this should result in heterosexuality. This is certainly the case within the school context, where the operation of a heterosexual norm appears to be most pronounced, particularly in its regulated through homophobia (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Griffin's (2000; 2002) review of the research around young women's friendships within this context, highlights the role friendship groups play in both facilitating



(through the support and intimacy they provide) and hindering the formation of young lesbian lives (through anti-lesbian and pressures to be heterosexual). In further highlighting the important role these friendships groups play, Griffin emphasised the sexual dimensions of young women's friendships groups, a role she believes is a shaper of their sexual identifications. For Griffin, a point of particular interest was how young these friendships become 'eroticised' and the implications they have for sexual identity formation. The importance of these more sexual dimensions of friendships is apparent in research showing that for young people identifying themselves as LGB, their early same-sex experiences were with close friends (Morgan & Thomson, 2006). Certainly, these types of research questions will enable a closer inspection of how the heterosexual imperative works to 'resolve' and silence these same-sex desires and experiences. The importance of this however, is the way it challenges the heterosexual assumption, without which, "young women will continue to appear as always and already heterosexual" (Griffin, 2000:232).

While it is difficult to ascertain how many young 'heterosexual' people have sexual experiences with someone of the same-sex, research appears to indicate that the outcome of future sexual identity development is changing. Research shows there is an increase in bi-sexual identities, particularly amongst young women (Mosher et al, 2005) as well as (at least among young women) a tendency to adopt a more fluid approach to sexuality and sexual identity. This increased tendency to adopt a more fluid sexuality (relative to young men), is not to say that women's sexuality is *naturally* more fluid, but that they are more able to reveal this fluidity and renounce their heterosexual identity than men. This is substantiated by research that emphasises the way in which gender identities are heavily policed, particularly masculine identities amongst young men (Sharpe, 2002). Given the way gender normative behaviour is enforced more heavily amongst young men, it may be that women are more able to express their sexual fluidity more readily, in the same way in which they are also more able to deviate from traditional gendered positions (Ellis, 2011). For the many young men who adopt a heterosexual identity but experience same-sex desires and engage in sexual practices with both sexes (typically given the label of bi-sexuality); their 'fluidity' may not be recognised in the same way as it is amongst women.

The changes that are occurring around sexual identities are apparent when looking at the way in which young people use sexual identity categories. While many young people appear to adopt relatively fixed sexual identity labels, there are many others who do not use labels in

such a stable way. This reflects the diverse and changing nature of young people's sexual desires and practices over the life span, a tenet which is reflected in research highlighting huge variability in the emergence and expression of same-sex desire during the life course, particularly amongst many same-sex attracted women (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond et al, 2000). This fluidity is documented on an international level, for example research carried out in Australia, also highlights that an increasing number of young lesbians are experiencing greater sexual fluidity (Dempsey et al, 2001). Moreover, research within a US context, illustrates the increased tendency amongst many young people towards adopting a bi-sexual identity over lesbian/gay identities, mainly for the way this identity is thought to better reflect the nature of their attractions, along with their fundamental philosophy (Savin-Williams, 2005, 2008). Thus the appeal of bi-sexuality appears to reflect the way it offers young people a greater level of flexibility around their sexuality. This is evident in those young people who select the bi-sexuality label in a broad and strategic manner, depending on the social context (Yon-Leau & Munoz-Laboy, 2010). In fact, research suggests that for some young people a bi-sexual identity may be actually safer when labelling their same-sex desires or experiences over a lesbian or gay identity; the emergence of labels such as 'bi-curious' and 'heteroflexibility' seem to reflect this sentiment further. Overall, these types of label offer young people greater flexibility in their attractions and practices whilst at the same time, allowing them to maintain their hetero-label (Essig, 2000). The emergence of these labels, and many other labels used to signify same-sex attractions (i.e. queer, dyke, heterosexual with a twist), highlight the increasing diversity of young people's sexual attractions, practices and identities. They also highlight the importance of ascribing sexual identity labels based on their sexual experiences along with the inherent politics that surrounds this process.

While it appears that some young people choose to adopt the label of bi-sexuality for the flexibility it grants them, there is also evidence to suggest from research conducted in the US, an increasing trend amongst many sexual minority youth towards renouncing sexual labels altogether (Diamond 2008; Savin-Williams, 2005). For example, Diamond (2008) found in a longitudinal study of sexual identity development in non-heterosexual women that 2/3 changed the identity label they gave initially most commonly to one of 'unlabelled'. This was further highlighted by Yon-Leau & Munoz-laboy (2010) who found the same tendency was utilised amongst both men and women as a way of challenging existent forms of sexual-identity classification and as a means of gaining control over aspects of their social contexts. Of course, this does not under value the degree to which some young people invest in and

assert their lesbian and gay identities (Russell et al, 2009). For many, lesbian and gay identities are extremely important and often become deeply political identities (Jeffreys, 2003).

Research that highlights the increased variability around sexual identity and sexual practices, and indeed their disjunction, has clear implications for the efficacy of SRE. The preoccupation with identities and indeed, with heterosexual identities in particular (under a climate of heteronormativity), determines who is considered to be the main recipients of most SRE messages. As the assumption is made that the majority of young people are heterosexual, this is obviously problematic for those young people who identify as anything other than heterosexual in the school context (e.g. LGB young people). It is also further problematic for those who do not adopt a fixed sexual identity labels (i.e. WSW and MSM), in addition to those whose sexual practices do not match their sexual identities. While this disjunction between identity and practice is increasingly evident in young people's sexual lives, it is currently not acknowledged in SRE provision.

### **2.3.3 Young people's Sexual Practices**

There have been a number of changes around the sexual behaviour of young people in the last two decades. While changes are apparent internationally, within the UK, these include; a reduction in the average age of first heterosexual intercourse from 17 to 16 years old for males and females, an increase in the average number of (hetero)sexual partners, an increase in the average number of same-sex sexual experiences and an increase in the amount of oral and anal sex (Johnson et al, 2001). It has been found that most young women between the ages of 16-19 (over 80%) rely on condoms at first sexual intercourse, whereas 25% use oral contraception either with or without a condom (Wellings et al, 2001). Research has found that incidents of first vaginal sex in younger teenagers are likely to be unprotected (Wellings et al, 2001) and also implicates lower autonomy, in addition to greater risk-taking among young people with same-sex partners (Parkes et al, 2009a). Despite the importance of addressing the sexual health needs of young LGB people, little information exists relative to those ('heterosexual') figures reported above.

While contraceptive use has been a long running concern within the literature, its use amongst young people is thought to be impaired by a number of factors that relate to the



pragmatic side of contraceptive use, including the desire to conceal sexual activity, ambivalence around the correct use of condoms and the difficulty using them in the contexts that many young people engage in sexual activity, for example, in the outdoors and when under the influence of alcohol (Hirst, 2004; Parkes et al, 2009b). More generally however, young people's contraceptive use is affected by a host of other factors, that relate to wider social structures outside of the specific sexual encounter in which they are (or are not) used. For example, contraceptives can have a marked impact mostly on young women's sexual reputations. For this group in particular, the very act of possessing contraceptives such as condoms can have stigmatising effects for young women leaving them vulnerable to being labelled with names such as 'slag', 'slut' or 'whore' (Hillier & Harrison 1998). Other barriers that affect young people's condom use also include problems around their negotiating with sexual partners and the common perception that they are incompatible with trust between partners (Marston & King, 2006).

Although research highlights the dominance of penis-in-vagina intercourse in young people's (hetero)sexual activity, particularly as young people equate it with 'real sex' (Sanders & Reinisch, 1999), there are a number of additional non-coital sexual practices that have become increasingly central to young people's sexual activity such as oral and anal sex. There is little research that explores the varied sexual practices of young people; research has tended to focus quite extensively on adolescent women and their vulnerability to pregnancy. Despite the focus on heterosex, research (e.g. Evans et al, 1995; Stone et al, 2006) indicates that the prevalence of oral sex is increasing amongst young people (Stone et al, 2006) and this is increasing for those who engage in heterosexual sex and those who engage in same-sex sexual practices (Johnson, 2001). In contrast to vaginal sex, young people perceive oral sex to be less risky, more acceptable and much more common amongst young people (Halpern-Felsher et al, 2005). While young people report oral sex as an increasingly favoured practice amongst peers, this is problematic given that research shows that many are not aware that STIs can be transmitted via oral-genital contact (Stone et al, 2006). While oral sex is common amongst young people, research shows that it does not displace penetrative intercourse but is instead additional to this sexual practice (Hensel et al, 2008).

Anal sex appears to be becoming increasingly common amongst young people (Lescano et al, 2009). As most research has tended to focus on anal sex amongst MSM (mainly in a sample of adult males and in the context of HIV/AIDS), there is little research which focuses on anal

intercourse amongst heterosexual young people (Halperin, 1999). Despite the misapprehension that anal sex is only practiced amongst gay men, research has shown the increasing prevalence of anal sex amongst young heterosexual couples (Lescano et al, 2009). This has been linked to the prevention against pregnancy; young people report anal sex as a method of contraception with new and casual partners (Houston et al, 2007).

Research has shown that the meaning around sex amongst young people varies (Cecil et al, 2002; Randall & Byers, 2003). Amongst WSW/MSM, this is even more pronounced as there appears to be no consensus around what behaviours constitute sex (Hill et al, 2010). Given the notable variation in the sexual practices of these groups, it can be assumed that the meaning given to sexual practices is also diverse. As such, it becomes important to acknowledge the heterogeneity in young people's sexual practices and the various meanings they hold around sex and sexual practice (Pitt & Rahman, 2001; Sanders et al, 2010). Even the diversity within certain sexual practices such as anal sex is important and requires clarification, given that it also includes a range of behaviours (such as use of fingers, objects and oral contact).

This research is important as it provides understanding around young people's conceptualisations of sex. As stated by Hirst (2008:403) sexual practices "result from a complex interplay of various prior (and in situ) cultural and historical contexts and biographies which vary in and between individuals and relationship formations". The scope of differences between and within sexual practices is evident in the research outlined above and has significant implications particularly around safe sex messages, and therefore, for the content of SRE.

#### **2.3.4 Young People's Sexuality within School**

As highlighted previously, in relation to the media, sexuality saturates young people's lives. While this begins early on in life, it is perhaps nowhere more pronounced than the school context. Schools are crucial sites through which sexuality is constructed, reproduced and experienced for young people (Mac an Ghaill, 1991), which in turn affects how they invariably experience their schooling (Connell, 1989; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Trudell, 1992). Within the school environment young people are exposed to both formal and informal modes of 'sexualisation'. The formal element comes from the official school curriculum that



is taught in the classroom, and the informal relates to young people's more 'unofficial' education, i.e. that which takes place in the 'playground' and through peer interaction. Through both these modes, schools play an active role in the formation and expression of sexual (and gendered) identities and subjectivities. In light of this, research has focused on young people's sexualities in the school context and has documented the pervasive heteronormative and homophobic culture of schools (Mac An Ghail, 1996; Warwick et al, 2001).

Research illustrates the ways in which schools sanction heteronormative cultures through various homophobic and heteronormative discourse and practices, which operate within this environment (Mac An Ghaill, 1996; Thurlow, 2001, Reay, 2001) in both the formal and informal aspect of schooling. For example, in the formal curriculum there is a persistent lack of representation of LGB people and same-sex sexual practices within the materials used (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). This is further reinforced through the more informal discussions that occur around relationships, where talk around LGB sexualities, LGB family members and same-sex practices and desire are further silenced. The heteronormativity present within the school context is therefore discursively constructed within the classroom between teacher and pupils, most directly through what is said, but also through what is left out (DePalma & Jenet, 2010). Within a primary school context, DePalma & Atkinson (2010) highlighted teachers' assumptions regarding the (lack of) importance of LGB issues and parental disapproval of LGB content. More problematic however, they found that many teachers weren't willing to engage in curriculum-based work around LGB sexualities.

In addition to the way in which heteronormativity is reinforced through teachers' discourse and practice, research also highlights the way in which heteronormative culture reinforced through the daily rituals and practices that occur within schools more generally. Examples include, extra-curricular activities and heteronormative culture as part of a school 'ethos', through institutions such as football and religion (Pascoe, 2007; Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009). The heterosexist nature of SRE has invoked considerable concern within the literature, most fundamentally for the messages it sends out about normative sexuality. All through their education, young people are assimilated in what Rich (1981) refers to as 'compulsory heterosexuality', which pervades the school context.

As discussed previously (see chapter 1), teachers also play a role in reinforcing a 'heterosexual presumption', through their inaction in intervening in incidents of homophobic



bullying (Nayak & Kehily, 1996; Mac an Ghaill 1994), through which heterosexuality is more directly 'policed'. Research has continued to document the high level of homophobic bullying present in schools (Douglas et al, 1999; Hunt & Jenson, 2007) even as early as primary school, where young people commonly use words such as 'gay' when referring to something as ugly or rubbish (Allen et al, 2008). Homophobia is much more rampant within the secondary school context however. Recent figures illustrate that 65% of young LGB have experienced direct bullying in schools and that 97% hear homophobia comments such as 'poof' 'faggot' and 'queer'. Furthermore, more than 50% of LGB people don't feel they can be themselves in school and 35% don't feel safe or accepted (Hunt & Jenson, 2007).

Research documents the role homophobic language (epithets and pejorative words) plays in the practice of homophobic bullying, and the way it is used most readily when amongst groups of peers (Rivers et al, 2007; Poteat & Rivers, 2010). More recent research also highlights the increase in all bullying across a number of mediums, such as those done via text and internet (Rivers & Noret, 2009), which may further increase the prevalence and effect of homophobic bullying. The increased popularity of social networking sites such as facebook and Myspace amongst young people may further exacerbate the chances of young LGB people and WSW/MSM being 'outed' on these sites before they are ready and/or without their permission.

In addition to the prevalence of homophobic bullying in secondary schools, research has also documented its impact on LGB pupils and those who diverge from traditional heterosexuality (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Rivers, 2004; Ryan & Rivers, 2003), highlighting a wide range of psychological, emotional, social and physical effects for LGB young people. In turn, this affects many aspects of their lives, from their schooling to their mental health. Notably, research (Rideway & Correl, 2004) also shows that the level of stigmatisation varies according to the nature of school environment for example, the extent to which their school promotes heteronormative assumptions. Indeed, the school culture can play an important role in shaping young LGB people's well-being: Wilkinson & Pearson (2009) found that young people experienced increased stigma and subsequently decreased well-being in schools where football was more visible. Overall, young LGB people report a number of negative experiences within their schooling that range from feelings of invisibility to experiencing considerable isolation and discrimination.

As highlighted, the pervasive nature of heteronormativity, heterosexism and homophobia within schools all work towards shaping young people's (hetero)sexuality. As schools actively produce and privilege heterosexuality at the expense of other sexualities, the school context is a crucial site within which the active construction of young people's identities and meanings around sexuality take shape.

## **2.4 Summary**

While academic literature and theory adopt more sophisticated thinking around sex and sexuality, young people continue to be exposed to and ultimately experience their sexualities in an essentialist way. Despite the problems with traditional frameworks for understanding sexuality, essentialist views of sex and sexuality have become hard to displace for young people as a result of both the school environment and wider discourse, which encourages them to think about sexuality and gender in an essentialist way. As sexuality is defined predominantly in relation to their sexual activity; young people's sexuality therefore becomes synonymous with heterosexuality based on assumptions around sexual identity. As research suggests that young people are experiencing their sexualities in an increasingly fluid way, sexual essentialism becomes a rather inadequate framework for conceptualising young people's sexualities.

As discussed in chapter 1, the basis from which the majority of SRE is established is predicated on essentialist notions of sexuality. Indeed, SRE assumptions of a fixed identity poses particular problems for its utility, as it assumes that young people will ultimately recognise themselves within heterosexuality. As illustrated, the pre-eminence given to heterosexuality is realised most profoundly within the heteronormative context of schools, where the policing of sexual identity occurs and where homophobic insults are rife and have detrimental effects (Douglas et al, 1999; Ellis & High, 2004; Rivers, 1996, 2006; Thurlow, 2001) and where SRE provision remains predominantly heterosexist.

Along with chapter 1, the current chapter therefore highlights the disjunction between both SRE conceptualisation and delivery and the way in which young people currently experience their sexualities. In highlighting this disjuncture, both chapters provide the foundations for the current research focus, which amalgamates young people's sexualities and SRE provision.

## ***2.5 Rationale for the Present Study***

The literature discussed in this chapter clearly highlights SRE as a highly political and contested subject mainly in its relation to young people's sexuality. In light of this large body of research highlighting the limitations of SRE and the many factors that encumber provision, this thesis sets out to examine SRE on a number of levels, namely from a socio-political, educator and pupil level. This approach to exploring SRE reflects the prominent issues arising from the literature and also aims to examine how SRE, and therefore young people's sexuality, is constructed.

Most significantly, the literature highlights the varied nature of SRE provision; along with the considerable autonomy teachers have in shaping this aspect of young people's education. This is important in light of a contradictory policy context, given that the way in which SRE teachers and policy-makers determine the nature and approach of provision is unclear. As such it becomes an important focus of this research, largely for the way it can reveal how these figures conceptualise the aims of SRE and young people's SRE needs. The value of examining the conceptualisation of SRE is illustrated in how well it compares to how young people formulate their SRE needs and evaluate their provision.

The impetus for this type of focus is evident where the literature outlines a number of changes that have occurred both at a policy level and around how we conceptualise young people's sexuality. Literature that also signals young people's dissatisfaction with their provision represents a basis from which this research is built and research focus shaped. In particular, recent calls to make SRE more inclusive of young people's diversity provide a strong rationale for examining how SRE is constructed. The changes evident in young people's sexual identities and practices have enormous implications for provision that fails to acknowledge such diversity. While SRE teachers work under legislation that demands acknowledgement of the importance of inclusivity, it is unclear whether schools (and perhaps more importantly, SRE teachers), take this advice as a matter of course, particularly as the nature of the current policy is open to interpretation and individual ideology. Additionally, 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, homophobia and the social construction of heterosexuality as gendered.



While there is a considerable amount of research exploring the quality and provision of SRE, relatively little research using a postmodern perspective have examined how SRE is constructed. Additionally, previous research carried under a more essentialist framework has typically utilised only one method (either interview or focus group) to assess the quality of provision from either an educator or pupil perspective, while this research aims to utilise a number of methods in order to capture how SRE is formulated at several important levels.

The following chapter will outline the overall approach and methods by which this research sets out in examining the research objectives.

## 3 Methodology

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### 3.1 *Introduction*

The previous chapters provided an important context from which to describe the rationale for the current research. Chapter 1 outlined the literature around SRE provision and examined the way in which young people's sexuality has been constructed in secondary school SRE. Additionally, this chapter also provided important information regarding the socio-political forces that have shaped provision. In providing an important backdrop from which to understand the current research, chapter 2 then gave a brief outline of the way in which sexuality has been more generally constructed in the literature in order to highlight some of the problems from which current thinking around SRE is predicated. It is in light of this literature, that the rationale for the current research is described.

In describing the current research, this chapter will provide details regarding its methodology and provide justification for the various methodological aspects of this research. Specifically, it outlines the ontological and epistemological position of the research, along with the design of the study. Finally, it outlines some of the problems the researcher faced in exploring three delicate areas; SRE, young people, and sexuality. As they are examined together, these areas make for a problematic research inquiry.

### 3.2 *Research Design*

This thesis utilised a qualitative design. At the heart of qualitative research is a concern with interpreting what a piece of text means and engaging in 'sense-making' with that data (Ashworth, 2003). This approach is fundamental to the understanding of how SRE is formulated on a number of discursive levels (e.g. political, educational and individual). In light of this concern, the research is loosely positioned within a social constructionist framework (more specifically, discursive constructionism: Potter, 1996), and with postmodern thinking, where concerns around the construction of meaning takes centre stage. Such concerns have been influenced by the 'turn to language'; an intellectual orientation that emphasises the central role language plays in how 'reality' is constituted (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). Characterised by its 'anti-foundational stance' towards 'truth' (Potter & Hepburn, 2008) or objective knowledge, that is assumed unattainable (Edwards et al, 1995;

Potter, 1996), a central feature of this approach is the theoretical importance of language and its use as a resource by which an individual constructs reality (see Gergen, 1985). To this extent, research conducted within a social constructionist framework focuses on examining the way in which reality is socially constructed within a particular social, cultural and historical context, in order to explore the way it shapes human experience and social practice (Willig, 2001). This differs from more realist and interpretivist qualitative approaches such as phenomenology and grounded theory, where emphasis is placed on individuals as perceivers, and concern rests with the underlying structures of psychological phenomena and/or human experience. Social constructionism has become an increasingly influential perspective (see Burr, 1995, 2003), particularly through its application to psychological inquiry, notably, the respecification of many traditional psychological concepts such as prejudice, emotion, and attitudes (e.g. Edwards, 1997; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This research has been concerned with studying such categories and descriptions, as they are considered to be indicative of how we construct social reality.

While a constructionist epistemology enables the research to examine how SRE is constructed, understood and displayed at the various levels at which it is constituted, it also supports the use of mixed methods utilised within this project aimed at exploring the various ways in which SRE takes on various meanings within the school context. As such, a social constructionist methodology facilitates the research objectives that go hand in hand with postmodern concerns around how meaning is constituted and deployed, and where language plays a central role in uncovering common forms of understanding (Gergen, 1985).

### **3.2.1 The Research Aims**

As indicated above, this research aimed to examine how SRE is discursively constructed and understood at a number of socio-cultural levels, (e.g. the political, social and interactional). More specifically, it aimed to examine how SRE is constructed at these various levels within the context of UK secondary schools. The research is also concerned with how SRE is discursively formulated at a governmental level (through policy), and within the school context itself (via both SRE teachers and pupils) and the effects of this. Questions regarding the construction of SRE (and what is prioritised within it) are the result of such aims. Other relevant questions include how SRE teachers account for the particular approach, in addition to how pupils talk about their provision and how it is understood. Pupils' experience of SRE,



how it contributes to their 'knowledge' and their understanding of sex and sexuality is of particular importance, along with the 'fit' of these meanings with that delivered in current provision. The nature and importance of these aims can be understood in relation to the backdrop of SRE as a highly contested subject, in which both provision and approach is often disputed. As a result, provision varies at the level of individual schools and teachers. As such, these aims help to examine how understanding is manufactured, negotiated, and justified within the school setting and the methodologies utilised within this research project are applied in a way which enable these research aims to be examined.

The rationale for the research aims outlined can be considered in light of literature which identifies potential barriers to comprehensive and inclusive SRE, and in relation to research which outlines its failure to meet young people's various needs (e.g. Biddulph, 2006; Corteen, 2006; UK Youth Parliament, 2007). The focus of this thesis is felt to be important and timely in terms of its focus on SRE since the removal of Section 28 and in the wake of a number of recent changes to government policy, particularly legislation outlining schools' responsibility to provide SRE that is inclusive of young people's various diversities (see chapter 1). This research therefore enables insight into how effective SRE is in acknowledging pupils' SRE needs, along with how it may impact on young people's current and emerging sexualities.

### ***3.3 Methods and types of data***

The choice of methodology was influenced by the various objectives of the research inquiry. Whilst previous research has commonly utilised only one research method (i.e. interviews or focus groups, and therefore one type of data source) for exploring SRE and sexuality, this research employed a combination of both of these, in addition to observation and policy documentation. The choice of research methods is based upon the researcher's epistemological and methodological commitments and the concerns of the research project outlined above. The use of mixed methods is advantageous as it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of SRE as a forum for both the construction and regulation of sexual knowledge and identities. This approach facilitates an examination from different subject positions (notably, teachers and pupils), and as such, recognises the plurality of meaning around the subject matter, from these different positions. Additionally, this is felt to be particularly innovative in that, to date, research around SRE has tended to focus on one aspect of SRE, typically from the particular viewpoint of one party. It is also typically

conducted from an essentialist/realist perspective. The use of only one method fails to acknowledge the importance of how SRE takes on meaning at the various levels it is enacted. In examining SRE at these 'levels', the research is able to make links between both the micro-processes, notably the way it is produced in talk; and the way it is constructed on a more (social and political) macro-level.

### **3.3.1 Observations**

Non-participant observation was utilised to gain a more comprehensive understanding of SRE within the school context. This was driven in part by the political nature of the subject but also in light of the different levels at which SRE is negotiated for and within the school context. Additionally, the research project is concerned with the subjective and discursive quality of SRE provision that occurs through the more informal interactions between teachers and pupils, which can only be captured using this type of method. This methodology has received contemporary use in classroom observational studies conducted by educational researchers (e.g. Rossman & Rallis, 1998) and it also allows researchers to capture more 'naturalistic' delivery and experience SRE for teachers and pupils respectively. As such, it provides the researcher with information regarding the nature of SRE and provides important context for understanding teachers' and pupils' more subjective accounts of their provision.

Research that examines sexualities, particularly within an educational context, illustrates the value of observational methods, particularly as they work to capture the social and cultural contexts within which experience and meanings are constituted (Allen, 2005; Hirst, 2004; Measor, 2000). Such research often utilises observations as a means of capturing details around physical and environmental features, including features present within the school context such as graffiti, posters, imagery and types of materials used (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Pascoe, 2005). In keeping with the ethnographic tradition, it would have been preferable to carry out more prolonged and embedded observations within schools, but this was not feasible due to the (often sporadically delivered) nature of SRE and the issues related to conducting research in a school context (such as limited access). Observations were therefore limited to only a small number of designated SRE lessons, although notes were made on the interactions and descriptions that took place within the school context more generally. This included informal conversations that took place between the classroom and staffrooms and observations about the SRE classroom, including the nature of posters and resources used. These aspects of this environment are considered valuable for the way they contribute

towards the research aims as important discursive data that often remain unexamined when using other research methods.

### *3.3.1.1 Approach*

The observations took place within PSHE lessons (or equivalent named programmes), predominantly classed as SRE. The lessons observed consisted of a range of different topics contained within each school's SRE programme and varied across each school. All PSHE lessons lasted around 50-60 minutes on average and included a range of different age groups (11-16 years). A total of 45 lessons were observed within seven schools (see table 3.1 for a breakdown) over two academic school years (2008-9/2009-10). The observed lessons were delivered by all the teachers included in the sample (PSHE co-ordinators), with the exception of Westbridge, which were carried out by an external professional (from the local sexual health clinic) and an SRE teacher from another school. While some observations were more consistent (i.e. they followed one-year group through their SRE within a particular school), other observations were less consistent, being selected by the teacher as a one-off.

Observations were unobtainable in two of the schools included in the sample (Southfarm and Low-valley) for different reasons. In Low-valley, SRE was sporadically delivered often done as a 'drop down day', with no timetabled provision being taught at the time contact was made. At Southfarm, permission was initially given to observe lessons but in the aftermath of the teacher interview, permission was revoked.

As a range of school lessons are observed by a number of people (Ofsted, teachers' in training etc.), the pupils appeared to be familiar with the presence of an observer. The observations mainly consisted of those taken in SRE lessons. The preferred location from which to observe lessons was from the back of the classroom, although this varied due to class size, frequency of observations and the teachers' often changing, and preferred classroom set-up. The notes taken focused on both description (setting, actions and dialogue) and reflection (personal descriptions and reactions to what was observed). More specifically, the observations focusing on description centred around aspects of the setting (layout and arrangement, equipment, materials and posters), activities (actions and behaviours of the teachers and pupils) and interactions (formal teaching, including power-point content and informal conversations/questions between the teacher and pupil's). All interactions made by teachers became the main focus on the field notes and were noted verbatim in order to preserve as much detail of the interactions as possible (including all information and instructions given,



questions asked and responses (both verbal and non-verbal) made to pupils contributions). In sum, notes were made on everything I could see and hear but particular focus was placed on the lesson content and knowledge imparted (including meanings ascribed to the sex and relationships and the discourses mobilised), in addition to teacher-pupil interactions (including questions, responses made to questions, and pupil and teacher reactions to what was discussed). These aspects were considered important for the way that SRE is constructed. The notes where I reflected specifically included my personal thoughts, feeling and reactions whilst in the field. Some of these notes were done in the field but these were mainly done outside of the school setting in order to strengthen and contextualise what was observed. They therefore consisted of issues that arose in the context, as a result of the messages delivered, the interactions that occurred and both personal description and reactions (impressions, impact, feelings and thoughts). In essence then, my sense-making and interpretations.

Shorthand and abbreviations were used to transcribe the notes, either in ‘situ’, immediately after leaving the setting or a combination of both), depending on feasibility. The decision to make notes in the field was dependent on where I was located in the classroom (front or back of the classroom). This decision was felt to be important given the tremendous impact these actions can have on those being observed.

Table 3.1 A breakdown of each school's individual level of participation in the research

<b>School</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Observations</b>
Hatfield	1	2	16
Hansway	1	3	4
Low valley	0	10	0
Middleton	1	1	5
Rushton	1	0	1
Bridgeford	1	0	2
Trencham	1	0	15
Southfarm	1	0	0
Westbridge	1	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>45</b>

As the observations highlighted the highly variable nature of SRE provision across the sample of schools, along with the politically charged aspects of the health provisions contained in some programmes such as Bridgeford, and those without such elements (i.e. Trencham), the importance of what was prescribed for SRE at a national level (see chapter 4)

became clear. This would allow understanding of how individual schools and teachers formulate and justify their own provision against that deemed most ‘appropriate’ at policy level.

### **3.3.2 Textual Analysis (Policy)**

In keeping with the focus on methods that emphasise the importance of language, the decision to include text analysis was taken in light of its applicability within the epistemological framework of this research and to provide an important backdrop from which to contextualise the other interactional data. In line with discursive approaches that view ‘text’ as both written and verbal, policy documents stand as forms of discourse that can provide researchers with rich data from which to do important analysis on the constructive nature of discourse (Wodak, 2007). The interest in (SRE) policy documents within the current research stems from their status as an important form of communication and discourse, and a source by which to gain further insight into SRE provision.

Textual data is considered to be an important aspect of research, based on its contribution as an element of meaning-making. As such, research often utilises textual analysis in a way that focuses on the social and ideological effects, along with the causal effects of various texts (on a social or individual level), namely policy texts (Fairclough, 2003). More specifically, the value of using policy documents is evident in the way these texts often shape the way we see the world, given the way they describe, conceptualise and create actions in the world (Saarinen, 2008). Texts therefore constitute a form of social action as premised on an understanding of policy as discourse (Ball, 1993).

Within social science (and a discursive framework), policy documents have been the source of much textual analysis, predominantly using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; 2000; 2003, van Dijk, 1997) or Foucauldian discourse analysis (e.g. Carabine, 2001). The inclusion of policy within this project is of particular interest for the way it delineates the actions of government and how they wish to intervene in young people’s lives and SRE provision. All policy constructs a particular (ideologically loaded) view of the various phenomena. Policy around SRE reflects governmental priorities regarding SRE, most notably their desired approach, along with what constitutes ‘comprehensive’ and ‘good quality’ provision. As illustrated in chapter 1, the policy context surrounding SRE is important for its practice, most specifically for the way it often informs teachers’ practices and therefore impacts on how young people experience their SRE. Therefore, the policy context that

impacts on current SRE provision is of importance for examining how SRE is currently constructed and delivered in secondary schools. More specifically, how the document informs various decisions made by teachers in charge of provision and manifests in practice (if at all).

#### *3.3.2.1 The Document*

The DCSF published draft SRE guidance document in January 2010 as part of a consultation process in January 2010. This document was published under a Labour Government as part of various policy changes aimed at SRE which, when published in its final form, served to replace the existing 2000 guidance (post consultation period) (See appendix H for a copy of the original policy document). As a government policy this represented the Labour Government's specific commitments to SRE and its intended approach (see chapter 4 for a detailed outline of these proposed changes). This policy was selected for the way it represented the current social and political context in the UK for SRE (at the time the research was carried out) and as such, reflects contemporary social and political discourse. Furthermore, this policy is important for the way it provides a social and political context, within which current SRE practices are situated. The aim of SRE policy is to standardise provision and facilitate 'good practice' in this subject, therefore what constitutes 'good practice' is constructed in this document, along with knowledge of (specifically young people's) sexuality. This document therefore reflected more recent 'knowledge' around SRE provision within the context of the UK (England).

#### **3.3.3 Interviews**

One-to-one, semi-structured interviews were the preferred research method for examining how teachers formulate and account for their SRE provision. In keeping with the analytic framework, the interactional nature of interviews is highlighted in many prominent discursive studies (e.g. Potter & Mulkay, 1985; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 1995). More commonly, interviews are often utilised within qualitative research for the way in which they provide access to an individual's understanding of their social world (through their accounts). Use of interviews within a discursive framework differs from those carried out within a more traditional qualitative framework, both theoretically and procedurally. Most prominently, accounts are treated as a piece of social interaction in their own right, as opposed to representing description of some underlying 'truth' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; 1995).



Researchers carrying out discourse analysis have commonly utilised interviews in order to study the situated and constructive features of language as inherent to the notion of discourse as 'social action' (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Edwards, 2003). The use of a semi-structured interview is particularly valuable as it grants the interviewee the freedom to speak more fully. This flexibility is particularly important within discursive work for the way it encourages evaluative discourse and variability in talk. As an important feature of discourse analysis, variability (i.e. how people's descriptions change in the course of an interview) is considered important within this context as it represents a tool for understanding, more specifically the way it reveals the action oriented nature of their account, i.e. what their account is doing (see Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Within this framework, an active research style, whereby the researcher interjects and challenges the interviewee (Potter & Wetherell, 1995) is preferable for the way it warrants further explanation or justification from the interviewee. It is also desirable for its incorporation of the researcher's more active role in the interaction, and as collaborators of the discussion that unfolds as a result of a sequence of specific questioning (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The (Jeffersonian) style of transcription utilised in discursive research further highlights the conversationally important features of such an approach and the researcher's role in the discursive actions that unfold (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). This approach also aids in revealing the many discursive practices and interpretive resources used by interviewees as they produce their accounts in response to the specifics of the researcher's questions. Moreover, interview data that emphasise their interactional nature highlights the way people also orient to issues of stake and interest; the way people respond based on particular interests and manage certain issues of interest in their talk (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Edwards, 1990).

In line with this analytical aim, an active interviewing style was utilised for exploring the constructive nature of teachers' accounts of their provision, along with the discursive resources they use in formulating and upholding them. The interview method is considered particularly appropriate, in light of the often controversial and political nature of the topic. The interactive and directive nature of the interview allowed the researcher to focus on the inherently ideological and rhetorical nature of these accounts. This was particularly important given the level of autonomy teachers have over their SRE provision and therefore the influence they have over the nature of SRE and subsequent meanings around the subject matter. Thus, as shapers of SRE, teachers' formulation and subjective accounts of their provision were of great importance. Interviews are valuable aids for exploring these; as Davis

(1994) points out, subjective accounts enables the researcher to assess how they influence others' subjectivity within a learning environment, notably those subject positions they may enable or disable.

#### *3.3.3.1 Approach*

All interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 90 minutes. An interview schedule broadly specified topics to be discussed. Examples of the broad topic areas include those around the SRE approach and content, SRE policy, barriers to provision and teacher evaluations. These topics were selected for the way they are identified in the literature as pertinent to the content and delivery of SRE (See appendix F, for the broad interview schedule). While the nature of the interview schedule remained roughly the same for each interview, it was tailored to the individual teacher according to their school's SRE programme and the information derived from classroom observations. This ensured that each interview schedule was meaningful to each teacher, which helped establish the teachers' opinions around their SRE provision. Follow up questions were used in all interviews to allow for further exploration of teachers' positions and to provide further information. This also allowed an opportunity for the interviewee to "generate interpretative contexts" as recommended by Potter & Wetherell, (1987:164) in line with the more active research style previously outlined. As part of this more interventionist and confrontational approach, a number of contrast questions were utilised by the researcher aimed at getting teachers to reiterate their accounting practices and provide further description or justification for the various choices made around their provision. As such, the interview schedule was used as a basis for discussion and not as an exhaustive guide. Following modification prior to each interview, the interview schedule was used only as a prompt by the interviewer; as the discussions required more of a personalised interviewing style, one that responded to the nature of the conversation and the issues raised by each teacher. All interviews were carried out on school premises in the teacher's personal office or an empty classroom. Details of the research, and ethical rights were discussed prior to carrying out the interview as part of the initial meeting where the research was explained in full. Prior to commencing the interview, teachers were given an information sheet and completed a consent form (see appendix A & E).

#### **3.3.4 Focus Groups**

The choice of using the focus group method for this research was primarily based on its extensive use within psychology, and on the burgeoning literature that documents the value

of this method for exploring young people's subjectivities around a range of topics related to the sexual. Within psychology, and indeed the social sciences, focus groups have been commonly used to study a wide range of issues relating both to sexuality (Allen, 2003; Frith & Kitzinger, 1997; Jackson, 2009) and SRE (Allen, 2005, 2008; Kitzinger, 1990). These studies utilise the focus group method as a means of exploring young people's own subjectivity, knowledge and practices. This approach has also been used for the way it is felt able to inform SRE (see Hirst, 2004, 2008). In the field of sexuality research, this method is also favoured for the way it enables researchers to explore the subjective aspects of sexuality and more importantly, "the social and cultural context which informs this experience" (Frith, 2000:275).

Focus groups are considered to be particularly useful when carrying out research with young people. They allow the researcher to capture the complexity of their experiences, opinions and attitudes, whilst giving young people a voice. Their use within feminist research in particular is based on this premise; particularly the way it captures the collectivist 'female' voice (e.g. Frith, 1997; Frith & Kitzinger 1997, 1998; Wilkinson, 1998). Their use within this research was founded on this basis and also on their utility within a discursive framework for studying interaction. The efficacy of the focus group method for eliciting more naturalistic interaction is due to their nature as a 'socially situated method', namely, one that enables a focus on group interaction and thereby offers social contexts for meaning-making (Kitzinger 1994; Wilkinson, 1999). The characteristics of this method therefore make it appropriate for use within this research for the way it yields interactive data and most appropriately represents the context within which young people most commonly talk and construct meanings around sex and sexuality (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999), whilst capturing the types of language and terminology they use within their social groups. Whilst not naturalistic talk in the purest sense, this talk is considered to be closer to everyday conversations (Wilkinson, 2004) than talk generated from interview methods as the potential for natural dynamics to emerge amongst young people is stronger. According to Frith (2000), for example, focus groups increase the likelihood of more elaborated and detailed discussions given the way respondents often encourage, build upon, react towards and debate with one another; which would otherwise be inappropriate from the moderator.

In order to facilitate the more natural dynamic, young people in their friendship groups were selected to take part in the focus groups. This format was chosen because as others (e.g. Frith,



2000; Hirst, 2004) have described, friendship groups foster a more relaxed and comfortable environment for young people. This is predicated on the notion that young people will have a number of common interests, shared experiences and an existing level of trust prior to the establishment of the focus groups. As researchers look to enhance disclosure, this format was favoured for the way it encourages young people to talk about issues, which is useful given the sensitive nature of the subject area. Although personal disclosures were not explicitly sought, some level of disclosure was anticipated as indicated in the literature (e.g. Frith 2000; Kitzinger, 1994; Overlien, 2005). As such, this method was also selected for the way it provided a less intrusive method for exploring a (potentially sensitive) topic, where some level of personal disclosure amongst participants is likely. In addition to these considerations, the format of the focus group was also guided largely by the research question as recommended by Farquhar (1999). As was dictated by the research concerns, young people were not required to disclose personal information, instead priority was placed on gaining their shared discursive constructions on topics such as sex and sexuality in order to explore the meanings around how they relate to their SRE.

#### *3.3.4.1 Approach*

The SRE teachers in contact or directly involved in the research organised the young people's participation in line with the requests made from the researcher (for single-sex friendship groups between 6-8 people). Most of the groups were sampled at the beginning of their timetabled SRE lessons. All pupils provided written consent to participate and for the discussions to be recorded (see appendix E). The researcher created a relaxed and safe environment advocated by focus group good practice (for example see Puchta & Potter, 2004), that also emulated the more successful methods utilised in SRE lessons. One of the strategies used to achieve this was the rearrangement of classroom furniture (for example, moving chairs in a circle) in order to work within the limits of the research context and provide a more informal environment. A technique also adopted from the SRE context was the process of endorsing young people's freedom of voice at the start of all the focus group. For example, they were told they could use whatever language they wanted and that the discussion was oriented towards them. Also, the use of 'ground rules' was established before the start of each focus group, those concerned with maintaining the groups right to privacy and confidentiality. A group 'pact' regarding confidentiality of the all the groups' discussions was endorsed between all who were present, which proved to be particularly valuable for the interviewees: Those taking part at later stages in the research process noted that their

inquiries (regarding the process) to those who had taken part earlier would be refused on the basis of the pact. This appeared to be reflective of how they (particularly the young women) valued this process and invested in honouring this pact. The interviewer encouraged impersonal constructions (Overlien, 2005) by asking questions in the third person perspective, particularly those related to more personal topics (i.e. about young people's relationships and sexual cultures). This offered some 'protection' and distance by giving them the opportunity to talk in the third person.

Within each focus group session, the researcher as 'moderator', took an active role in guiding the discussion according to the dynamics of each group. A semi-structured focus group schedule was used in a similar way to the teachers' interviews, namely as a basis for discussion and a means through which topics could be covered. Similarly to the interview schedule, it was not used as a comprehensive guide, given that discussions varied between each group according to the spontaneous nature of young people's talk and the group dynamics. The types of topics covered were those that explored their SRE experiences (content, delivery, amount of provision received) and evaluations of their SRE. Whilst informative in nature, these topics also served as springboards for discussions regarding definitions and understandings of sex and sexuality (see appendix G for the focus group schedule). The schedule was used in a more flexible fashion to that used within the interviews with teachers and varied according to the dynamic of individual groups' level of discussion, perceived comfort and the agenda of the young people themselves in taking part in the research. On average, the focus groups lasted between 50-60 minutes depending on the duration of individual school's class period. All focus groups were carried out within the school context, mainly within empty classrooms.

### ***3.4 Analytical Approach***

A discourse analytical approach was applied to all data collected, 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). As such, this approach is distinct from that of mainstream psychology, where traditional psychological perspectives aim to provide a technical account of a range of phenomena as underlying, stable cognitive representations



typically using experimental methods. In contrast, discursive psychology is interested in how participants mobilise various psychological categories such as memory and emotion to achieve various social objectives, such as to justify, rationalise and categorise (Locke & Edwards, 2003). These discursive practises are examined for the way they inform the researcher about the social actions or interactional work being done in the discourse, for example, the way particular discursive practices reveal the way people manage certain interests within a particular context. As such, DP is "analytically focused on the way psychological phenomena are practical, accountable, situated, embodied and displayed" (Potter, 2005: 739).

With a concern on the action orientated nature of talk (Heritage, 1984) also comes an interest in the rhetorical and argumentative nature and organisation of discourse; the inconsistent, contradictory and dilemmatic nature of people's talk, as evident in discussions around motives or descriptions of events (Billig et al, 1988; Billig, 1999). In light of such concerns, analytic focus is placed on identifying the discursive resources that underlie interaction, thus revealing the interactional work being done in discourse. As such, emphasis is placed on examining categories and descriptions for the way they are indicative and involved in actions (Wiggins & Potter, 2008).

This analytical approach was selected for the way it enables focus on both the constructive and functional dimensions of discourse by concentrating on the discursive resources and practices employed in talk, particularly with how events are described and explained (Edwards & Potter, 1992). A discursive approach was deemed particularly useful for this research as it provides some insight into how SRE is talked about and therefore understood. While valuable to the specific research aims, this approach has been applied to many analytical endeavours within social psychology and provides an appropriate framework for studying issues related to sexuality as they are discursively constructed. In line with this approach and the analytic aims, the current analysis also draws on rhetorical social psychology (Billig, 1987) as a concern for the rhetorical or argumentative organisation of talk was central to the nature of the research topic, particularly as it was expected to feature in teachers' accounts. Discursive psychologists have illustrated the many ways in which peoples' 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). This is particularly relevant to the current research focus, where emphasis is placed on how teachers



formulate and account for their SRE provision, in addition to the types of actions these accounts are designed to perform.

The interviews and focus group data were transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984), a format suitable for detailed discursive analysis. The preliminary stage involved multiple readings of the transcripts without coding. It also involved repeat listening of the recordings in conjunction with reading the transcripts in order to gain familiarity with the discursive effects of the data. The coding stage of the analysis differed slightly between the different data sources based on the specific aims of the analysis (as specified more clearly in the subsequent sections). Most broadly, the distinction centred around the level of detail included in the analysis of the features of talk. For example, the analysis of teachers' interviews included more focus on the more micro-features of talk (i.e. the pauses, pronoun use etc) in order to focus on the practices and discursive resources of their talk. This is in line with the aims of the analysis, which set out to explore the constructive and action-oriented nature of talk. Conversely, the coding within the focus group analysis focused more on a surface/transparent level of analysis (i.e. one interested in the content of what was said and the nature of issues raised) in line with concern around description and understanding attributed to the sexual and to SRE, along with a concern for their evaluative talk. While these analytical approaches differ in the level of detail included and research emphasis, both approaches serve to highlight how both teachers and pupils' formulate SRE. As such, the coding involved identifying stretches of talk where both teachers and pupils were describing their provision, along with features within their talk where arguments and opinions were mobilised, as indicative of the action oriented nature of the talk. The coding process was therefore more complex than just identifying all stretches of talk where reference was made to SRE provision.

### **3.4.1 Analysis of the interview data**

In line with the research aims, the analysis of all interview data focused on the way in which SRE is formulated in teachers' talk. Specifically, the analysis sought to examine how teachers formulate and make sense of SRE. As schools are given a high level of autonomy over their provision, this focus was felt to be particularly important for the way it offers some insight into how teachers conceptualise their individual SRE provision (and 'approach'), along with how they manage and account for various decisions taken in relation to that provision. The

interest in how teachers justify various ‘moves’ in their provision also called for a focus on the rhetorical features of teachers’ talk, in line with SRE being a highly contested subject. While all the teachers participating in this research had sole responsibility for the content and delivery of their provision, a focus on the rhetorical nature of their accounts is important for the way it reveals the action orientated nature of the talk (i.e. what is being done in the talk and why). With that 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. In this instance, a focus on the discursive strategies teachers use in their accounts can reveal the level of interest a teacher has in how their provision is heard, along with what they are trying to prioritise/de-prioritise.

While a distinction is often made between discursive approaches concerned with discursive practices (namely, its action-orientation) and those concerned with discursive resources (the category systems and interpretative repertoires drawn upon in constructing particular versions of social life: Potter & Wetherell, 1995); these approaches are not considered incompatible, particularly as much research often requires a more layered approach in line with a particular focus. Within this research, a layered approach allows an examination of the different elements (i.e. both construction and function) of the accounts produced by teachers, which acknowledges that people are both produced and producers of discourses (Edley & Wetherell, 1998).

Parts of the data selected for detailed analysis included stretches of talk which involved teachers producing descriptions of their provision, as well as passages where they were constructing young people's sexuality, based on the way they often co-occurred. Instances where teachers were providing justification for aspects of their provision were transferred into a separate file and selected for closer analysis. These passages were then analysed in terms of similarity and difference across transcripts. In line with paying close attention to the constructive and functional dimensions of the discourse, all material in which teachers were describing their provision was included, along with instances where teachers provided some type of justification. In addition all sections including teachers’ claims about young people and their sexual health needs were also included. In light of the concern with the rhetorical nature of teachers’ descriptions and evaluations of their provision, coding focused on identifying features of teachers’ talk, most notably instances where teachers used a variety of

discursive resources. These strategies were analysed in terms of their function in this context, specifically for the way teachers manage issues of stake and accountability.

### **3.4.2 Analysis of focus group data**

While still analysed within the analytic framework of DP, the focus group data involved a more transparent analytical approach, focusing on the constructive nature of their talk over more functional character of this talk. With analytic focus on the way pupils construct meaning around the content of their SRE and the sexual, following the initial repeat readings, the coding and subsequent analysis included all instances of pupils' (explicit and implicit) evaluations of their SRE provision. The initial stages of analysis (after repeat reading of the transcripts), involved the selection of sections of discourse where young people were talking (both explicitly and implicitly) about particular discursive objects (i.e. sex and sexuality). This also included those segments of talk where young people were expressing opinions and their experiences of their SRE. Analysis began on these evaluations and as part of this process, this data was organised into common themes, as indicated through reoccurring patterns and meanings raised by pupils. Analytic focus progressed onto how pupils were making sense of their provision and their more personalised SRE needs. Of particular interest was the type of opinions, the issues they expressed and the reasons for this. The next stage of the analysis involved a more detailed examination on how these constructions were produced in relation to the varying SRE approaches pupils were located within (based on the observation data).

### **3.4.3 Textual Analysis**

The policy document was analysed using textual analysis in order to examine its significance for shaping the discursive practice of SRE. The approach was informed by the discursive approach and methods utilised within critical discourse analysis (CDA) for textual data, most specifically, the analytical framework outlined by Fairclough (2003). Both approaches are employed for the way they enable understanding around the dynamics of specific policy. A discursive framework is useful for examining the constructive and functional dimensions of a text, notably for highlighting the themes and issues raised in the policy (i.e. what is brought to the fore in this document and what is left aside). The issues made explicit in the document where those considered indicative of where the process of meaning-making is taking place, as such, these were made central in the analysis. As policy documents are often constructed in a



persuasive way, particularly through their presentation of new information around values, social norms and ideals, the rhetorical features of the document was also examined under this analytic framework. The focus placed on the persuasive elements of the policy is considered important for the document in question based on the way it is written in accordance with particular priorities of the particular government (and their political interests). The nature of SRE policy aims to be particularly persuasive in the way it incorporates social views and manages the interests of key stakeholders such as parents, religious group and young people.

In line with examining the various aims and objectives of the policy and its rhetorical nature, focus was also placed on macro-level analysis, which concentrates on the more broad linguistic features of the text (Fairclough, 2001), including the organisation of the text, the types of information emphasised and the types of language used. As part of this more macro-level analysis a series of questions were asked of the text, informed broadly by the frameworks used within critical discourse analysis that examine the features of the text i.e. what is present, absent, and prioritised, in addition to concern with identifying gaps and contradictions contained. For example, questions such as; what kind of information is presented in the document and what appears to be central/key information? What kind of meanings (around SRE and young people's sexuality) are on offer in this text? In light of the nature of the text, the rhetorical analysis examined the type of persuasive features used in the text, including instances where claims were made or certain information was presumed.

Thus, the overall analytic approach involved a number of readings of the document to gain an overall feel for the main ideas and information. Certain sections were then selected in terms of importance, based on how they highlighted issues regarding the constructive or functional dimensions of the text. They formed the basis for closer analysis and were transferred into a separate file. The broader features of the document (relating to structure, linguistic features of the document and various sections within it) were also included in this analysis.

### **3.5 *Sample***

#### **3.5.1 Schools**

The research took place within a total of nine secondary schools in South Yorkshire (see table 3.1 for a breakdown of each individual school's participation). The rationale for focusing on one district was that gaining a detailed understanding of SRE provision would be more informative than looking across a larger geographical area. UK SRE, like all schooling, is

determined at a regional level by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and school governors of individual schools. As such, it varies considerably on both a national and regional level, based on the different policies and approaches advocated. It is therefore important to look at how more localised provision compares, given catchment areas often work under the same policy contexts (local Government) and shared resources (funding, SRE advisors). Within the study sample, all schools are co-educational public schools, with the exception of one independent all girls school (Rushton). The sample of schools also includes Trencham, which runs as an Academy school and operates within a Christian ethos. All the schools serve a broad ethnic and socio-economic population. For a breakdown of each school's individual level of participation in the research see table 3.1.

### **3.5.2 Teachers**

A total of eight teachers from the nine schools included in the sample were interviewed, comprising of three male and five female teachers (see Table 3.2). All teachers were of White and British nationality. All were full time PHSE co-ordinators, with the exception of one who was a full time school nurse and PSHE teacher. The time each had spent teaching PSHE (and SRE specifically) varied between 2 and 15 years. All of the teachers varied in terms of their training related to this subject; while some of them reported attending some short courses related to PSHE, some were only related to the leadership element of the role. Others had not completed any training but undertook the role citing reasons such as personal interest or professional development (see Table 3.2 for a breakdown). Two teachers (Sarah and Carl) have external roles; Carl has Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) status, which involves outreach work in other schools in order to share good practice in PSHE. Sarah is a lead professional for PSHE in her local district and also provides training for teachers around PSHE and sexual health. Sarah has completed a number of PSHE training courses and did PSHE as a second subject as part of her original teacher training. Both Carl and Sarah are the only full time PSHE teachers in this sample; Carl has established PSHE as a department within his school and Sarah is employed as a specialist PSHE teacher that delivers her provision with two supporting teachers. Both Steven and Bridget have completed an authority lead and nationally recognised qualification in PSHE (as part of their CPD). While Heather had completed a short SRE course this related to setting up Peer Activities in Sexual Health (PASH), in order to set up a peer delivered element.

Table 3.2 Teachers' school and PSHE training

Teacher	Training	School
Carl	AST status	Hatfield
Steven	PSHE qualification <sup>1</sup>	Hansway
-----	-----	Low-valley
Sarah	Lead Professional	Middleton
Heather	SRE Peer Education	Rushton
Bridget	PSHE qualification <sup>1</sup>	Bridgeford
Bob	None	Trencham
Judy	None	Southfarm
Rachel	None	Westbridge

<sup>1</sup>Authority lead and nationally recognised

### 3.5.3 Programmes

In line with the content of provision and the nature of teachers' descriptions, the SRE of most of the schools within this sample can be broadly classed as a health promotion approach.

Middleton and Trencham were the only schools that differed from this. As a Christian based school, Trencham adopts a strong abstinence only programme (endorsing a strong anti-health promotion approach), and Middleton's provision can be classified as a more progressive approach, based upon the broader, more holistic work carried out regarding young people's diverse sexual health needs. This approach was markedly different to all the other schools observed, mobilising a broader conception of sex and sexuality than in the other schools.

Provision was also delivered in an inclusive and sensitive manner that was accommodating to young people's diversities.

#### 3.5.3.1 Resources

Three of the schools utilised external SRE programmes within their provision, either alongside their own programmes or as their principle SRE. The APAUSE programme is used within two schools (Hatfield and Southfarm) alongside their own programme. The extent to which the APAUSE programme was used within these schools varied and was mainly at the discretion of each SRE co-ordinator. The APAUSE programme was developed by the University of Exeter, in collaboration with a number of steering groups (teachers, young people, and health professionals). The programme includes both a teacher/health professional



led element (materials for year 7 through to year 10) and a peer delivered element (year 9), which are both scripted. The materials are self-contained; 'ready-to-go' packs with supporting materials (lesson plans/guidance, power points and scripts including discussion questions). APAUSE units of work include; 'Human Development' (part of mandatory Science curriculum), 'Understanding Healthy Relationships', 'Peer Education' and 'Maturing Relationships'. Within Hatfield, the peer education element of the APAUSE programme was utilised within year 9 and the teacher led units were integrated into the co-ordinators own-authored materials. Within Southfarm, the co-ordinator reported using the materials from APAUSE in much the same way, although she said she was re-writing much of the material over the course of her taking over the PSHE provision. The APAUSE programme includes an evaluation questionnaire at the end of key stage (KS) 3 (years 7-9) & 4 (years 10 & 11).

Within Trencham, the Lovewise programme was utilised alongside their own SRE programme, although the Lovewise materials provided the basis from which this additional material was written. Lovewise is a Christian charity and produces self-contained SRE materials (lesson plans/scripts and power point presentations) for years 8 through to 11 from a Christian perspective. These materials can be delivered by school teachers or by external supporters of the Christian organisation. Lessons include those titled 'Choosing the Best', 'Too Special to Spoil', 'Marriage, Sex and Living Wisely', 'Emotional and Physical Consequences of Sex' and 'Abortion'. The classes observed within Trencham included many of these lessons and while the ready-made presentations were used (power points), they also included additional elements (for example, a series of role played conducted by the teachers) written by the SRE teachers.

The other schools utilised their own SRE programmes. These varied considerably as some were more teacher led (power points and lecture based format) whilst others were more interactive, containing the use of activities, role-play and group discussion for example. While the observed lessons were mainly headed by the SRE co-ordinator, the use of external visitors, were also utilised to various degrees in all schools.

#### **3.5.4 Young people**

In this part of the research, young people were invited to participate in the focus groups via their SRE teacher. In the majority of cases they were recruited at the beginning of their SRE lesson. Each teacher was advised on the researcher's desired approach to pupil's participation. A total of 16 groups across 4 schools were gained (see Table 3.3). With limited control over

participation, the sample of pupils comprised predominantly of white pupils, with only one Asian/Indian young man (group 11) and one black/afro-Caribbean young women (group 14). The age ranged between 11-16 years. The majority of the groups were friendship groups and others reported they were classmates. Group size varied from 3 to 8 depending on pupils' consent and availability.

Table 3.3 Breakdown of the focus groups

Group	Year	Number	Gender <sup>1</sup>	School
1	10	8	Mx (W=4, M=4)	Hatfield
2	10	4	Mx (W=1, M=3)	Hatfield
3	8	6	Mx (W=3, M=3)	Hansway
4	10	8	Mx (W=4, M=4)	Hansway
5	10	6	Mx (W=2, M=4)	Hansway
6	7	6	W	Low-valley
7	7	7	M	Low-valley
8	8	7	W	Low-valley
9	8	8	M	Low-valley
10	9	6	W	Low-valley
11	9	5	M	Low-valley
12	10	8	W	Low-valley
13	10	8	M	Low-valley
14	11	5	W	Low-valley
15	11	3	M	Low-valley
16	11	5	Mx (W=2, M=3)	Middleton
<sup>1</sup> W=Women, M=Men, Mx= Mixed		<b>Total 100</b>		

### 3.6 *Carrying out the study*

All secondary schools within three of South Yorkshire's main boroughs were invited to participate. A total of 82 schools were contacted and 26 responses were received (9 accepted, 7 pulled out, 10 declined). Initially, the first letter was addressed to the school Head Teacher but due to an extremely low response rate, each school's head of PSHE was contacted in order to forge a more direct relationship. An introductory meeting was offered to each teacher in order to meet the researcher, discuss the research further and explore each school's individual participation. The teacher was informed of the various elements of the research

study and in accordance, outlined their level of preferred participation. All the schools visited by the researcher differed in a number of ways regarding their SRE provision; while some had relatively regular and integrated provision; other schools had more limited and sporadic provision. Accordingly, these schools varied in terms of the amount of teachers involved in teaching SRE, its integration into PSHE and whether schools had a specialist department.

The study was conducted in accordance with BPS ethical guidelines. A Full CRB screening was completed in preparation for entering schools with clearance granted on 23/05/2007. The research was also approved by the Sheffield Hallam University Faculty of Development & Society Research Ethics Committee in September 2007. The local authority in charge of Children and Young People's services was also provided with full details of the research and consent was given to conduct this research in the chosen district. As one of the important 'gate keepers', this contact was deemed important for the way it facilitated and authorised access to schools in the chosen district. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, particularly for the way it involved pupil participation, three versions of the information sheet and consent form were prepared by the researcher (pupil, parent and teacher) in order to reduce potential anxiety and facilitate participation (see appendices A-E).

A research diary was kept over the full duration of the data collection period. Notes were often made within the school context or shortly after, and these included notes on comments and communications made by pupils and teachers. The discussions held between the researcher and teachers in particular carried out in the staffroom, before and after the SRE lessons and those that took place over email were all documented as they potentially provided important context for the research.

### ***3.7 Reflections around Researching a 'Delicate' Topic***

Like many other researchers who have studied young people in relation to SRE or sexuality before me, I experienced a number of difficulties at certain stages of this research (particularly the data collection process) that reflect the current fears and tensions associated with this subject area. Whilst many of these 'difficulties' were anticipated to a degree, the extent to which these impacted the research was underestimated. Many of these constraints and restrictions were overcome 'in situ', but they did have a substantial effect on the type and level of data I was able to collect. I have included these issues as a way of highlighting the inherent compromises to the research process, and for the way they highlight the furore and stigma that relates both to young people's sexuality and to SRE. These reflections are



therefore considered to be an important part of the research findings in their own right for what they say about the topic area.

### **3.7.1 Contact and Access**

Gaining access to schools to conduct this research was challenging for a number of reasons. Firstly, a large number of schools did not respond to requests regardless of the method used (i.e. seeking contact through the head or the SRE teacher) and the nature of the request. Secondly, the teachers that initially granted access (committing to an introductory meeting) shortly backed out of this agreement, commonly citing the opposition of senior management. Contrary to much research in this area that provokes strong refusals and concerns from teachers who are invited to take part in this kind of research (Kehily, 2002), I found more diplomatic refusals pertaining to teaching staff's busy workloads and their inability to accommodate the numerous requests they receive. While these types of refusals give the appearance of a more relaxed feeling around SRE, the more common refusal of silence from schools perhaps more accurately captures the way in which schools didn't wish to highlight their anxieties around this area. Many of the teachers expressed a number of small concerns around the research project, namely those related to their confidentiality and the effect of the research for individual schools. This was most evident where my access was denied after elements of the research appeared to cause concern and a level of suspicion in teachers. For example, after enquiries were made around the incorporation of sexual diversity in provision, one teacher conducted an internet search and denied access after reading my student profile and brief synopsis of my research proposal (which most pertinently mentioned LGB issues). In other cases, focus groups with the pupils were denied following interviews with their SRE teachers. In some instances, emails and phone calls were left unreturned despite some level of dialogue being established.

As contact was made with the PSHE co-ordinator in each school, all of the teachers who took part in the research were the authors/co-ordinators of the SRE programmes. It is also important to reflect on the reasons why those who responded to the letter did in fact do so, while others didn't. After the initial meeting with these teachers what became apparent was the way in which they all felt they had good, if not exceptional provision. An indication of this was the often 'promotional' nature of their talk around their provision. As authors of these programmes and the material used within them, they spoke positively about their provision. As two of the teachers had additional external roles (advisors/consultants), their reasons for

participating were often likened to 'showcasing' their provision in line with their external roles. As such, it is important to acknowledge the fact that those interviewed were markedly positive about their provision and had a vested interest in how this was received. This may have been the reason the concerns from SRE documented elsewhere were absent here.

### **3.7.2 Structural constraints on the Research**

Alongside the difficulties relating to researching sex and young people are those that pertain to researching in an educational context. Schools are as Allen (2005:21) concedes, “highly regulatory environments” where teachers often struggle within an over prescribed curriculum and pressures to fulfil certain academic attainments, to find time for PHSE or freedom with which to release pupils from their timetables. Time constraints also impacted upon my contact with teachers as discussions and interviews were often squeezed in between other commitments and were therefore dictated by the school bell. While many of the teachers agreed to the interview stage of the research, they had more reservations about focus groups with the pupils and the observation element of the project. In a couple of instances, teachers verbalised a number of stipulations to their interview participation, some of which outlined strict 'no-go areas'. Teachers' reservations were also evident in the repeated requests for reassurance around their anonymity, despite my previous rather explicit assurances. As such, the extent to which all schools participated within all three methods was extremely limited.

The 'control' I had hoped for around conducting the research in this context was compromised. This I feel was certainly linked to the challenges of the environment but appeared to be exacerbated by the anxieties that are held around this area of education. This certainly appeared to be the case from the way in which the focus groups were selected and carried out. Despite my efforts to ensure young people's participation was voluntary, pre-arranged and carried out in friendship groups, I was unable to control various stages of this process. Teachers would often use the pupils' SRE lesson time to take part in focus groups and as I was on standby in another room, I often had no indication of how these pupils were selected. As such some groups were classmates as opposed to friendship groups. Other constraints stemmed from conducting the focus groups in the school context where the discussions were often interrupted by teaching staff, support staff and other pupils needing access to the room. These constraints were not desirable and were unfortunately products of the limited control I had within this context. Moreover, in two schools, my ability to conduct focus group sessions was contingent on them being utilised to canvas young people's opinions around what they



would like from SRE. This was sought in order to establish some help within the set up of a more cohesive PSHE programme before an imminent Ofsted inspection. In these instances, I honoured this commitment before using the rest of the time to explore my own research objectives. The time constraints were felt most acutely on these occasions; the allocated 50-60 minute sessions were often concluded at the end of the period as opposed to the discussion coming to its natural end.

In carrying out the observations, the ability to capture the discourse was limited as my position and location within the classroom was dependent on the individual teacher. At times, I was placed at the front of the class at the teacher's desk where 'in situ' note taking was inappropriate. In some instances my presence was utilised by the teacher to supervise various activities and act as support teacher. While this inhibited note taking, it equally provided more fruitful insight. Again, the observation process highlights the controversial nature of this area as this elicited various anxieties for some teachers as they prohibited note taking.

### **3.7.3 Setting the scene: A reflexive account of the research process**

In this section, I wish to provide an account of the potential ways that my own background, position, personal assumptions and behaviour may have affected the research process and ultimately, the data collected. Given the nature of the literature, I had many concerns about certain aspects of this research, many of which centred on entering the research context and speaking with teachers. I held some anxieties about how I would be perceived and how this would affect my ability to conduct the research and foster a good relationship with these teachers.

When entering the school context, I became aware that my presence was also uncomfortable for teachers. I sensed some underlying reservation in their manner, which resulted in them being somewhat guarded during the process. This may have stemmed from my presence as a (psychology) researcher, focusing on what is often classed as a highly political and sensitive topic. Both schools and teachers are often subjected to scrutiny regarding their approach and delivery of SRE and this may have contributed towards their reserved behaviour. Certainly, my anxieties could have been attributed to these issues, in addition to a sense that they may perceive me primarily as a potential critic or saboteur rather than an ally. Although I



speculate on what the issue may have been for these teachers (if indeed they had any issues), my access and position within the school context was very much subject to a range of provisos that ultimately placed my research in potential jeopardy. I was acutely aware that my access was not only entirely dependent on the cooperation of the SRE teacher I was in contact with, but was subject to their continued satisfaction that I wasn't a risk to them or their school. With this knowledge I felt cautious and hesitant in my dealings with these individuals. This often led to some tensions regarding the ethics of the study: While I didn't wish to deceive them regarding the nature of the study, I certainly didn't want them to be aware of my true research motives. My position and status could therefore have been likened to an 'outsider'.

In some of the (SRE lesson) observations prior to interviews where I felt some level of struggle with the content (or lack thereof), I felt some level of discomfort towards the teacher as the author of that provision. I certainly noted that my initial impressions of some of the teachers had potentially affected my perceptions of their approach to the subject. For example, I felt Carl was rather dogmatic in his approach to SRE. This was perhaps guided by my initial impressions on my first visit, where I was drawn to a poster on his wall which stated "I am the boss, no questions, no arguments; its my way or the highway". While this may have been selected for its humorous value, I noted this in my research diary and consider it an apt representation of what appeared to be his teaching philosophy.

While I certainly felt uncomfortable in instances where the teachers had an oppositional view of SRE to mine, I do wonder if some of the discomfort I felt in these teachers presence impacted on my interview practice and my ability to get an 'insiders' perspective. The interviews did at times feel constrained: At certain points I felt frustrated with the types of questions I was asking and the responses they were giving. Teachers were often very defensive and reluctant to step out of their professional roles to give more personal responses. In reflecting on this, potentially, it may have been because I (a researcher and potential critic) was asking. I came to associate the shortcomings of my approach with our difference in professions and often differing positions on the subject. My anxieties about not asking the right questions (or getting the 'right' types of responses) obviously centred on concerns about not getting the 'right' type of data. In reflecting on the responses given, I realised the data could be a product of the subject and the political context it is generated in and as such, interesting in and of itself. Questions in particular around diversity issues that caused some

discomfort in teachers and which resulted in some very interesting defensive rhetoric, left me feeling guilty of allowing my own anxieties to impact on my interview technique. In these instances, I often failed to challenge or follow up on their responses for fear of crossing the line. Given the barriers I had previously experienced, I therefore made the and often uneasy decision to leave certain things unchallenged. In these instances I felt guilty of reinforcing heteronormative values and assumptions. Reflecting on my interview approach in such instances is of importance for the way it ultimately shapes the accounts produced. In this instance, a more active and challenging interviewing style may have pushed interviewees into having to continually assemble, modify and formulate their responses. As such, it would have presented the opportunity to capture more discursive manoeuvres made by teachers to account for their provision. As a result, the accounts may be missing more strong evaluative talk. To a lesser extent, the line of inquiry established in the interview may have also influenced the focus on certain ways of accounting or what may have been prioritised by the teachers within their talk.

While the time I spent in the school context presented some level of anxiety, this differed greatly from my relationship with the pupils. I felt that my presence (as another adult) may have impacted on their responses, but I was pleasantly surprised that this didn't appear to be the case. Most pupils seemed unconcerned by my presence in classrooms and appeared to enjoy the discussions the within the focus group. In some instances they would encourage me to take part in their activities and seek my advice over the teacher's. The pupils appeared not to see me as an 'outsider', instead granting myself (albeit perhaps temporally) access to their social worlds. This was reflected in their requests to see me again "just to talk" and in their compliments. These comments and the way they appeared to enjoy the opportunity to talk in their groups seemed to indicate a level of comfort and rapport.

In some instances, the value attributed to the research process and the apparent gains seemed to reflect the level of SRE the pupils received in their school. Whilst the schools with more consistent provision seemed to utilise this as an evaluative process, pupils located within patchier provision took the opportunity to ask questions typically addressed in SRE lessons. This included asking more personal advice related to puberty and STIs, and using this time to share various anxieties they had around sexual issues. In these instances, they seemed to value the opportunity to speak openly. While the differences are important for illustrating the

differences between the pupils' individual school provision, they also illustrate some of the ethical challenges I faced in these situations. For example, while many of these pupils were seeking important information, my inability to step outside of my researcher role into one of SRE 'expert' meant that I couldn't provide this information. While I did my best to advise them on points of information or services, this was very difficult for me, especially where I could see clear gaps in young people's sexual health knowledge and therefore potential issues around vulnerability. It was in these instances that I felt most constrained by my role as researcher. These particular ethically important moments also appeared where the pupils disclosed personal (often sexual) stories and information. Whilst I purposely refrained from inquiring into their personal and sexual lives, I was surprised by their willingness to disclose such information. I found it difficult to manage these instances carefully without closing down the conversation or without jeopardising their trust. I had to remain vigilant to the discussions unfolding, confidentiality and young people's feelings. It was in these moments that I felt the imposition of my role most explicitly.

Another dimension of the research process worth reflecting on is the observational aspect of data collection. This element was without question, one of the most enjoyable aspects of the process and equally, one of the most challenging. Overall, I wish to highlight the way such an account can provide a rich source of data detailing by affective and performative aspects of the research. From my observations across the schools, it was clear that the discomfort I felt was associated with the type of provision I was observing and certain aspects of tutor-pupil interactions. In many cases, my reactions were varied: Whilst certain schools left me feeling a little dismayed, mainly owing to the limited nature of the provision, my strongest reactions were felt most acutely in the time I spent in Trencham. These emotions were linked to the nature of the messages presented and the impact they had on me as I sat amongst the pupils. I attributed these emotions to my status as an atheist and to a certain degree, a female. For this school, all of the SRE information was based on a Christian perspective and therefore an abstinence approach. It was therefore extremely moralistic and gendered. This was a struggle for me, particularly as the majority of the messages ignored the socio-demographic status of many of the pupils (those living within one parent families in areas known for high rates of STIs and pregnancy). As a female who believes that all young people are entitled to SRE that is comprehensive and inclusive to their diverse needs, I found these messages extremely judgemental, often damaging and merely partial. The root of my frustrations seemed to stem



from the fact that this provision was leaving young people vulnerable, particularly young women.

These feelings intensified in my observation of lessons which aimed to promote the benefits of getting married over living together. In these lessons, the teachers would often role-play with another teacher, with one acting at being pro-cohabitation whilst the other was pro-marriage. All teachers who delivered SRE in this school were Christians, and the person acting out the pro-cohabitating view mobilised very stilted and 'promiscuous' attitudes to highlight the benefits of living together. The position of living together outside of marriage was always referred to as "trying it out". The final message would highlight that marriage is "god's plan" and living together discourages people from making a commitment. From the start, I was aware of the issues relating to such a message and its potential impact on the pupils.

The nature of the messages became increasingly upsetting, as they became more damning, largely for young women. One particular lesson titled 'too special to spoil' and included the question 'why keep sex for marriage?'. This lesson involved a teacher unwrapping a champagne flute from tissue paper whilst admiring it and saying what a "precious, delicate and beautiful object" it was before smashing it on the table. He then talked about how it had become a dangerous object that was "broken and ruined". I remember sitting there aghast knowing where he was going with this very symbolic display. I was correct, when he started making the analogy between the glass and those who have sex before marriage and who were "damaged". The final blow came when he addressed the pupils by stating that boys wouldn't like second hand clothes or Christmas presents, so they also wouldn't want to marry a girl that have been damaged. My reaction was clear from my research diary: *I feel sick, angry, and extremely mad. How must these girls feel who have already had sex? What is this teaching young men? I feel totally horrified. I am sat amongst these young people looking around and I see a group of people who look uncomfortable and perplexed. I want to walk out and take them all with me.* This lesson wasn't unique, it often reappeared throughout other lessons in some form, typically using bits of paper glued together. Pupils were asked to separate the paper, which would of course, would always tear. An analogy would then be drawn between those who have sex in a relationship and become 'damaged' and those that don't. Again, the final message would always be directed at the young women who were told to protect their "purity".

Again, while I can't be sure that the pupils felt the same way I did, I felt like one of them, most likely because I was positioned amongst them, but also because we seemed to have similar reactions. This sense of having a shared understanding with the pupils appeared in my notes where I wrote *“one girl looked at me as if to gauge my feelings, my response to what was being delivered, whilst there were no words, I felt we shared a moment of feeling sad and dismayed”*.

While I found it difficult to hide my emotions in this school, I also found it hard to manage my prejudices towards the messages delivered lessons and towards the teachers delivering them. The teachers were passionate about their religion and their approach. While I felt that I had to hide my own views from the teachers, this was not reciprocated. For example, I was often asked about my religious faith or what church I was part of. Upon responding that I wasn't religious, I was often advised that I should be and on one occasion told that “it wasn't a good place to be”. It was in these moments that I felt the message and approach were used to fanatically.

The time I spent in this school was certainly more challenging than those spent for example in other schools but these weren't without issues. I felt for example, extremely uncomfortable in Hatfield with the types of highly gendered and often heterosexist interactions between the teacher and the pupils. While this was often produced under ‘banter-like’ conversations, I felt the teacher reinforced gendered notions of sexuality and heterosexist attitudes in his interactions with the pupils. Similarly, he also failed to challenge prolific instances of homophobic verbal abuse in the classroom. It was again in these instances, that I felt the imposition of playing a non-participatory role. These are some of the illuminating moments in my research, in addition to some of the more ethically and personally challenging moments I grappled with. Such issues highlight the value of this research and also highlights that it is not a neutral one.

The following chapters aim to examine the research questions set out in this chapter; chapter 4 begins by examining the way SRE is constructed on a policy level and subsequent chapters move on to examining how this is done within the school context, namely, at the level of the individual teacher and pupil.



## 4 Examining SRE Policy

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### 4.1 *Introduction*

To inform the subsequent analyses, this chapter provides an analysis of a draft policy text relating to SRE which operates in the context of primary and secondary education in England. The chapter aims to examine the policy context within which current SRE provision is placed, thus providing a context from which to understand the current research and the SRE programmes examined within this thesis. As highlighted in chapter 1, all SRE is designed and delivered within and against a backdrop of policy, which informs its nature and scope. Importantly, this research took place during a time where a number of changes were being initiated by the (then) Labour Government regarding SRE's non-statutory status. The changes proposed by this Government principally centred around making SRE statutory which involved replacing existing SRE guidance to reflect this change in status.

In proposing a number of changes, the document highlights the troubled and political history of SRE. In analysing the nature of this document, this chapter provides an analysis of the various propositions outlined, along with the different discourses (both around young people and SRE) it contains. The analysis is used as a means of identifying various assumptions regarding SRE content and delivery, along with ideas around 'appropriate' sexual behaviour. It will also provide a basis from which to understand the range of approaches taken by SRE teachers throughout the thesis.

### 4.2 *The Document*

The draft sex and relationship guidance to schools in England was produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It was released for a three month period of consultation in January 2010, with the final version intended for publication in June later that year. Upon publication, this guidance aimed to replace the existing department guidance (2000) and was written in line with Labour Government proposals to make PSHE a statutory subject as part of the national curriculum in England (which includes SRE) at both primary and secondary school level (key stages 1-4) by 2011. This proposal was included in the Children, Schools and Families (CSF) bill (clause 10-14) which, at the time this draft guidance was published, was still awaiting approval by Parliament. The document makes

reference to the Government's intentions to implement these changes, which it refers to as imminent. As such it outlines proposals regarding the nature of SRE under this new status. The other key proposal made by the document is the *statutory* provision of SRE for those at a younger age (i.e. primary school children).

The intended audience for this guidance encompasses all professionals who contribute towards the provision of PSHE and SRE at primary and secondary schools (including specialist schools and pupil referral units), as outlined under "*Who is this guidance for*" (Section 1.2). While it indicates that this guidance can be used by all professionals (teachers, non-teaching staff, and nurses) who work with young people on aspects relating to SRE and PSHE, head teachers and school governors are required to "*have regard to the guidance*" (Section 1), that is, they are legally required to be familiar with it. Additionally, the document explicates the role head teachers and governors should play in ensuring that statutory requirements are met and that policy is up to date. The information is presented under the heading "*The legal position on SRE*" (Section 1.5) and refers to the specific sections of the Education Acts (1996; 2002) where these requirements are outlined.

Based on the provisional nature of the document, its legal position at the time it was issued for consultation was non-statutory. As such, both the guidance and the proposal to make SRE statutory (within the framework of PSHE) remained only a recommendation of good practice. The guidance therefore, at the time of being issued under consultation and before the proposal to go statutory being passed in parliament, carried the same weight as the existing guidance (2000). Upon PSHE being made statutory (a premise the guidance is ultimately predicated on), the guidance would then also be statutory under this policy change. This document reflects the lack of power the Government has continued to have over SRE outside of the national science curriculum, and as such the potential impact it can make without statutory status. The implications of non-statutory SRE may result in various discrepancies emerging between policy and practice as knowledge around key policy and guidance remain low. Additionally, the responsibility over SRE may be deferred or overlooked as a result of inconsistent provision within schools. Notwithstanding, this document continues to stand as official discourse around SRE and as such, has the ability to influence the scope of what may be taught in the classroom.

Despite being a document written on behalf of the previous Labour Government, formation of this policy appears to reflect negotiation by various stakeholders. This is apparent

throughout the document where it includes the many voices of those it claims to represent (i.e. young people, teachers, authorities, parents). In being written this way, it effectively speaks on behalf of the interested (and presumably, expert) parties. Moreover, it is also framed as collaborative, incorporating and managing the voices of the different people and organisations involved in the drafting process, including various steering groups, health charities, faith groups and young people. Conversely, it also stands as part of a chain of policy procedure, and thus, as part of a wider national agenda, written in accordance with major economic, social and political concerns. These concerns are implicit within the document, given the more immediate rhetorical work being carried out (i.e. that which effectively tries to promote the framework outlined). This ‘work’ is accomplished by placing particular emphasis on the Government’s strategies to improve the health and well-being of young people. Therefore on the face of it, the document stands as an attempt to create improvements in SRE. However, as specified above, the text is doing much more than this.

While the guidance states a number of specific aims, it exists within a wider social and political context that inextricably contributes towards its intended purpose and overall content. The aim of this guidance should therefore be considered in light of these wider contextual issues in an attempt to understand its intended rhetorical effect and as part of the ideological work it does.

The document exists as a small piece of the overall picture in SRE theorising, through its relation to other texts. In considering it as part of a bigger text, it is dialogical (Bakhtin, 1986); organised in relation to, and as part of, a complex chain of thought around SRE. That is, it exists in relation to, and as a response to things that have been said before. While policy documents are not typically dialogical because they avoid intertextualising different voices, this document’s dialogical manner can be considered in light of the sensitive and somewhat exceptional nature of the subject it pertains to. The legal position of this document, along with the stake many interest groups have in this area of education, reflects its departure from other policy formats and ultimately contributes therefore towards its more persuasive ambition.



#### 4.2.1 The Context

At the time this draft guidance was issued for consultation, the DCSF was the government department that dealt with education provision for those up to the age of 19. During this period of consultation, the Department for Education (DfE) replaced the DCSF after a change in government in 2010. The change in government that occurred shortly after the publication of this guidance (under consultation) prevented the Government's response to the feedback given under this period of public consultation. As produced under Labour Government, this document reflected the party's (more liberal) views of SRE and policy-making. The proposal to make PSHE compulsory, along with other key policies that reflect Labour's aims, was abandoned after encountering political opposition by the Conservative party. Accordingly, this document does not reflect current Conservative policy as indicated by their consequent obstruction of the publication of this guidance (which appears to be indefinite). The concerns the Conservative Government have with Labour's proposals further highlight the diverging political views around SRE provision and the sway political parties continue to have over this area of education.

Under the current Coalition Government, plans to develop SRE remain unclear. While their remains pressure on the Government to provide information on future policy regarding SRE, as of yet, there appears to be no signs of the Government making any headway on this issue. While the position of the current Government is unclear, the DOE have issued a statement stating that: *"DfE Ministers are currently considering the future scope of the National Curriculum and whether there should be any additional requirements on schools regarding what they must teach. This includes consideration of the position of sex and relationships education (SRE)".* It goes on to state that Ministers will be announcing their proposals later this year. While this date has clearly passed, they state that *"whatever the future position and status of SRE, Ministers have been clear that they want SRE delivery to have a much stronger focus on relationships"* (DOE, 2011).

While the policy was never actualised, the guidance reflects the broader socio-economic and political context through which many teachers and the Government were negotiating SRE provision, and as such, it is felt to reflect the issues most prominent at the time the data for this thesis was collected.

This guidance was produced at a time when certain proposals around SRE provision, particularly those outlined for primary schools, faced fierce opposition in the public sphere.

These issues, along with aspects of this draft guidance, have played out in the media in various sensationalised headlines and articles: “The most widespread child abuse in Britain is perpetrated by the Government” (The Telegraph, 2009), “Pupils to be taught about sex at seven”, (The Telegraph 2010). As illustrated in these headlines, certain aspects of the proposals were met with fierce public and political opposition, particularly the recommendation that SRE be made compulsory for all key stages within the curriculum, in addition to proposals to lower parents’ right to withdraw their children from SRE from 19 to 15. In defending the Government’s support for these changes, the Department’s press release sought to establish credible support for the proposed changes as it listed the various stakeholders involved in the drafting process. The then Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, stated that these decisions were based on a period of consultation with parents and adults, and therefore those that were made after careful deliberation “with experts and other interested parties” (DCSF News, 2009). In citing the various organisations and steering groups involved in this process as part of the rationale for these changes, the Government was heavily engaged in defending these moves.

As illustrated, the nature of this document, particularly the socio-political context from which it was produced, has to be considered in relation to the nature of the information contained within it. As the document reflects a contentious aspect of policy making, it invariably walks a treacherous path, as it aims to improve SRE (which entails some contentious changes), and resolve long held anxieties relating to this area of young people’s schooling. This is evident where the guidance engages in a level of strong rhetoric around the approach outlined, in addition to where it embarks on defending the various changes proposed. As this guidance attempts to manage this struggle and achieve the various tasks involved in this process, one of which is naming the scope of SRE, the features of the document attend to SRE as political, contested and problematic.

## **4.2.2 Overall features of the document**

### **4.2.2.1 Summary**

The guidance is prefaced with an overview (“*Executive Summary*”, p. 1-3), which outlines its separation into five sections. Each section provides a brief outline regarding the information contained in the document along with the various sub-sections. As section one serves as a general introduction aimed at setting up the nature and purpose of the document, it also indicates who this document serves. Within this brief overview, the guidance immediately



engages in a process of defending its position, along with various objectives. This is evident in the information presented here outlining the purpose of “*effective SRE*” and its importance within the school context (referenced as that outlined within section 1.3). Section two, titled “*Understanding SRE*”, outlines the section within the document that delineates the position on SRE advocated in the guidance. As part of this, we are briefly provided with recommendations (and justifications) for SRE to be delivered as part of PSHE. Expectations of parents and carers are also referenced, as well as evidence supporting the outlined proposals. Section three, headed “*Planning and Teaching Effective SRE*”, outlines the measures schools are obligated to enforce for SRE, along with various roles staff are expected to play. This section also makes reference to the wider responsibility it deems schools should play in building “*strong partnerships*” with parents, carers, community organisations and various key faith and cultural groups (p. 3). The role school governors and senior management are also expected to play is also mentioned here (as outlined in sections 3.11-3.13). Section four is titled “*SRE within a whole school approach*”. This section sets out the expectation for SRE to be part of a wider and integrated school approach. As indicated, the relevant section in the guidance sets SRE as part of an existing school framework, supported by specialist policy. Section five, “*Resources for teaching and learning*” highlights this document as a practical resource for those seeking guidance in delivering SRE. This is illustrated in the appendices, which contains a checklist for planning, teaching and reviewing SRE. The nature of the summary further functions as a quick referencing tool for the user. Overall, the summary indicates the way in which the document carries out ideological work as it lays the SRE philosophy, and functional work, as it creates a ‘how to’ guide.

In addition to providing an overview, the process of summarising illustrates the information that is deemed essential. It gives a sense of how the text is organised, and what is prioritised in each section. Accordingly, the aims and objectives of the guidance are explicated here, along with what it includes and whom it’s for. In making a series of claims (i.e. what SRE is), it aims to clarify a subject that has open to (mis)interpretation. The use of various modalising words such as ‘should’ littered throughout the document is also reflective of its various objectives. Furthermore, use of a number of declarative statements of how SRE ought to be indicates a level of ideological work carried out through this document.



#### 4.2.2.2 Structure and Content

The order in which the information is presented in the document is important, as it appears to reflect the contested nature of the subject. It was noted earlier that the introduction addresses the importance of SRE, and section two “*Understanding SRE*” provides a definition of SRE and supporting evidence for this approach. In structuring the information this way, the document moves between building a case for SRE and delineating a method for how it should be taught. The promotional aspect of this is particularly evident throughout the document, particularly within the introductory section, where it outlines the Government’s intent for a new standardised approach (“*Changes proposed by Statutory PSHE education*” Section 1.6, p. 7).

The aforementioned use of headings is made more prominent in the instances in which they are posed as questions such as: “*What is sex and relationship education?*” “*What should be taught in SRE?*” (Section 2.2, p. 9), “*What needs to improve?*” (Section 2.5, p. 14). These subheadings highlight the rhetorical nature of this document through its attempt to clarify uncertainty around provision. Moreover, these questions mirror those asked of SRE on a wider social and political level. They also further reflect the document’s dialogical element as it represents part of a consultation process and the voices of the main stakeholders it serves. As such, all headings (for example, “*Why sex and relationships education is important*”, Section 1.3, p. 5) serve to mark this area of education as vital, and not open for debate or interpretation.

While the structure of the document helps identify important factors, some select text (presented in bold) also marks specific information as significant, indicating key elements of SRE provision. For example, under the section “*Where SRE should be taught*” (section 2.3, p. 11), there are five criteria in bold which emphasise aspects of SRE provision deemed central for SRE to become a more comprehensive subject. These elements include “*Continuity and progression*”, “*Integration within PSHE*” and “*Cross curricular links*”, illustrating a vision of SRE as integrated within a wider school programme, as referenced in the ‘whole school approach’. From this, it is clear that the Government seeks to elevate the status of SRE through the wider school curriculum. Other information presented in bold is similarly used to signal information of importance to the intended audience, all reflecting issues in SRE that call for change and clarification. These issues reflect the proscriptive and argumentative

element of this document, illustrated by the use of conjunctions. For example, in the following excerpt, the document considers parents right of withdrawal as problematic:

“Parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from SRE taught outside of the science national curriculum-but if they choose to withdraw their children from school provision they have a responsibility to provide alternative SRE” (Section 2.6.1, p. 15).

This segment outlines the parental right to withdraw their children from SRE. Using the conjunction ‘but’ however, makes it clear that this decision is not definitive; it establishes that parents have a responsibility to provide their children with SRE in the absence of school provision. Placing this information in bold highlights this information in such a way that it can’t be misconstrued (i.e. seen as an ‘opt out’ subject). This appears as a means by which this document can outline the rights of parents, whilst still emphasising young people’s entitlement to SRE.

The issue of responsibility is clearly demarked throughout the document, but features most evidently where bold text is used. As above, there is emphasis on parental responsibility over and above that of the school, but it also outlines where responsibility falls within the school context. This is highlighted more explicitly in the following two excerpts.

“However, class tutors should not be expected to deliver SRE if they have not received specific training, or to provide SRE in short tutorial times ” (Section 3.3, p. 25).

“Non-teaching staff have an invaluable role to play in supporting delivery of SRE but should not be used as a substitute for teachers” (Section 3.4.2, p. 27).

Again, this information clarifies issues that have previously hindered provision. These segments appear to specifically determine the responsibility teachers have in providing SRE and the level of expertise expected of those that deliver it. As such, the bold information appears to reflect aspects that are subject to some influence, but are not open to interpretation or negotiation.

An additional feature that functions to establish the importance of SRE and the advocated approach is the inclusion of various case studies and quotes from pupils and head teachers which feature in the text as ‘success stories’. It also includes other more directive information

such as sample lesson activities, schemes of work and curriculum checklists. Each of these elements is presented in a distinctive format that distinguishes this type of information from the other information, thus, highlighting the document's function as a pedagogical tool (for those who wish to use it as such). As such, these distinct ways of presenting information therefore reflect the various objectives of this guidance; one of which is to do policy-making, the other to provide information. In combining the two objectives, on the surface, we can see that this is not unlike many other policy-making documents.

### ***4.3 Building justification for the current SRE approach***

#### **4.3.1 The rhetorical deployment of 'child protection'**

The rhetorical functions of the document appear most explicit where it works to provide rationale for the value of SRE. The importance and preoccupation with building justification can be understood in light of certain common held beliefs around SRE. As highlighted in chapter 1, SRE has long been considered a subject that has been undervalued and deprioritised. As part of promoting SRE as fundamental to young people's well-being, this guidance attempts to present it as a crucial part of education. As SRE is a particular concern for the parents and carers of children, the document aims to reduce these concerns before outlining the nature of SRE and the advocated approach, which without adequate justifications, may otherwise be rebuffed. This is highlighted by the fact that the section titled "*Why SRE is important*" (Section 1.3, p. 5) preludes the rest of the information and signals that justification for SRE is still required. As the document continues to outline a new approach for SRE (characterised by its position with PSHE and its new statutory status), this information proves crucial for producing agreement. The justification worked up in this document illustrates careful management of both SRE as a delicate subject area and of the changes proposed. This is achieved by presenting arguments aimed at building consensus by mobilising various discourses around the importance of SRE for pupils; more specifically, a child protection discourse, which emphasises the role of SRE in protecting young people from harm. It also highlights the many educational and developmental benefits young people gain from SRE. This is evident in the following excerpt, which emphasises the role SRE plays in the prevention of abuse by equipping young people with the language through which to identify it:



“Learning the words to describe feelings and emotions, the correct terms for parts of the body and developing “health literacy” is vital for children to stay safe and seek help if they feel at risk or are being harmed” (Section 1.3, p. 5).

Use of the words “*risk*” and “*harm*” highlight the importance of SRE for young people, and appeal to the need to protect children from danger. The use of such words is intentional, as is evident in the plethora of discourses that could have been deployed here. The first part of this extract (up to the word children) could have been followed by any of the many innumerable benefits young people gain from SRE, for example, “*to go on to develop a strong sense of sexuality*”. Instead, it attributes the importance of young people gaining these skills, to the avoidance of abuse. Not only does this type of discourse mirror wider concerns regarding the increased awareness of the abuse of young people, it also appeals to the more general need of parents to protect their children from harm. Any notion of harm towards children signals significant concern among parents and carers; a strategy borne out of concern to preserve the ‘innocence’ of childhood (Jackson, 1982). Therefore, this particular discourse is used primarily for the way it incites the agreement of even those who may oppose SRE. Presented in this way, even for the most resistant, SRE becomes difficult to oppose and is therefore favourable over and above alternative discourses surrounding sexuality such as those around pleasure, agency and desire, which are often construed as promoting young people’s sexual behaviour and practices. Clearly, the de-emphasis of sexuality is thought to be reflective of the more conservative nature of young people’s sexuality in the UK.

As we can see then, the child protection discourse features as a particularly persuasive and thus, strategic means of influencing attitudes, for those opposed to importance of SRE. While previous guidance (and indeed, proponents of SRE) have emphasised the preventative role of SRE in reducing risky sexual behaviour, the nature of risk has been upgraded and the role of young people has been downgraded in this instance. While their active role in these negative outcomes is implicit to this problem (i.e. by partaking in sexual activity they are vulnerable to its negative outcomes); their role in issues of abuse is considerably different. This is marked by the compromised issue of consent, and thereby warrants a more active and direct intervention. Here, young people’s role in sexual activity becomes less clear-cut; sexual activity is not something young people choose to take part in, but something that happens to them. This shift in responsibility is important, as it takes on a different imperative; something

that parents and carers have to respond to and as such, increases support when utilised to justify SRE.

Therefore, while a risk reduction argument is still utilised as a main justification for requiring SRE, it is now mobilised in a more obvious manner. It has become a stronger argument against even the most ardent opponents of SRE through its appeal to the shared instinct of safeguarding “*children*”. The rhetoric of risk and safety continues throughout this document, most evidently amongst information concerned with establishing SRE’s importance. Again, this particular point is emphasised over and above those pertaining to young people’s sexuality, the latter of which is arguably less legitimate. Such discourses are selected for the way they present a more compelling argument for SRE advocates, particularly when attempting to create change. This is evident amongst information presented at the start of the document, where it emphasises the importance of safety as a shared enterprise.

**“Every parent and every school wants to see children grow up safely and be able as an adult to enjoy the positive benefits of loving, rewarding and responsible relationships, to be informed, comfortable with the changes during puberty and emotionally supported”** (Section 1.3, p. 5, emphasis added).

In addition to the child protection discourse, the appeal to parents and teachers is more explicit where it emphasises the shared commitment between these groups. Given the crucial role the Government believes parents (and schools) should play in SRE (a tenet emphasised throughout this document), this is an important move that rests on gaining their approval. One way to do this is to establish schools as having the best interests of the pupil at heart. By presenting SRE as being in the best interests of pupils is a particularly useful tool for what follows, namely text that stresses the “*vital*” and “*lead*” role it requires parents to take in this area (Section 1.3, p. 5). Such arguments appeal rather strongly to these objectives, as every parent may not want their children to learn about sex, but every parent certainly wants their child to “*grow up safely*” and have “*responsible relationships*”. Again, we can see that different formulations of parents’ aspirations for their children’s relationships are absent here in favour of those characterised by responsibility. Framing the argument in this way however contributes to its overall efficacy.



#### 4.4 *Conceptualising SRE*

Further ideological work is most evident in information that conveys how SRE is conceptualised. This establishes the rationale for the approach formulated. Given SRE is highly contested and has been subject to various moral and value frameworks since its emergence, this document becomes another part of its ideological history. As such, it becomes important to examine how the guidance defines SRE, the scope of its content and how it attempts to negotiate a new value framework, particularly in light of its main proposals to change the status of SRE. As part of attempts to steer SRE in a new direction, some focus is placed on issues such as diversity and inclusion, in addition to the well-being of young people, in line with a rights based or ‘progressive’ approach. This is evidenced throughout the document and can be seen within section two of the document “*Understanding SRE*” (p. 9) where the nature and scope of SRE is outlined under subsection 2.1 “*What is SRE?*”:

“SRE is learning about our bodies, health and relationships; with a particular focus on puberty and growing up, sexual health, sexual intimacy, dealing with emotions and managing personal relationships” (p. 9).

As this excerpt establishes a definition around SRE, it also marks the first and only shift from a third person tense to a first person and includes the use of the deictic category “*our*”. Its use here is important for the document’s persuasive aims; this shift positions the reader within this discourse, setting them as part of the subject matter. This encourages them to identify with young people’s needs as part of their own, which is of importance given that the guidance is attempting to outline issues open to contention, namely; what the subject of SRE is, and what the sexual needs of young people are. As it does this, the guidance also delineates the current notions and beliefs around what the nature of SRE should be. This is intentionally broad and inevitably vague, which is apparent where it presents the main aspects as based around three topic areas; “*SRE is about learning about bodies, health and relationships*”. This deliberate vagueness remains subject to the various interpretations of those reading it. While the initial use of “*bodies*” can encompass many different aspects of body awareness, sexual, physical, and biological, it appears that this in fact only refers to the biological and developmental as occurring during puberty. The same appears to be true, in relation to the meaning of “*health*”; despite the fact that the understanding of health encompasses much more than the absence of illness (its cover all types of well-being, including sexual, emotional and physical aspects), it only relates to young people’s “*sexual*



*health*” in this instance. So, whilst meanings of various aspects of SRE appear to be broad enough to cater for breadth of topic, this is closed off where these terms are further specified. It therefore appears that while this document demonstrates attempts to define the focus of SRE, there is a level of strategic vagueness (Edwards & Potter, 1992). This strategy effectively provides enough information to satisfy the target audience, without pinning down actual specifics.

In setting the nature and scope of SRE within the document, there is a clear absence of the word sex. This is notable, given the nature of the subject and appears to reflect wider reluctance not only to address young people as sexual beings, but also to address SRE as a subject that facilitates them as such. While the use of the word sex is absent, the term “*sexual intimacy*” (Section 2.1, p. 9) is utilised instead. While the use of this expression appears to reflect efforts to broaden the scope of SRE and acknowledge young people’s sexual activity, it also reflects a more conservative approach when referring to such matters. “*Intimacy*” denotes something inherently more palatable than sex: It implies an emotional connection between those who engage in sexual activity (incidentally, a prerequisite to sex heavily promoted in SRE). In employing the term “*sexual intimacy*”, the guidance is therefore acknowledging young people’s sexual realities, and the wide range of sexual activities this can include. As such, this term complies with various efforts outlined to promote inclusivity and diversity. Despite many curtailments evident through the nature of the terminology used in trying to delineate the subject, there appears to be some acknowledgement of the wider social and emotional aspects of sex. This is evidenced through the focus it sets around “*dealing with emotions*” and “*managing personal relationships*” (Section 2.1, p. 9). In acknowledging these issues, the guidance is setting the boundaries around what is taught within SRE in a way that is broad without giving the appearance of limiting the nature of this subject.

So while the scope of SRE appears here to be widened with the emotional and relationship aspects of sex included in provision, greater emphasis is still placed on the more biological and health related aspects of sex. As illustrated in the excerpt below, certain elements of SRE appear to hold more significance, particularly in their application to young people. More biological aspects of provision such as puberty and sexual health appear over and above the aforementioned social and personal elements. With this, the guidance contributes towards

creating a hierarchy of sexual information within SRE, with more emphasis placed on the potential negative outcomes arising from sexual behaviour.

“SRE should enable young people to develop skills and confidence to access professional advice and appropriate health services” (Section 2.1, p. 9).

As is evident from this excerpt, the importance of acknowledging sexual health services within SRE is explicated in this document, along with wider sexual health imperatives. More specifically, SRE is implicated as having a fundamental role in young people’s “*skills*” to utilise these services. It also highlights various intentions to produce some form of standardisation in provision in line with other national curriculum subjects, where learning outcomes are set, measured and levels of understanding assessed. This is reflected in the document as it outlines “*knowledge and understanding*” as one of the three main learning outcomes of SRE, along with “*Values and attitudes*” and “*Personal and social skills*” (Section 2.2).

Through specifying the broad learning outcomes that young people are expected to gain from their SRE programmes, the guidance is again establishing firm parameters around SRE. By attaining these learning outcomes, young people are then able to “*make informed decisions and healthier lifestyle choices*” (Section 2.1, p. 9). While not specified, such rhetoric is reminiscent of that mobilised in promoting sexual abstinence. Typically, young people are advised to make the ‘healthy decision’ of abstaining from sexual activity. In addition to specifying *what* students are expected to learn from SRE, the guidance also specifies *how* this should be experienced. For example, the guidance not only specifies the type of knowledge young people are expected to gain on topics such as pregnancy, development, reproduction, sexual health services, and legal aspects of sexual behaviour, but also states that they should also “*learn how to resist unwelcome pressures to be sexually active*” (Section 2.2.2, p. 10). Here we can see that young people are positioned as potential victims of unwanted pressure, which effectively denies their positioning as an active, ‘desiring’ sexual agent. This works to reinforce SRE as a means by which to protect them from sexual activity as opposed to facilitating it.

In addition to knowledge and skills, the guidance also specifies that SRE must inform young people about certain values and attitudes surrounding sexual issues, including mutual respect and acceptance of diversity. The reasoning behind this is specified as relating to “*the*

*personal and social nature of the topics covered in SRE*". One of the more fundamental values emphasised specifies certain ideals around relationship and family structure.

"The value of family life, marriage and of loving and stable relationships in bringing up children" (Section 2.2.1, p. 9).

Like the existing (2000) guidance, marriage has been specified as an important value for family life and growing up, but this is widened through the addition of certain types of relationships considered beneficial ("*loving and stable relationships*"). Such additions reflect clear attempts to acknowledge the diversity in relationships in modern society (e.g. gay relationships and civil partnerships). Interestingly however, the word marriage is still present, although it could in fact fall under the umbrella of a "*loving and stable relationship*". This can be argued as contradictory as it features alongside (previously mentioned) values such as acceptance of diversity. By singling marriage out, this places more emphasis on it compared to all other types of relationship.

Another example of where the guidance promotes the value of marriage over other relationship forms is presented below:

"SRE should help children and young people to understand the importance of marriage and stable and loving relationships for family life" (Section 3.1, p. 21).

Here we can see that the guidance is explicitly promoting marriage and in doing so, is undermining other values promoted in the document. This is potentially problematic in that it leaves considerable space for those using this guidance (i.e. both educator and school), particularly schools with a religious ethos, to continue to present family life and marriage synonymously. The continued prioritisation of marriage in SRE, reflects the continued influence of certain religious steering groups in the policy making process. As highlighted, in selecting and promoting the value of marriage in this way undermines the commitment made to other values advocated as part of SRE: "*Promotion of equality, inclusion & acceptance of diversity*" (Section 3.1, p. 20).

"SRE should promote awareness, respect and understanding for the wide range of practices and beliefs relating to sex and relationships within our society" (Section 3.1, p. 20).



While this excerpt clearly highlights attempts to promote acceptance in the diversity of practice and belief as part of a rights-based approach to SRE, we can see that this is weakened. While “*awareness*”, “*respect*” and “*understanding*” of diversity are considered crucial for creating acceptance, these terms are not certain to bring about equality. Merely having an *awareness*, *understanding* or indeed, *respect* of something, is certainly not sufficient for ensuring equality. In fact, such principles only appear to work towards reinforcing the discourse of ‘other’, instead of producing intrinsic equality.

#### **4.4.1 Delineating a fixed approach as part of an overarching philosophy**

Perhaps based on fact that SRE content has varied considerably, one of the main objectives of this document is to establish a clear approach to SRE as part of an overarching philosophy. It attempts to do so by establishing a number of set ‘principles’ that all SRE programmes should follow. This is set out in section three “*Planning and Teaching Effective SRE*”, effectively exerting some control over what information is taught in schools. As part of this, such guidelines include SRE being: “*Factually accurate and evidence based*”, “*Age appropriate*”, “*Sensitivity to faith and cultural perspectives*”, “*Promote equality, inclusion & acceptance of diversity*”, “*Promote strong and stable relationships*” and provide young people with an understanding of their “*Rights and responsibilities*”.

The importance of giving young people factual and accurate information is presented first and undoubtedly reflects wider sexual health aims. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this involves emphasis on the importance of information regarding contraception, STIs and pregnancy choices (a theme that runs throughout the guidance). Also stipulated is the importance religious schools have in ensuring they present their information without bias:

“Schools should make a clear distinction between factual information and views and beliefs” (Section 3.1, p. 19).

“Statistical information about norms and averages must be presented with sensitivity to the diversity of experience of children and young people. Some pupils may already have had sexual encounters in circumstances that may or may not have been in their control” (p. 19).

In line with issues in the guidance around diversity, this extract emphasises clear distinctions between fact and beliefs in SRE. Although this is clearly intended to apply to all schools, it more strongly alludes to those with a strong religious ethos, who both pose the most risk of

presenting morally loaded information and are likely to be at odds with the sexual health initiatives SRE is legally obliged to work within. Thus, although the message does not discourage sensitivity towards faiths, it highlights that beliefs should not hinder the factual and legal aspects of information. As such, it attempts to strike a balance between both religious and non-religious approaches:

“Faith and cultural beliefs have an important role in shaping children and young people’s views and decisions about sex and relationships. It is right, therefore, that in helping children and young people to make positive and informed choices, faith and cultural perspectives are considered alongside the law and medical facts” (Section 3.1, p. 20).

Implicit within this information is the potential neglect of more factual based information within religious programmes that may be biased towards certain aspects of provision. Thus, while the views of those religious groups are clearly present in this guidance (as highlighted in parts of the document that emphasise faith and marriage), this particular excerpt appears to highlight the dangers of abstinence only programmes.

In addition to emphasising the importance of SRE being factually accurate and sensitive to faith and culture, it also stresses the importance of information being age appropriate, a tenet further reflected in the schemes of work, which stipulates the types of information that young people should be receiving at each key stage. While similar to other national curriculum subjects, this approach reflects various assumptions to regulate the nature of SRE content based on various assumptions regarding young people’s development:

“The relevant programmes of study for science and PSHE education have been designed with the physical and emotional maturity of children and young people in mind” (Section 3.1, p.19).

Here, the kinds of messages considered appropriate for young people are based on current notions held around young people’s physical and emotional development. This represents a form of regulation around the type of information felt appropriate for young people at certain stages of their school lives. While a progressive approach has legitimate learning benefits, given the subject matter, it also has various moral ones.

As part of this document's objectives to establish a clear SRE approach, the guidance works towards setting both the nature and scope of SRE. In doing this, it attempts to establish SRE as part of a value framework, underpinned by various principles. Given previous problems within SRE, the guidance highlights a process of negotiation around values in attempting to establish consensus. An essential part of this involves specified commitments in acknowledging inclusivity, diversity and faith. In establishing this framework, this guidance appears to make various commitments towards the needs of young people and specific interest groups.

#### ***4.5 SRE as political and contested terrain***

As previously specified, information presented throughout the guidance marks SRE as a site of ideological struggle, highlighting various rhetorical strategies utilised to manage such concerns. Most specifically, these strategies primarily aim to generate support both for SRE and the approach outlined, as they emphasise young people as potential victims of their sexuality. In attending to these concerns, the guidance invariably demonstrates awareness of SRE as a controversial area of policy making, characterised with a marked history.

Given SRE is part of a wider national agenda aimed at reducing health inequalities; policy changes inherently reflect wider political, social and economic interests. The social and political implications of young people's sexual activity are considered important as the guidance refers to the outcomes of this activity as problematic:

“Currently approximately half of teenage conceptions end in abortion, indicating that they were unwanted or unintended” (Section 1.3, p. 6)

Through this excerpt we can see that the current social context regarding young people's sexual activity is constructed as problematic, with this statistic simultaneously highlighting an outcome of sexual activity and constructing it as negative (unwanted). Aside from providing a (statistical) indication of conception rates in young people, this information highlights the importance of SRE provision for the wider health context. Further reference to the wider health problems of young people's sexual behaviour is highlighted in its reference to health initiatives such as; “Every Child Matters”, “The Children Plan”, “TPS” and “The Education and Inspections Act” (2006), all of which exist as part of a larger project to improve the



health and well-being of young people. As such, SRE is a crucial aspect of a wider strategy that affords SRE more significance as a pragmatic approach to a widespread problem.

By highlighting current issues with young people's sexual behaviour, the guidance can be seen to be engaged in the process of legitimising SRE, by implicating it as part of the solution to wider issues by promoting its pragmatic role. Given the document is engaged in trying to bring about agreement for SRE *and* the proposals outlined, gaining approval rests on the proviso that they are seen as justified and legitimate. In building legitimacy, both the rational and moral justifications are utilised as means of validating the policy decisions. This rationalisation is achieved through emphasising SRE's role in protecting young people from the risks present in their sexual activity. Therefore, certain actions or motives contained in provision are seen as self-evidently justified. This SRE approach is therefore constructed as inevitable, made such by outlining the risks sexual activity presents for young people. This is further emphasised through information which highlights the risks young people face within modern (and sexualised) society.

“In the 21st century, children and young people are exposed to sexual imagery and content in a wide array of media including adverts, the internet, video games, mobile phones, pop songs, TV and magazines. These media often present a distorted and inaccurate view of sex and relationships, and provide increasing explicit images of sex and sexuality” (Section 1.3, p. 5).

Here, the necessity and value of SRE is apparent where the document emphasises the widespread (inaccurate) sexualisation of young people. It does this by listing popular media channels, further emphasising young people's exposure to sexualisation. This contributes towards the defence of the (inherently political) position it proposes to take, which not only includes plans to make PSHE a statutory component of the national curriculum, but also involves the promotion of contraceptives. Both of these proposals have, and continue to be, controversial. In highlighting the various social and health imperatives attached to SRE, these moves are less likely to be contested.

In attempting to present a valid case for SRE, the guidance also engages in fact building, building a case against those who may be most resistant. Specifically, it presents information that explicitly acknowledges how different members of the target audience are likely to diverge in their level of agreement. In section 2.4, p. 13, “*What is the evidence about the*

*impact of SRE?*”, the guidance uses a number of strategies aimed at increasing the credibility of its claims. It draws upon 'international' academic research when presenting the benefits of its approach as a comprehensive program:

“The evidence is conclusive that SRE does not increase rates of sexual activity or sexual experimentation in young people (Kirby, 2001) rather it helps young people make sense of the sexual messages and imagery that are around them, to understand risks and consequences and to gain the knowledge and skills they need to stay safe, be healthy and to delay until they are able to enjoy and take responsibility to ensure positive physical and emotional benefits of intimate loving relationships” (Section 2.4, p. 13).

Emphasised here is a strong message that SRE improves the sexual health of young people. This is a common discourse mobilised in arguments for SRE and its use here highlights it as such. Clearly, this argument rests upon the issue of sexual activity being dangerous for young people, as indicated by the emphasis placed on “*risk*” and “*consequence*”. While reference is made to the importance of young people’s “*health*” in this excerpt, as it is prefaced and followed by “*safety*” and “*delay*” respectively, this is limited to young people’s physical sexual health. Similarly, while there is reference to “*enjoyment*”, it only features in relation to “*intimate loving relationships*” again placing less emphasis on casual, short-term sexual encounters. Also, the phrase “*intimate loving relationships*” appears to have been strategically employed here over terms such as ‘sex’ or ‘sexual activity’. This further mitigates the proposals outlined in this document and defends against the potential interpretation that it is promoting sexual activity. By utilising evidence in support of its chosen approach, the excerpt is also responding to the common claim that SRE encourages earlier sexual experimentation. This therefore highlights the dialogical aspect of the document and the role it serves in doing ideological work. Referencing academic sources adds credibility to this position and helps to discredit any counter argument. In choosing a form of academic representation and using expressions such as “*international*” and “*conclusive*”, this credibility is further accentuated. Moreover, the document also presents a number of research statistics to further establish facts and build consensus. For example, the document states that research evidence shows: “*parents (75%) agree that young people should have access to confidential contraception services*”. Here statistics act as a powerful

fact constructing device that works in this context to legitimise certain information, most notably for those opposed to these types of services.

The importance of appearing neutral and discrediting the voice of critics is an important rhetorical device utilised in this guidance such that it makes explicit references to such views.

“Far from “destroying their innocence” SRE equips children and young people with the values, skills and knowledge to understand and deal appropriately with these social and cultural pressures” (Section 1.3, p. 5).

Here the document is responding to a common criticism, the belief that SRE is damaging to young people as a corruptor of innocence. Contrary to this belief, the guidance *explicitly* states that SRE equips young people with important knowledge and skills to empower them and ensure their sexual health, although again, in the context of (presumably unwanted) pressure. In further opposing this criticism, the guidance uses a number of devices aimed at discrediting this claim and in establishing a counter claim. Firstly, it presents the contrary opinion using reported speech to attribute the statement to the opposition, a particularly useful device used when building a robust case. Secondly, it prefaces this with the negative modality expression “*far from*”, which further establishes the opinion referenced here as untrue. It further dismisses the claim by expressing the oppositional aim of SRE, thereby reinforcing a high degree of commitment to the truth of this approach. In addition to countering the main criticism, the use of high modality expressions clarifies the high degree of commitment to truth in an attempt to ensure that fact is established (Fairclough, 2003).

The importance of presenting particular ‘truth’ claims around SRE, along with the importance of discrediting major critics, appears to be important for defending various moves made and features here, in much the same way. In presenting what it refers to as a “*comprehensive programme*”, it stands in opposition to the widely used alternative abstinence approach. Thus, as the guidance attempts to establish this comprehensive model of SRE, it presents evidence against this notion as it attributes positive health outcomes to this model.

While a central feature of a comprehensive SRE programme is the provision of contraception, such provision is opposed by those who advocate an abstinence approach. The way in which the guidance deals with the potential tension regarding this aspect of provision is handled interestingly in the following excerpt. Whilst acknowledging potential opposition, the guidance highlights the importance of contraceptives by building a (strong) case for the



inclusion of this information. This is achieved in such a way that subverts the main opponents of this provision.

“While acknowledging that the issue of contraception will be a sensitive for some schools and individuals, there is UK evidence that SRE improves knowledge, develops more mature attributes, postpones the age of first sex and that those young people who do have sex are more likely to use contraception (Blenkinsop et al, 2004)” (Section 2.4, p.13).

In addressing this issue it refrains from overtly discrediting those who oppose such provision, but indirectly attends to their common arguments regarding the onset and safety of young people’s sexual activity. This is most explicit in first line of the excerpt where some acknowledgement is given to the fact that contraception is a “*sensitive*” issue for some people. While not stated, this “*sensitivity*” often arises as a result of religious or personal views, with those with the former being significant in the policy making process. One such argument is that contraceptive provision encourages young people to have sex. In countering this argument, the perceived benefit of delay is also implicated in contraceptive provision, a strong appeal to those abstinence proponents and to parents. In further justifying the provision of contraception, it also relates such information to healthy protective behaviours. Incidentally, both the promotion and access to contraception exists as a key component used in meeting the wider sexual health strategies. Its justification then, is crucial. Therefore, it is clear that as part of fact building, the document attends to its (potential) critics. As part of building policy around this sensitive area, it manages counter claims by building successful and robust arguments for the importance of its main policy proposal, which evidently, often involves silencing the arguments of opponents.

While the information used to justify its policy is carefully selected for the effect it produces, it reflects the fact that expressing a view around SRE ultimately involves taking a political position of the subject. Given the controversial nature of SRE and the lack of consensus between approaches, the information presented needs to be seen as legitimately serving the needs of young people. For example, proposals that address diversity, faith and contraception. However, these elements are justified in the benefits they afford young people. The guidance therefore employs a number of strategies to support the proposals being made. Thus, a further strategy used as part of its policy justification is the active voice of young people through direct quotes. The position of these quotations proves particularly significant as they often

follow central proposals in the guidance, such as to “*promote equality, inclusion and acceptance of diversity*” and show “*sensitivity to faith and cultural perspectives*” (Section 3.1, p. 20). The following direct quotes from young people are included in these subsections:

“The teaching was fair and balanced, and unprejudiced” (Section 3.1, p. 20)

“The SRE we had respected that we had different ethical and spiritual views about sex and relationships” (p. 20).

Additionally, the voices of parents are also present:

“If we had SRE when we were younger then a lot of us would have been better equipped to deal with a lot of things in life” (Section 2.6, p. 15).

The most significant aspect of these quotations is that they present a positive evaluation for the SRE approach outlined in this guidance. These quotes provide important representations as they signify the voices of those served by the guidance serves. In presenting the voices of significant parties, the guidance is again attending to the contested nature of SRE provision, attempting to build an effective case against when these issues may arise.

In contrast to the previous SRE guidance, this guidance also includes a number of case studies as a means by which to highlight how various proposals are implemented. These case studies represent examples of good practice and feature as success stories in SRE provision. More importantly however, they also represent models of good practice in line with those set out in the current guidance and thus work to support the current proposals. As the guidance attempts to establish a cohesive programme, focusing on elements of planning, content, and teaching strategies, these case studies also provide concrete guidance to various professionals about what these principles look like in practice. Examples of the various case studies include “*Consulting parents about SRE policy*” (p.16), “*Flexible teaching model to suit the needs of young people with severe learning disabilities*” (p. 26), “*Examples of class ground rules for SRE*” (p. 37). Sample lesson activities are also included, covering issues such as “*body image*” and “*messages from the media*” (pages 38 & 40), the inclusion of which, work to present a positive and workable approach to SRE, which becomes important for those professionals who struggle to translate principles of SRE such as inclusivity and diversity into practice.

#### 4.5.1 Managing various interest groups

As one of the sole functions of this document is to outline new policy for SRE through its statutory status, it outlines the legal position of SRE (as represented in section 1.5). From this, we can discern the mandatory measures that have to be fulfilled in this regard and the people with whom this responsibility falls to. While the document is outlining statutory SRE, it also outlines the arrangements that are to be retained from the previous guidance. This highlights the highly political nature of this statutory move, in addition to the trade offs required to appease those in opposition. This is most evident in the legal arrangements it retains and more notably, in the individuals for whom these arrangements continue to grant control. Currently, as part of the Education Act (1996) both primary and secondary schools are required to have an 'up to date and fit for purpose' SRE policy which is the responsibility of the school governors (as reiterated in the guidance). This includes the stipulation that both pupils and parents are involved in this process and that it is made available by the school for parents to see. The changes proposed by statutory PSHE make no change to this current arrangement:

“Governing bodies would retain the right to determine their school's approach to SRE, to ensure that SRE is delivered in line with the context, values and ethos of the school” (Section 1.6, p. 7).

As seen in this excerpt above, while the policy move towards statutory SRE is outlined, school Governors' power over their approach to SRE is retained under this new policy change. As we can see this formative role pertains to the “*context, values and ethos of the school*”, a broadly articulated stipulation that appears to give the Governors a significantly influential role in being able to determine the nature and scope of their SRE provision.

In addition to this, the guidance also reaffirms the expected role parents and pupils should play in creating the SRE policy. Rather significantly, it adds that:

“In developing their SRE policy to ensure that it meets the needs of their pupils and reflects parents' wishes and the culture of the communities they serve” (Section 1.6, p. 7).

Here, parents' rights in school's SRE policy-making are in line with the increased role they are expected to play in SRE more generally (as emphasised throughout the guidance). As such, this clause reflects the position parents continue to occupy as major stakeholders.



Furthermore, it signals a demand for greater parental ownership in this area of young people's education. This again highlights an attempt to create balance in light of the proposed (controversial) change to SRE status and is further reinforced by the explicit acknowledgement of parents' "*wishes*". As the document appears to be reinforcing the rights of such groups, it appears to be minimising the potential 'fall out' of the proposed statutory change from its most likely opponents. This is further evidenced by the focus on potential issues that may cause particular concern (for such groups) following statutory change, for example, the right it grants parents around removing their children from SRE. While the right parents have in removing their children from SRE is retained from the current guidance, it proposed a slight change as it states that a parent's right to withdraw a child from SRE applies only up to the age of 15 years, rather than the previous 19 years.

Not revoking parents' right of withdrawal may be considered alongside the other changes needed in SRE that are also proposed in this guidance. As the guidance proposes to make SRE statutory and extend this down to primary school level (a move which has provoked considerable public concern), it cannot simultaneously remove the right of withdrawal. Given that the statutory status of the guidance is crucial, agreement with the issues is a primary concern. Lowering the age for withdrawal, rather than removing it, may be considered a necessary trade off at this stage in policy making for SRE. What this does mean, however, is that although SRE will be introduced at a younger age, parents also have the opportunity to remove their children from SRE at a younger age. To remedy this, it includes the stipulation that those parents who choose to withdraw their children from SRE will have the responsibility to provide alternative SRE (Section 2.6.1). The guidance further specifies that this requirement should be set out clearly in the school's SRE policy, along with "*how the school will support them in fulfilling their responsibility to provide SRE at home*" (p. 15). However, attempts to reduce this negative outcome are offset by the creation of a greater working relationship with parents. This is achieved by increasing the involvement, support and communication between schools and parents, which is endorsed as part of this new SRE framework.

In addition to the power of governing bodies and parents, the guidance also acknowledges the rights faith groups wish to have in this area of education. In order to reaffirm the role faith groups have in the planning and provision of SRE it states:

“Effective SRE is dependent on partnerships at many levels; between parents, schools, children and young people-and at a more strategic level between the local authority, local **faith communities such as diocesan boards of education**, PCTs and partners in children’s services” (Section 3, p. 19, Emphasis added).

In catering for these interest groups, the document represents an attempt to appease those most likely to oppose the guidance by giving them some authority over provision; a role deemed to be important due to the political sway these groups continue to have in shaping the SRE agenda. The guidance further stipulates that in the planning of SRE, schools should seek advice from such groups accordingly, a requirement which could undermine the importance placed on other principles deemed important within SRE, such as those outlined around inclusivity. While the guidance therefore appears to be acknowledging the various voices of those it seeks to represent and appease, it is creating spaces within which the guidance can be used selectively. For example, whilst faith schools in particular may adopt provision in line with their religious ethos at the expense of inclusivity and diversity issues, they can still be in line with the requirements of this guidance. Additionally, aspects of provision such as contraception and pregnancy options may be left out of these programmes if they go against the ethos of school.

Through its attempt to outline new proposals for statutory SRE, the Government appears to be making a number of compromises in an effort to appease various interests groups, including parents, school governors and religious groups. In doing this, it outlines its commitment in retaining certain arrangements from the current guidance which would certainly appease possible opposition, but also undermine many of the central policy moves advocated. These compromises highlight the continued curtailment that seems to be part and parcel of UK SRE policy making.

#### **4.6 Summary**

SRE has an ideological history and this document not only reflects that, but through its ideological work, it also becomes part of that history. The analysis of this draft guidance continues to mark SRE as inherently political and problematic, made more prominent by its subsequent rejection by the Coalition Government. As previously stated, SRE policy-making

occurs as part of the wider social and political context, and is therefore largely determined by the current Government. This is highlighted by a number of proposals included in this guidance, such as the intentions to change statutory status of PSHE, which were opposed at a political level. Moreover, the document explicitly attends to the political and contested nature of the subject through strategies which pre-empt and address these concerns. Examples include the way the document engages in justification, fact-building and legitimising. In doing this, the guidance is attempting to build new SRE policy by outlining a new direction for SRE whilst justifying its ideological position. In creating new policy, we can see that this guidance attempts to deal with the political tensions that exist around SRE through its renegotiation of a value framework surrounding SRE. This is not the sole purpose of the value framework however, as it attempts to ensure that there a number of underlying principles that guide how SRE content is presented to young people.

Whilst the guidance highlights a number of problems that continue to curtail the development of SRE, notably those that relate to interest groups, these proposals represent welcome steps towards what would have been the most comprehensive SRE document to date. It is still useful however, in highlighting the public discourses held and employed around SRE. The content and policy issues reflect meanings held around SRE, in addition to the values, social norms and ideals of Government and of various significant steering groups whom requested this document, many of which are SRE teachers. As a site of ideological struggle, this document highlights the many competing discourses that exist around SRE and the process of policy making in this area as highly strategic. Also highlighted in this analysis are the continual issues within the wider social and political context which hinder SRE and its future progression. Most notably, this guidance reflects problems and anxieties that relate to SRE's position as a statutory subject, evidenced in the Labour Government's attempts (and failure) to gain this status and widely implement the proposed guidance. As such, the document highlights the various ideologies embedded in the issues that encircle SRE. As documented, we can see how the policy is written in way that highlights the persuasive aims. Through its attempts to achieve this however, the autonomy provided by the document creates space for certain information to be recontextualised to serve opposing SRE philosophies, largely in the same way the current guidance also does.

As this chapter focuses on the ways in which SRE is formulated and negotiated on a political level, highlighting the importance of analysing textual data, the subsequent chapters aim to



highlight the other levels through which SRE is further shaped and enacted within the school context. Teachers' discourse is the focus of the following two chapters, where the textual focus of the current chapter becomes an important foundation from which to contextualise how descriptions of their own provision are produced and justified, along with how pupils ultimately come to experience their SRE (the focus of chapter 7). The transition made from analysing textual data to more interactional data reflects the various levels of the discursive process around SRE and the importance of examining the various ways SRE policy affects its practice for those who choose to engage with these discourses. This is of particular interest given the current non-statutory status of SRE, which provides the backdrop for how it is practised.

## 5 Constructing and Justifying SRE Provision

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### 5.1 *Introduction*

The previous chapter examined the way in which SRE is formulated at a national level through Government issued (draft) guidance. The analysis of SRE guidance was demonstrated to be important for a number of reasons including the way it conveys meanings around young people's sexuality and sexual health, and the way it locates meaning around SRE more generally. Policy related to SRE shapes and delimits the practice of SRE as it stresses the importance of certain aspects of provision. Guidance therefore contributes towards defining SRE as it is constituted at a specific moment and as such, represents one level at which young people's sexuality is constructed and the way practice and content of SRE is constituted.

The focus of the current chapter is to examine how SRE is constituted at the more localised level of the SRE teacher, specifically how provision is formulated and accounted for. What these teachers convey about their provision ultimately contains assumptions about young people's sexuality and therefore their SRE needs.

### 5.2 *Formulating an SRE Approach*

In response to various inquiries from the interviewer about the content and structure of their SRE programmes, many SRE teachers sought to conceptualise their provision in terms of an overarching approach or philosophy. Within these accounts teachers formulated their approaches in a number of ways, all of which appeared as a means by which they could more adeptly account for their provision and thus, legitimise their programmes.

#### 5.2.1 **Formulating Provision as part of an overall 'Ethos'**

In instances where teachers were directly questioned about their SRE approach or philosophy, some described the nature of their approach as part of a wider 'ethos'. This appeared to be a strategy teachers utilised in order to account more effectively for their provision and position this provision more widely. This notion of 'ethos' is drawn upon in the following excerpt:

- 150 Interviewer: is there a particular stance you take in your provision or (.) an overall  
151 philosophy which underpins (.) your programme?
- 152 Judy: LOVE
- 153 Interviewer: right (.)
- 154 Judy: umm (.) we do bang on about safe:ty (.) definitely (.hh) but I would say there's a  
155 particular (1) or (.) I've just written (.) LOVE, sex and marriage
- (Judy briefly describes a the lesson she teaches that explores the concept of love)*
- 188 Judy: OUR OUR ETHOS I would say (.) is a mixture of both things [page 7]

Within this excerpt, Judy is answering a question aimed at further exploring the nature of the approach taken in the SRE provision. Judy answers the question directly (and with little hesitation): "love" (Line 152). The lack of elaboration here suggests that Judy perceives this response to be both desirable and complete: in providing no immediate expansion here, it effectively 'speaks for itself' and thereby, justifies itself. Responding in this manner also implies that she is able to encapsulate the nature of her provision in this way. The nature of such a response appears to reflect the fact that, in the light of much health orientated provision; this is an exceptional philosophy and that Judy is aware that it would be heard as such. Only in response to follow-up from the interviewer did Judy elaborate about the content of her provision; while she highlights that love is not the only focus of her provision she places emphasis on safety, (Line 154), she continues in her initial emphasis of love underpinning her provision. This is reiterated in lines 154-155 as indicated by the following utterance "*but I would say there's a particular*" where she breaks off and finishes this segment of talk by providing an example of how this is enacted in her provision ("I've just written love sex and marriage", Line 155). In citing these lessons focused on love, we can see that Judy is attempting to reinforce its priority within her provision, in keeping with her earlier response. After briefly outlining the content of the lessons exploring the nature of love (not shown in this excerpt); Judy returns to the original question around philosophy and it is here that she formulates this in terms of 'ethos' ("*our our ethos I would say is a mixture of*



*both things*", Line 188). This formulation is particularly interesting, as it conceptualises her provision as having a broader, more established and coherent underpinning.

The term 'ethos' has become commonly used within educational settings to describe an overarching value system in which learning takes place and has taken on importance more recently for the way it outlines the culture of a school (Glover & Coleman, 2005).

Specifically, the concept of 'ethos' refers to the way a school works as an organisation, as it sends out strong messages about the fundamental features of a school's culture such as its shared values and principles. In Judy's case use of the term reflects the former definition: it infers that the SRE provision also has clear underpinnings and a fundamental ideology. The linkage of "I would say" to this utterance suggests that whilst this concept is used within this context to refer to a value framework, it is Judy's own formulation and as such, may not reflect an established, or agreed philosophy.

Judy's conceptualisation of her SRE as having an underlying 'ethos' characterises it as having some underlying value framework. From this and other teachers' descriptions, it appears to be used as a device by which to authenticate individual provision. Where the concept of 'ethos' features in the following teacher's excerpt, it is described not as something which stems from the provision itself, but more broadly, from the wider school context (i.e. a religious orientation).

#### Excerpt 2 [p.2]

38 Interviewer: so can I ask you what's included then in the (1) SRE programme specifically (.)

39 what is taught (2) in (.) in the core programme?

40 Bob: I suppose (.) what we want to is e:r (1) educate them from the point of view (.) o:f the

41 ethos of the school (1) the ethos of the school is Christian

42 Interviewer:° umm mm°

43 Bob: a:nd profoundly so °I supp-°(.) I would say compared with other schools (2) <and we'd

44 want them to understand our stance on (.) o:n > sex education particularly from a Christian

45 angle (1.5) and that's not to say they have to follow it (.) it's purely introducing them to it

46 (1) a (.) a view (.) but also (.) t:o get them to think very clearly about (.) what they're doing and

47 why they're doing it (.hh) what does it mean to them no:w and the future basically

48 Interviewer: umm

49 Bob: and that their behaviour (1) >has an impact on other people and< (1) and what does  
50 that mean as well

This excerpt illustrates a teacher responding to an inquiry regarding the content of his SRE provision (Line 38-39). As in the previous excerpt, he describes his provision by referring to its 'ethos', but specifically, the ethos of the whole school (Lines 40-41). Despite being asked for information regarding what is taught within the programme itself, Bob begins by outlining the position from which they approach this provision, namely the 'ethos'. This response highlights Bob's concern with conveying the theoretical underpinnings of his provision as opposed to specific content and can be seen in the rest of the excerpt (Lines 43-50). While the majority of teachers, including Judy, set about providing information around the content and form of their provision (information around topics and lessons), Bob's accounts related more specifically to its theoretical underpinnings. This difference appears to relate to the nature of Bob's provision as religious, which provides the basis from which his abstinence approach can then be outlined.

While his approach can be classified as abstinence, Bob does not refer to it as such; although he does identify his provision as one of abstinence later in his interview. Instead, Bob refers to his provision primarily in relation to the school 'ethos'. Describing the provision in relation to its 'ethos' implies that it is merely in line with the overall culture of the school as Christian, but also simultaneously downplays the religious nature of this provision. Presenting the provision as part of the overarching Christian ethos of the school avoids this description of SRE provision being heard solely in terms of its religious nature, but instead, as part of an overarching system which the provision is merely part of.

In his account, Bob sets up the nature of his provision very carefully, which appears to stem from his awareness of its distinctive nature. This is apparent where he describes his approach as different to those in other schools (Line 43) and where he describes it as "*our stance*". Interestingly, this is followed by a concession around enforcement ("*that's not to say they ha:ve to follow it*", line 45). This concession highlights his awareness of how this may be heard: as a statement which may elicit contention based on its prescriptive nature and Christian agenda. The use of the various modalising expressions such as "*I would say*" and "*I suppose*" further highlights his awareness of their distinctive approach and that it is *based* on its religious viewpoint. The use of the pronoun "*our*" implies that the speaker is establishing

himself as part of a collective group of people who not only believe in this particular point of view, but that it is distinct from other (non-Christian) schools.

As illustrated in the above excerpts, reference to an ethos is used as a device through which these teachers can authenticate the nature of their provision and effectively account for it as being part of a considered 'approach'. Moreover, where it features in Bob's descriptions, it appears as a way of managing the religious (and therefore distinctive) nature upon which this provision is founded.

### 5.2.2 Formulating Provision in Terms of 'Core Tenets' of SRE

In addition to conceptualising provision in terms of its overarching ethos, teachers also formulated their provision in relation to the broader SRE approaches and as a number of discrete and complementary topics. Where provision was described in this way, it functioned as a means through which they could locate their provision within the wider of context of SRE provision (that described on a national level), and by which they could present their SRE as essentially comprehensive in nature; or 'covering all bases'.

The following excerpt illustrates the way in which a teacher accounts for his provision as a number of distinct topics that make up the overall SRE approach. In producing a description of his SRE; he is attempting to provide a balanced and comprehensive picture of his provision:

#### Excerpt 3 [p. 5]

154 Carl: so we do (1) er:m (.) we start the programmes off in year eight (.) and we do er (2) an  
155 A to Z of love and sex what we call (.) and that's based on (1.5) a computer programme (1) er  
156 that's been (.) designed under the heading of (.) life skills (.) so the year eights basically do  
157 about a three week introductory get (.) get used to the familiar names (.) and then in year nine  
158 (.) we go on in to er (.) the facts of life (2) sexual reprod- human reproduction (2.5)  
159 alongsi:de the APAUSE project (2) and then in year ten (.) it's basically (.) STI's (.)  
160 contraception (.) HIV/AIDs (.) and running parallel to that (.) is a module on relationships (1)  
161 which we call love sex and marriage (.) where (3) on the one hand of being given (2.5) the  
162 facts of life (.) but on the other hand they're also being given the morality of Christian values  
163 if you like (.) to go along side it (.) so we are not basically saying there (.) that's how to have



164 sex (.) away you go and ↑practice (.) what we're saying is (.) you need to think ↑seriously  
 165 about when is the right time in yo:ur (.) own personal development (.) when are you going to  
 166 be a-a- (.) having sexual intercourse (1) and can we just point out to yer↑ (.) legally (.) that's  
 167 not until after you're sixteen

In this excerpt, Carl describes his SRE as having a number of discrete topics that are appropriate for specific year groups. The provision young people receive in the early years of their SRE is referred to as an "*introductory*" element (Line 157), where SRE comes under the heading of "*life skills*" (Line 156) in which young people are taught rudimentary information around anatomy i.e. correctly labelling body parts ("*get used to familiar names*" Line 157). This introduction serves as a foundation from which further provision is built; the nature of SRE provision progressively changing through subsequent years. This provision is further conceived as distinct but supplementary to aspects of young people's SRE. For example, the provision delivered in year 9 consists of information that which deals with the biological and physical aspects of sex; what Carl refers to as the "*facts of life*", or "*sexual human reproduction*" (Line 158) and that which deals with the wider relationship and social elements of young people's sexual relationships, as represented by the "*APAUSE*" element. While these two elements of provision (the facts of life and the APAUSE project) consist of a number of further topics, they represent the broader (and distinct) elements of provision. In referring to the biological side of provision pertaining to sexual reproduction as "*the facts of life*", we can see that within this element of SRE, the focus on this provision is heteronormative. Carl uses this phrase to refer to information that deals with the physical act of (hetero)sex, specifically the reproductive element of this sexual practice ("*Human reproduction*" Line 158) as it represents fundamental 'truths' of sex. This emphasis on the physical and biological appears to be acknowledged by Carl here; he specifies that "*alongside*" (Line 159) this, pupils additionally receive the A pause programme. In stating that these two elements co-exist, he is suggesting that these elements work together to provide a more complete SRE for young people.

Accounting for his provision in terms of these two distinct but complementary elements of SRE appears to reflect current thinking that advocates effective SRE as comprising a comprehensive range of information about sex *and* relationships. This way of accounting for provision is also evident in Carl's descriptions of the SRE delivered in year 10. While

provision is described as a number of further discrete and stand-alone 'topics' ("*STI's contraception HIV/AIDs*", Lines 159-160), the nature of this provision broadly consists of biological (more specifically, the negative outcomes of sexual activity, the sexual health information) and the more interpersonal elements (Lines 160-161). The complementary, but distinct nature of these fundamental elements is further clarified in Carl's subsequent talk: "*on the one hand of being given **the facts of life** but on the other hand they're also being given the **morality of Christian values** if you like to go along side it*" (Lines 161-163, emphasis added). This way of describing provision is built around a powerful contrast structure, a device used in discourse for its rhetorical effects (Drew, 1990; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) that is further worked up by using the effective idiom "*on the one hand...but on the other hand*" (Lines 161-162), a strategy also commonly utilised in opinion formulations. The use of this contrast structure works to build the comprehensive picture of provision that balances "*the facts of life*" and "*morality*" (Line 162). This also builds justification for the approach as each element is presented as mutually beneficial, based on the presumption that providing young people with the facts of life without the morality may be considered as encouragement.

The morality element of provision therefore appears as a way of reconciling the messages contained in sexual health promotion. Carl works his descriptions in a way that simultaneously acknowledges and mitigates such concerns, whilst also justifying the nature of his provision (Lines 163-165). Again, this justification utilises an effective contrast structure "*so what we are not saying...what we are saying*" that works to effectively corroborate the (middle) line Carl takes within his provision, which he emphasises as being anti-promotional ("*so we are not basically saying there that's how to have sex away you go and practice*") and as a cautionary message for pupils ("*you need to think seriously about when is the right time in your own personal development*"). Structuring this justification in this way using this contrast increases the rhetorical effects of this talk and his chosen approach. Moreover, his use of active voicing (Wooffitt, 1992) in this stretch of talk ("*so we are not saying that's how to have sex away you go and practice*"), works to highlight the inappropriate nature of such a message, it more specifically emphasises the necessity of these complementary elements of his provision. Drawing on a commonly shared concern in this manner allows Carl to further building his justification, as he appeals to the reasonable side of such an argument. Carl achieves this using disclaimers emphasising the importance of choice and timing: and the legal dimensions of young people's sexual activity: (Line 164-167).

Attempts to formulate provision in a balanced manner were also evident in Judy's descriptions of her SRE. Similarly to Carl, she conceived her provision as consisting of two overarching elements relating to the wider approaches of SRE.

Excerpt 4 [p. 8]

- 206 Judy: so you could say ye:s (.) that is the (.) we we're not saying AB:stinence but in the sex  
207 education we try to teach the abstinence bit
- 208 Interviewer: right
- 209 Judy: we try to make the kids awa:re o:f (4.9) <the risks of sex> (.) you know (.) s:o (hh) (.) I  
210 think we're smack bang in the middle

From line 206 (“*we’re not saying abstinence*”) in which her sexual health provision is presented as not compatible with an abstinence approach, it is clear that the wider approaches of abstinence and health promotion are measures against which Judy can position her own approach. More evidence for this comes from her acknowledgement of elements of health provision representing information around ‘risk’ (Line 209). Whilst she struggles to specifically articulate the nature of her approach, we can see that Judy utilises the two common SRE approaches as reference points in her attempts to do so. While Judy asserts that this approach is not abstinence she acknowledges that this is included in her provision. In doing this Judy is making a distinction between what they teach and their overall message. Judy’s acknowledgment of both wider approaches here allows the effective positioning of her provision in a very particular position between these two approaches; embodied in the idiomatic phrase “*smack bang in the middle*” (Lines 209-210). As indicated in the discourse and conversation analytic literature, idiomatic formulations are typically used in talk, because they are difficult to contradict or challenge (Drew & Holt, 1988, 1995; Edwards & Potter, 1992). This can be seen here, as Judy is deliberately not aligning hers with any particular approach. Instead, she is more effectively positioning (and evaluating) her provision in a more desirable place, the middle ground. This formulation therefore works to build credibility for the provision, locating it within the legitimacy of two widely advocated approaches, a position that is considered as desirable despite the incompatible nature of the approaches.



This particular position can be seen as a strategy for dealing with SRE talk that, as we can see, is both ideological and dilemmatic (Billig, 1988).

This concern with balance and comprehensiveness in provision can also be seen in an earlier excerpt with Judy. If we look back at excerpt 1, like Carl she refers to her provision in terms of fundamental and opposing elements of SRE, referred to as “*safety*” and “*love*”. Although Judy describes her SRE philosophy as being concerned with love, she still attempts to present her provision as balanced, made apparent by the significance also afforded to sexual health (“*we do bang on about safety*” Line 154). The idiom ‘*bang on about*’, implies that these sexual messages are emphasised repetitively and forcefully in this provision, however, formulated this way (as it is emphasised in addition to those aspects that deal with love), Judy ensures that while this is heard as a significant focus in her provision, it is not heard as the only one. In following this statement with ‘*definitely*’, Judy is acknowledging that it almost goes without saying that safety is central. In placing a strong emphasis on love as part of the overall philosophy of the SRE whilst still maintaining a focus on safety, Judy is presenting a picture of her provision that is desirable in that it covers all the ‘core tenets’ of SRE.

### **5.2.3 Formulating Provision as Part of the Wider Sexual Health Initiatives**

In addition to presenting their provision as part of an integrated and established approach, teachers’ provision is formulated as part of a larger health strategy, namely those relating to local teenage pregnancy rates. As such, they consider their SRE as part of the wider Government driven endeavour to reduce negative outcomes of young people’s sexual activity (namely, STIs and unwanted pregnancies). As we will see in the following accounts, this works to build important justification for their SRE through its focus on improving young people’s sexual health. In this instance sexual health is rather narrowly conceived in relation to STI’s and unwanted pregnancy.

The following excerpts illustrate how some teachers’ account for the role they play in wider sexual health strategies:

Excerpt 5 [p. 4]

- 116 Carl: and we do basically our bit within the (.) teenage pregnancy strategy for the authorities  
117 (.) saying well we will (.) highlight the contact points for the students

Excerpt 6 [p. 5]

- 155 Steven: (.) erm (1) its (1.5) a lot of the focus that we have particularly at this school (1) is  
156 about teenage pregnancy because we do have teen- (.) a hi:gh teenage pregnancy rate (.)  
157 which seems to be continually getting higher or staying (.hh) at the same peak (.) erm (2) but  
158 (.) but I think it's difficult actually for a very very different reason (.) a:nd I think that's to do  
159 with people's confidence in being able to deal with the situations that that can sometimes  
160 bring up

Both these excerpts illustrate the way in which teachers consider their provision as part of a wider strategy and that they therefore have a responsibility for tailoring provision accordingly. In Excerpt 5, Carl specifically refers to a particular national sexual health initiative, the teenage pregnancy strategy. Here, Carl implies that there is a general requirement for all schools to play a role in these wider strategies: His specification that they "*do our bit*", implies that they have some level of obligation on this front. Use of the plural pronoun "*our*", in this instance suggests that this is not a duty he personally regards as important, but a requirement by the SRE team (and school). The way in which Carl slips into using active voicing here to illustrate this claim suggests that he is attempting to formulate his talk in way that it can be heard as reported talk (i.e. confirmation of the agreement between the school and the local authorities).

While Carl indicates his provision as having some obligation to wider sexual health strategies, we can see that he also appears to be attributing this action of highlighting local contact points for the pupils (i.e. sexual health services) specifically to the TPS "*for the authorities*" (Line 116) as opposed to this being framed as something they do as part of young people's sexual health entitlement.

Excerpt 6 also highlights the way wider sexual health statistics are specifically used to refer to a particular focus within provision (Lines 155-156); in this case directly concerned with "*teenage pregnancy*" (Line 156). Steven suggests that this may not be the same everywhere

(stipulating “*particularly at this school*”: Line 155), setting this up as something specific to his school, and its local context. Steven extends this by providing a picture of the levels of pregnancy rates, a reference that commonly features in many of these teachers’ accounts. While he doesn’t quote specific figures, he emphasises this rate as “*high*” (Line 156) and then offers two ways of considering this, as something that is increasingly “*getting higher*” or staying constant “*same peak*” (Line 157). The use of this vague and shifting notion of ‘high’ is strategic for the way it works to construct the rates, as significant enough to warrant a focus regardless of the exact figures. Strategic vagueness is a particularly useful discursive strategy used to manage the dilemma of stake and interest (Edwards & Potter, 1992). It functions here as a way of managing Carl’s accountability for the focus on pregnancy.

In aligning their provision in relation to these initiatives, we can see that these teachers conceive SRE as having a significant role in pregnancy prevention. The following account reflects another instance in which the wider sexual health context is used as a means from which to account for particular choices.

#### Excerpt 7 [p. 5&6]

- 174 Interviewer: why er:m (1.5) wh- why APAUSE (.) how come you’ve chosen APAUSE?
- 175 Carl: w- (.) we didn’t choose them (.) they chose us
- 176 Interviewer: right
- 177 Carl: erm (2.5) (*name of town given*) (1) at one point was a teenage (.) capital teenage
- 178 pregnancy capital of the country (.) according to the Daily Mail
- 179 Interviewer: (*laughs*)
- 180 Carl: two page ↑spread (.) and as a result of that (2) there was (1) a bit of a moral panic about
- 181 the place (.) about teenage pregnancies and so on (.) so therefore (1.5) funding was made
- 182 available to reduce teenage pregnancy (2) a:nd (.) those at authority level made the decision
- 183 that we’d go with this APAUSE project
- 184 Interviewer: umm
- 185 Carl: (.hh) we were chosen (.) because we were really ↑fortunate to have two girls who were
- 186 excluded from (*name of school given*) school (.) who were pregnant at the time



In responding to a question around the reason for choosing APAUSE programme as part of his provision, Carl attends to the issue by highlighting the distinction between them choosing the material and them being chosen (Line 175). This reformulation (and rebuttal of the interviewer's inference) suggests that this distinction is important for Carl, namely for the way it implies something more favourable than the school simply selecting materials: Being 'chosen' is potentially more significant for the way it imbues credibility. This is evident in Line 185 where Carl conceives being 'chosen' as a positive (and promotional) position in his reference to their selection as based on "*fortunate*" incidents. Although these incidents (two young women getting pregnant and expelled from their schools) are not typically considered as 'fortunate', they are constructed favourably within this context for the funding they allocate to their respective schools.

As part of this excerpt, Carl refers to the local pregnancy rates, implicating the area as one of the worst in the UK (Lines 177-178). Following this with "*according to the daily mail*"<sup>5</sup> works to shift the footing of this statement so that authorship becomes attributed to a newspaper report. This accomplishes what Wetherell (2001) terms 'attributional distance'. While it is often utilised by speakers in attempts to manage potentially controversial talk, it features here as a way of inducing some level of scepticism about this particular article. This scepticism is underscored first by reference to the amount of space afforded the article ("*two page spread*", Line 180) and second by reference to the reactionary nature ("*moral panic*", Line 180). This also works to establish the school and its surrounding area as particularly exceptional (as it is portrayed in the media), based on the fact that it is implicated as a high-risk area for teenage pregnancy. This works to establish the school as being in need of 'special' funding and therefore in a 'privileged' position given that funding. Furthermore, by invoking the category "*authority*", Carl seeks to further align his provision with those who grant legitimisation to SRE's aims. Direct involvement with such, 'authorities' grants additionally credibility for this school's SRE provision.

Overall, teachers' accounts evidence various attempts at formulating their individual SRE approaches. As they set about formulating their SRE provision they did this by establishing

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<sup>5</sup> The Daily Mail is the second largest selling British national daily newspaper. This tabloid newspaper editorial stance is traditionally conservative and it has become renowned for its controversial and sensationalised style.

their provision in a number of ways; as part of some encompassing ‘ethos’, in relation to wider SRE approaches or in terms of two main tenets of provision and as part of wider national sexual health strategies. All of these serve as means of formulating their SRE in a comprehensive and balanced manner.

### **5.3 *Building Justification***

Excluding the teacher who identifies his provision as an abstinence only approach, the majority of these teachers’ SRE provision can be characterised as health promotion, their accounts illustrate a number of ways in which they build justification for this approach. This involved making a number of assertions about pupils and their SRE needs, along with the local contexts these schools serve. By constructing young people in ways that warrant a particular SRE focus, these teachers were able to build justification for both their individual approaches and the focus placed on certain elements.

#### **5.3.1 Constructing Young People as Vulnerable**

Across all accounts, teachers construct young people (particularly young women) as vulnerable as a result of their sexual behaviour. Notably, this most commonly features in their talk around young women. As highlighted previously, teachers reference the high levels of teenage pregnancies to justify pregnancy prevention elements of their provision as crucial. This is evident where young people are constructed as being at risk from their sexual behaviour and therefore vulnerable without the right education.

Excerpt 8 [p. 7&8]

190 Judy: (.hh) er in terms of we don’t particularly (1) want our kids (1) to go out and practice  
191 because of the dangers there

192 Interviewer: umm mmm

193 Judy: but at the same time (.) we’re not naive to think especially with a (.) pregnancy rates  
194 with what they are (.) I think we’re the second highest (.) in (*place of town given*) (1) this area  
195 it’s (.) really bad

196 [ ]

- 219 Judy: you know (.) s:o (hh) (.) I think we're smack bang in the middle
- 220 Interviewer: right
- 221 Judy: (.hh) I don't think we sa:y (.) yes (.) go and do it but we're not naive in thinking that  
222 they're (.) they're gonna abstain because (.) anybody would be a fool to think that
- 223 Interviewer: yeah
- 224 Judy: (1) and I think it's all about having the right education

Within this excerpt, Judy is building important justification for her approach based on the dangers young people face without both sexual health promotion and abstinence aspects of provision (see excerpt 4). Her emphasis on the element within her provision that deals with risk prevention is most evident in the former part (lines 190-195) of this excerpt, where young people are constructed as particularly vulnerable because of their sexual behaviour. This is corroborated with her emphasis on the high rates of teenage pregnancy. What is particularly interesting however, is the way she constructs this as a pragmatic argument rather than an ideal one. Judy does this by firstly conceding that young people's engaging in sexual activity is not desirable: (lines 190-191). While this statement does important work emphasising the importance of young people's protection (which SRE is often made responsible for), it works as an important concession for what follows, which in essence, is an admission of their sexual behaviour: (Lines 193-195). Here then, we can see that this initial concession is important for the way it attends to potential counter claims, before acknowledging the importance of catering for young people who are engaging in some type of sexual activity. Essentially, the concession prevents Judy's statement as being heard as some kind of endorsement and, because of the pragmatic nature of her argument, it portrays Judy as someone responding in the best interests of young people. As a result, the position of giving young people sexual health information appears reasonable, if not necessary.

The importance of striking a balance between the realities of both young people's ideal and actual behaviour, in addition to building justification (particularly for the health promotion elements of her provision) appears to be important for Judy. This is highlighted in talk around her plans for a sexual health service in school, Lines 197-203 (not presented here), where she further mitigates against counter claims by reiterating her position on this matter at Lines



221-222). Again, this refutes the notion that sexual health promotion constitutes promotion of sex (“*I don’t think we say yes go and do it*”) with the former part of this statement working as a disclaimer “*we’re not naïve in thinking that they’re gonna abstain*”. This important disclaimer works to authenticate both this admission and Judy, who is merely responding to her pupils’ sexual realities. In displaying this type of pragmatism, Judy is providing justification for the importance of incorporating both elements in the provision and hence, taking the middle ground within her SRE. In essence then, this concession functions as a powerful rhetorical strategy as it grants Judy the opportunity of promoting her provision as balanced and responsive to young people’s needs and vulnerability. Judy is thus not “*naïve*” (Line 221), a belief that would render anybody, most presumably, the SRE teacher more so, “*a fool*” (Line 222), an evaluation that further reinforces the importance of this recognition. It would appear then, that acknowledgement of young people having sex, whether you are reluctant to accept it or not, is important justification strategy for SRE teachers, particularly as it appears to reconcile the sexual health messages present in many SRE programmes and provide a justification for the use of this element of SRE alongside an abstinence message.

In addition to presenting (distinctly high and problematic) local pregnancy rates in which to highlight young people’s vulnerability, these teachers also positioned young people at risk in terms of their (i.e. young women’s) inexperience. Specifically, their inexperience is constructed as rendering them vulnerable in dealing with unwanted sexual advances. Moreover, the teachers are fundamentally referring to women in particular.

#### Excerpt 9 [p.9&10]

- 284 Steven: er:m (1) w:e (1.5) < we do cover> quite regularly (.) not as regularly as I would lik-  
 285 (.) as as we can (1) erm different forms of contraception (.) erm (.) and we need to do a little bit  
 286 more o:n (.) teenage pregnancy
- 287 Interviewer: right
- 288 Steven: erm (3.) because I think it’s alright to cover (.) STI’s (.) which sometimes get lost in  
 289 the (.) >er sorry (.) er contraceptives< which sometimes get lost within (.) the context of  
 290 protecting against STI’s (.) rather than (.) thinking about teenage pregnancy as (.) well
- 291 Interviewer: right

292 Steven: we maybe don't do (.) as much on that as we should do (.) erm (1) because as I said  
 293 we've got a high teenage pregnancy rate

294 Interviewer: umm mm

295 Steven: (2) c:r (.) and that despite of the fact that we do quite a lot (.) on contraceptives

296 Interviewer: °umm mmm°

297 Steven: so I think there's (.) possible an issue there with (.) negotiation skills

298 Interviewer: umm umm

299 Steven: (.) when in those situations (.) or (1) which °>could be even worse<° (.) that some of  
 300 the students (.) could be being groomed

301 Interviewer: °oh gosh yeah°

302 Steven: °which is (.) a bit scary°

303 Interviewer: ye:ah

304 Steven: °because we do have some very vulnerable students° (.hh) and I know (.) erm a yea:r  
 305 eleven girl (.) that I taught last year for RE (.) > I didn't teach her for SRE< (.) or PSHE (1)  
 306 erm (2) sh:c (.) was a very vulnerable student (.hh) and she's now °pregnant as well°

307 Interviewer: °right°

308 Steven: so (.) we're aware that some students are sort of preyed upon a little bit

When considering aspects of SRE provision that need changing, Steven prioritises teenage pregnancy and contraception. They are identified as aspects of his provision that require further expansion (Lines 284, 285, 292). Like many other teachers, Steven cites local teenage pregnancy rates as an indicator of this, which he makes a point of reemphasising: (Lines 292-293). Interestingly, Steven displaces potential blame from the SRE itself by emphasising that pregnancy rates occur in spite of a focus on contraceptives (Line 295). Instead, Steven directly attributes the rates to poor decision-making and struggles around negotiating (safe) sex: (Lines 297). Whilst Steven appears to be speaking about young people in general, in the latter part of this excerpt he refers to young women's negotiation skills specifically (Lines 304-306). Steven is therefore constructing young women as particularly vulnerable, based on

their inability to ward off unwanted sexual advances or to negotiate safe sex. This claim is further substantiated in his implications of their vulnerability to abuse and sexual exploitation (Lines 299-300). Having effectively ‘upgraded’ the threat young women face as a result of sex, Steven can be seen to be building a strong justification for the importance of addressing contraceptives (and teenage pregnancy). In doing this however, Steven is making a number of assertions regarding young women’s pregnancies as (in most cases) unwanted mistakes and the result of some form of abuse as opposed to a lack of education or information. Implicit within these accounts then, is a notion of male sexuality, resembling the ‘male sex drive discourse’ (Hollway, 1984, 1989), which the female becomes responsible for. These young women are considered to be in danger based on the pressure placed on them, in addition to their inability to say no and to adequately protect themselves from unwanted sexual activity. This is further reinforced in Line 308 where Steven infers that young women are targeted *because of* their vulnerability. This claim is supported by reference to an incidence where a (vulnerable) pupil fell pregnant (Line 306). Outlining this incidence, Steven is trying to establish that the link between vulnerability and subsequent pregnancy is real, a case of simple cause and effect. In referring to those cases where teachers have correctly identified the ‘vulnerable’ pupils, he is strengthening this link.

What is also interesting about this account is the way in which the problem of poor negotiation skills and pressure amongst young women is tackled through the delivery of more contraceptive information. This represents discrepancy between the ‘problem’ identified and the ‘solution’ offered. What is prescribed for these ‘vulnerable’ women is a health promotion strategy; (i.e. more contraceptive knowledge) paired with the necessary negotiation skills. Conversely, young men's sexuality is entirely absent from this account. When emphasising young women’s vulnerability, some teachers attributed this to their levels of sexual knowledge and experience.

#### Excerpt 10 [p. 9]

304 Heather: and again they ask really quite nitty gritty sort of questions coz you know coz I  
 305 think some (I) you know in year eleven I think there’s lots of gi:rls that probably (.) are not  
 306 as well informed as you’d like to think they are (.) and I think some are (.) you know very  
 307 well informed (.) they could tell us a few things but I think there are some who are still very  
 308 sheltered and don’t ac- you know (.) you’ve still got quite a (.) wide cross section of  
 309 experience and you always have to take that into account of course in all years, you know in



310 your lessons anyway and I do always make that point coz I think particularly year nine when  
311 we're doing about contraception and so on (.hh) I think some of them think oh why is she  
312 telling me this now do you know what I mean? so I think we always try to make it very clear  
313 from the onset that it'll be applicable to some (.) e:arlier than it will be to others but everyone  
314 needs to know at some stage and we build up as they go through (.) so in year ten we revisit it  
315 (.) in year eleven we revisit it so hopefully everybody has the right sort of information

In talking about the types of questions pupils ask in their SRE, Heather is voicing concern over the diverse nature of her pupils' knowledge, particularly those whose knowledge she feels is limited: (Line 305). The use of the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) "*lots of girls*" works to emphasise this as problematic as it implies that this problem is widespread. As part of this, we can also see that Heather has an expectation about the level of knowledge pupils should have about sex and relationships, which they are expected to gain through their SRE. Presumably, Heather has selected this particular age group (year 11) because they are at the end of their secondary SRE schooling and have reached a legal age for sexual activities. Effectively then, these students should have all the appropriate information through which they can embark upon healthy sexual relationships. Her use of these year 11 pupils however, reflects that this is not necessarily always the case. Conversely, those with a high level of knowledge are implied as a little too knowledgeable: (Lines 306-307). Here Heather is not asserting that these students are more informed than SRE teachers on sexual health, but is instead implying that they have a different type of knowledge, perhaps more reflective of young people's sexual culture and experiences. Through this utterance, Heather is making certain inferences about the sexual conduct of these young women (a claim which becomes more evident in subsequent talk). Although, Heather doesn't make her moral evaluative position explicit here, she is making a clear evaluative point nonetheless. Often, where speakers are reporting on the conduct of others they intend to make a moral point. Moreover, this often features implicitly in speaker's descriptions (Drew, 1998). Given Heather's position (as an SRE teacher) it seems appropriate that any judgements around the inappropriateness of young people's sexual behaviour are done implicitly. Therefore, as Heather makes various inferences regarding the sexual conduct of these young women, this utterance is significant for the way in which it manages this 'moral work'.

From Heather's talk, we can see that she is voicing concerns over the knowledge of students at each end of the spectrum; those that are too "*informed*" (Line 307) and those that are too

"sheltered" (Line 308). As specified earlier, the implication here is that those pupils who are considered too informed have gained this knowledge outside of their SRE and those who are too sheltered haven't supplemented their SRE with information gained from outside of their school provision. While this doesn't necessarily relate to sexual experience, it does appear to implicate all the information young people gain from their peer cultures.

In highlighting both ends of the spectrum of pupils' knowledge, we can see that Heather is positioning both of these types of pupils as vulnerable within their future or current sexual experiences. Young people who are too 'sexualised' (either through the sexual activities they engage in or through the type of information/material they are exposed to) are considered to be vulnerable, whilst those who are un-informed are also constructed as vulnerable due to their limited sexual knowledge. This promotes SRE as able to provide young people with the *"the right sort of information"* (Line 315). Constructing young people as vulnerable in both these ways, manages the criticisms often levelled at giving young people sexual health messages at an early age. Heather in fact directly attends to this issue: *"I think we always try to make it very clear from the onset that it'll be applicable to some earlier than it will be to others but everyone needs to know at some stage"* (lines 312-314). In making it *"very clear"* to the pupils (and to the interviewer) that this information is fundamental whatever their current sexual health needs, Heather is attending to these anxieties and providing a legitimate need for their inclusion.

Similarly to Judy (excerpt 8), we can see that Heather is working her accounts in a way that serves to justify the sexual health elements of her provision. By constructing that young people are vulnerable as a result of varying knowledge, Heather, like Judy, creates a pragmatic reason for her provision whilst rebuffing potential claims of early sexualisation.

Particular emphasis on young women's vulnerability appeared throughout teachers' descriptions of their provision. While we can see that these constructions worked to create certain sexual health imperatives present within provision, it also works to warrant additional provision given to these young women, for example, work done around self-esteem and assertiveness. Moreover, these accounts created a sexual health imperative, and thus an SRE imperative, especially *for* young women. This is apparent in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 11 [p.7&8]

- 234 Interviewer: Is there any other support groups or anything or (.) erm (1.5) or (.) any (2)  
235 °afterschool (.) drop in's° ?
- 236 Bridget: not at the moment because they can have er (.) a (.) I'm av- (.) you know they can  
237 have a one to one appointment with me (.hh) w- we make appointments during school day  
238 (.hh) we have in past (1) done some (1) erm (2) like rolling programmes (.) erm raising self  
239 esteem that have include- (.hh) have included some sexual health (.) and stuff and that were  
240 targeted (.) erm (.) delivered at girls but could be delivered at boys as well (.hh) you know  
241 that were either (.) vulnerable because they were very sexually active or (1) vulnerable  
242 because they were very nai:ve (1) and that was erm (1) a five week (1) programme where we  
243 looked at (.) what self esteem was (.) erm (.) how they felt about (.) erm you know  
244 compliments (.) and giving compliments and (.) then how they felt about saying no (.) and we  
245 would sort of give em some (.hh) tips on saying no (.) you know being a bit assertive (.hh)  
246 then looking at relationships (.) what they found (.) what they thought were important in  
247 relationships (.hh) and then sexual (.) health again about (.) STI's (1) and types of  
248 contraception erm (.) body image (.) allsorts (.) things and then on las- the last week we went  
249 and took em out for a meal (.hh) got em to use (.) you know coz some of em have never  
250 ordered from a menu or (1) you know (.) got em to build their confidence

Similarly to the previous excerpts, Bridget is positioning pupils as vulnerable based on their sexual activity (Line 241) and their limited knowledge and lack of judgement (Lines 241-242). In both formulations, the extent to which Bridget is presenting these young women as vulnerable is emphasised by the prefacing extreme term “*very*”. This extremity is important here for establishing these young women as specifically vulnerable; presumably Bridget is aware that by their very nature, young people are expected to be somewhat naïve and similarly, that many young people are presumed to be sexually active. These case formulations create a basis from which Bridget can position these young women as extraordinary cases, reinforcing her claims of vulnerability. Young women that are “*very sexually active*” and “*very naïve*” become stronger claims.

While Bridget makes a point of stipulating that the services could also be used for men, her descriptions of the topics covered in these programmes are more relevant and thus designed to “*target*” women specifically (for example issues around self-esteem, body image, compliments and resistance skill). Thus, whilst these particular sessions are aimed at any vulnerable pupils, they are largely based on teacher’s views of young women’s sexual



vulnerability, arising from dominant discourses of (hetero)sexuality that reflect the way in which SRE and teachers' positioning of young people's sexuality remains inherently gendered. We can see that Bridget perceives young women in particular to be the main recipients of extra intervention, most explicitly where she enacts a self-initiated repair of her use of the word "*targeted*" to "*delivered*" (Lines 240). Repair in conversation analysis, is a practice used for dealing with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing and understanding talk in conversation (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977). Repairs then, operate on words and phrases to effect deletions and replacements and as such, mark trouble sources (Schegloff, 2000). In this case, we can see that the source of trouble is the word "*targeted*", presumably for the way it indicates some level of concern for a target group of young people (in this case in young women). While Bridget is clearly implicating young women specifically as vulnerable and in need of additional (interventionist) support, we can see that this is dispreferred for the way it could be heard as signalling exclusionary practice. The repair mechanism appears to downgrade the extent to which this is heard as isolating women and therefore excluding young men. It also works to downgrade the extent to which this seen as interventionist as opposed to more preventative and ongoing work. As such, this repair operates as a 'self righting' mechanism (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977) to modify her initial conceptualisation, which could be heard as exclusionary towards young men and overly biased towards young women only.

Despite a clear attempt to inoculate against isolating young women only, we can see the recipient of this discourse of danger mobilised here, clearly implicates women mainly. The discourse of danger and victimisation used here by Bridget is reflective of the pressures placed on young women and the emphasis placed on female sexuality in society. We can see this where Bridget outlines the work she carries out around assertiveness skill training (Line 245). Giving young women 'tips' on how to refuse sex, doesn't directly address the problems arising from male sexuality, most importantly, those that pose most threat to young women such as sexual exploitation and coercion. Instead, this type of training places responsibility on women in deflecting men's advances and pressure, a criticism raised by Kitzinger & Frith (1999) when commenting on the problems with assertiveness skills training.

In the cases where teachers construct young people (particularly young women) as vulnerable and susceptible to danger (thereby, constructing them as victims), they did so in a way that gave the appearance of being value-free (i.e. avoiding expressing personal and emotive opinions). This manner of formulation complied with the professional role of a teacher and

therefore strengthened their justifications. However, one case also included switching subject positions away from the neutral SRE teacher in order to make a number of stronger claims about the needs of the young people.

Within this excerpt, Bridget is expressing concerns for young people based on their perceived vulnerability to early sexualisation and early sexual activity. This excerpt is particularly interesting for the way this concern is achieved, specifically the shift in subject position from SRE teacher to mother.

#### Excerpt 12 [p. 6 &7]

- 196 Interviewer: erm (1) have you found that any of your own views or personal beliefs have ever  
197 interfered in your teaching or that you have had to manage these (.)
- 198 Bridget: (3) yeah because I've struggled (3) with me mothers hat on (.) you know I've got  
199 (.) erm (1) a teenage daughter and I (.hh) I've just felt that (.) as a mum I would be (2) upset if I  
200 thought that my daughter couldn't come and speak to me about (2) contraception o:r (1.5)  
201 that she needed contraception or (.) that she didn't understand something about sex (.hh) an-  
202 and (.) I struggled abo-(.) about that (.) but then (.) wi me (.) and I also thought if my  
203 daughter were you know (.) °having sex at fourteen and putting herself at risk (.) you know I  
204 would be really (2) I'd be horrified actually (2) °but then (1.5) with my school nurse hat on  
205 (.hh) my (.) it's my duty of care to (.) to (.) to be an advocate for em or to (.) to (.) promote  
206 the:ir (.) health and sexual health is part of their (.hh) so I had got a bit of erm (2) you know  
207 wi- wi me mum's hat on and me school nurse hat on I did (.) and I do feel (.) even now when  
208 I perhaps (.) when I'm delivering to year nines (.) that I do (.) I I sort of distance me self (2)  
209 from what am actually (.) tel- do do yu- I don't know how (.) I don't know how to explain it  
210 erm (1) I don't (.hh) (2.5) It has got easier (2) but when my daughter were (.) sort of thirteen  
211 fourteen at the same age (.hh) as kids I were delivering at (.) you know (1) °I kept thinking oh  
212 god if I'd (1) you know how would I feel if our (*name given*) were (.hh) having to speak to  
213 someone abo:ut°(1) something she couldn't talk to me about and (.) it it were a personal thing  
214 not that I don't think (.) kids should have information but I just struggle:ed
- 215 Interviewer: yeah
- 216 Bridget: you know (.) morally (1.5) because because they not (.) mature enough physically  
217 o:r (2) mentally often you know to deal wi (1) full on sex (1) they think they are but they're  
218 not (1) and erm (.) yeah I had a bit of a cla:sh (1.5) I did (.) I did stru- (.) not struggle but I did  
219 find it difficult sometimes (3) you know so (.) wi me different hats on(h)

As we can see, Bridget confesses to feeling a level of dissonance in her professional role (Line 198). It would appear that this admission is a delicate matter for Bridget, given the expressive caution she displays through a number of lengthy pauses at the start of this talk. The source of this “*struggle*” is attributed to her diverging roles as school nurse and a mother to a teenage daughter. Bridget specifically implicates her role as a mother as being the cause of a lot of the tension she experiences in her professional role, particularly the provision she provides young people which she infers as occurring without the knowledge of their parents. We can see this where Bridget imagines herself as the unsuspecting parent through a number of hypothetical ‘what if’ scenarios (Lines 199-201). What is interesting about the way Bridget produces her account of the ‘struggles’ she experienced as a sexual health advisor, is the way in which it effectively problematises the nature of this service; suggesting that young people are seeking her help in the absence of parental guidance. By presenting these concerns as a series of hypotheticals from her subject position as a mother, Bridget is able to voice her concerns about pupils, without having to state such concerns explicitly. As a mother, Bridget’s reflections on how she would feel if the situations were applied to her own daughter implicates this as something that all mothers would feel. Importantly, each of these concerns relate to potential barriers to getting the right sexual health advice, which incidentally is the very thing that she provides as part of her role. Voicing these concerns from this position allows Bridget to critique the nature of the service she provides (i.e. providing information about contraceptives) and the knowledge that is confided in her from pupils (i.e. about their sexual behaviour and lack of knowledge). These concerns hold greater weight (and legitimacy) when voiced through such a subject position (“*as a mum*” 203-204). Bridget further emphasises her distinct subject position through her different ‘hats’ (Line 207) such that with the former hat, her (motherly) concerns don’t interfere with her professional role, namely, her “*duty of care*” (Line 205). So with her different ‘hats’ on, Bridget is able to disclose the nature of the struggle she faces without undermining her professional status. Done in this way, Bridget’s concerns appear as the reasonable concerns of a mother, and not as inappropriate judgements of a sexual health provider.

While this talk avoids any explicit negative evaluation about the nature of this service or the pupils who seek these services, in her subsequent talk both are problematised. In lines 203-205, Bridget makes a number of strong concerns about young people’s sexual behaviour. Although this is a hypothetical scenario, Bridget is expressing quite strong feelings regarding sex at an early age, something which she frequently deals with in her professional role, to



which she states her reaction would be to feel “*horrificed*”. Despite coming from another subject position, this statement is nonetheless heard as a general concern about young people’s early sexual activity and implicates all mothers as having the same reaction. This more general concern is evident in the latter half of this excerpt, where Bridget switches from expressing concern for her daughter to young people generally ( “*they not mature enough physically or mentally often you know to deal wi full on sex*” Lines 216-218). This struggle, which was originally related to Bridget’s relationship with her daughter therefore reflects an on-going issue within the classroom.

As teachers position young people (particularly young women) as vulnerable by their lack of knowledge, their sexual activities and by the pressures that are placed upon them to engage in sexual activity, they uphold the fundamentals of their specific approaches. As the various tenets of their provision invariably relate to their specified approach, this justification relies on creating various imperatives to warrant need for certain focal elements of provision. This is evident where teachers adopt a health promotion approach, they reinforce a sexual health imperative, where aspects of their provision such as preventing unwanted pregnancies and STI's become essential. Given their professional roles, teachers appear uncomfortable criticising any of these elements within their provision and can only do so by utilising strategies such as changing subject position.

### **5.3.2 Constructing Young People as Vulnerable within their Localised Communities: Family and Community as Poor Role Models**

In addition to constructing young people as vulnerable in order to uphold certain aspects of their provision, there are many instances where teachers made claims about the needs of pupils based on their more personal and localised contexts. While these claims work to present provision as tailored to the individual needs of the pupils, they were formulated based on what teachers often presented as problems that affect the majority of their children. These claims again form the basis and rationale for much of the provision, and serve to uphold elements deemed to be of particular importance that are often in keeping with the overall approach.

This is evident where one teacher makes a number of exaggerated inferences around young people and their parents in a way that reinforces the strong sexual health focus found within

her provision. In particular, this teacher is seen to be passing judgements on young people's aspirations based on claims regarding the nature of their localised contexts, in a manner that appears inconsistent with the assumedly impartial position of an SRE teacher.

Excerpt 13 [p. 4] [in answering a question around what she considers to be the most important elements within her provision]

- 105 Rachel: erm (2) I've got two things really (.) it's the relationship side because we've got  
106 (.) erm quite a large ethnic minority (2) erm (1.5) our kids (.) <struggle> with things like erm  
107 (.) arranged marriages and things like that
- 108 Interviewer: [right]
- 109 Rachel: [erm] and parents pushing them into marriages that they don't want to be in (.) in (.hh)  
110 erm (1.5) my main point is putting across that actually in this country that is illegal (.) and  
111 there is help out there if these kids need it (.) cos they run away (.) and all sorts
- 112 Interviewer: °<gosh>°
- 113 Rachel: (.hh) erm and its getting them to realise as well we have a lot of families where  
114 there's quite a lot of domestic abuse (.hh) and it's trying to get particularly the girls (.) to  
115 realise that (.) you know there is help out there (.) cos they don't (.) they don't know where to  
116 turn

Within this excerpt there are many instances where Rachel makes various claims about pupils' more localised context, particularly their local communities and parents. Rachel specifies two important aspects of her provision, “*the relationship side*” (Line 105) and the “*protection*” aspect (Line 118, not shown here). She provides justification for the importance of the relationship side in her reference to the community that the school serves, in particular, the ethnic minority pupils (Lines 105-106). Her use of the subordinating conjunction “*because*” (Line 105) provides direct evidence for this; Rachel is directly attributing the “relationship” aspect of provision to this specific demographic. This is attributed to arranged marriages, which she presents as a significant issue for many, through her use of a very generalised statement which infers specific struggles: (Lines 106-107). While Rachel specifies arranged marriages as problematic in particular, her use of the phrase “*things like*”,

suggest other issues too. Rachel further implicates her pupils as having problematic circumstances as she uses an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) to underscore the risks many of her pupils face from abuse at home: (Line 113-114). Specifically, use of the phrase “*a lot*”, not only presents domestic abuse as an extreme problem, but an issue applicable to many of the pupils within the local area.

In presenting these extreme issues in a way that maximises and implicates them as common problems, Rachel is building strong justification for the aspects of provision that deal with young people’s ‘relationships’. This is further evidenced where their vulnerability is emphasised through the use of factual reporting. Most fundamentally then, this aspect of provision will deal with the negative relations young people are exposed to through their parents’ relationships and their family circumstances. Rachel emphasises these pupils’ vulnerability further as she outlines how the provision responds to these issues; she implicates young people’s lack of understanding around such issues, particularly their ability to recognise these as abuse (Lines 113 and Line 127) and knowing where to turn (Lines 115-116). In making this point, we can see this also further strengthens the importance of this aspect of provision.

As we can see, teachers build justification for particular aspects of their provision in a way that validates the nature of that element of provision and its central place within their programmes. These constructions relate to the discursive business of building justification rather than reflecting issues that affect the majority of young people; they appear within accounts as issues that create the greatest need for the provision. This is evident in the following excerpt that follows on from the previous stretch of talk, where Rachel continues to construct young people in a way that fits the rhetorical demands of the moment.

#### Excerpt 14 [p. 4&5]

- 128 Interviewer: (.hh) do you find that sort of (.) because (.) I think I suppose in this area and I  
129 think (*name of town given*) as well (.) >because you’ve got high levels of teenage  
130 pregnancy< (.hh) and high rates of STI’s (.hh) do- (.) does that sort of (.) almost erm (3)  
131 prescri:be what you feel you have to teach and what you feel you have to focus on?



132 Rachel: yeah (.) definitely (.) we have to try and get that message across (.hh) I mean a lot of  
 133 the children (2) in this school (.) have got parents that (1) don't work and don't have any  
 134 aspirations erm (.) and have children at a very young age (.hh) and because our kids don't see  
 135 any different (.) they think that's all there is for them (1) you know that how their life is  
 136 meant to be

137 Interviewer: umm mmm

138 Rachel: (.hh) that they're meant to go out and have sex because it's (.) a lot of its attention as  
 139 well (.) there's not much attention from parents so it's attention off somebody (.hh) you know  
 140 (3) I-(.) that (.) they actually (1.5) got attention you know they're having sex

141 Interviewer: °<yeah>°

142 Rachel: (.hh) to (*whispers something about the Dictaphone putting her off*)

143 Interviewer: (*apologises and explains*) (.) you were saying about the parents (.) they don't  
 144 have very many aspirations

145 Rachel: yeah (1) they're following the parent's footpath and it's trying to make them (.)  
 146 realise that there is (.) a life out there other than (2) having a child at fifteen sixteen

147 Interviewer: umm

148 Rachel: I mean we often have children that think (2) if I get pregnant then I'm gonna get  
 149 more money from (.) Government you know so I'm gonna get pregnant cos (1) I'll get me  
 150 rent paid for and (2) cos that's what the parent's are like

After a brief intervention from the interviewer regarding the extent to which she feels that the focus of provision is dictated by the local sexual health context, Rachel makes a series of claims about both the pupils and their parents in a way that further reinforces the sexual health focus within her provision. In promoting a strong sexual health focus, Rachel is aware of the responsibility placed on SRE in reducing the negative outcomes of young people's sexual behaviour. This allows her to portray young people and parents in an extreme way by making a number of exaggerated inferences around their sexual decision-making. In doing this, Rachel is articulating what are in fact very discriminatory opinions that (through her use of a number of discursive devices) are presented as accurate accounts.

Rachel builds up a negative picture of local parents by making inferences of their low aspirations and bad decision making (Lines 132-134). She again uses extreme case formulations to emphasise this as common amongst her pupils, in addition to a three-part list (Jefferson, 1991) to reinforce her claims: *"don't work and don't have any aspirations erm and have children at a very young age"*. The use of three-part lists is a resource used in many everyday interactions for a number of functions, one of which is to substantiate arguments. As such, they often function as a persuasive rhetorical device (Potter, 1996; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998).

Making various inferences about these parents' dispositions substantiate Rachel's inferences about the pupils' sexual behaviours and aspirations, by attributing them directly to the parents: (Lines 134-136). As part of this, claims around parents life choices are evaluated negatively for the messages they send to young people (*"don't see any different"*) and for their inability to advocate anything different for their children. Furthermore, this series of assertions contains a strong value claim, which infers some sense of standard or ideals regarding how people should live their lives.

Within this talk, we can see that Rachel also makes a number of assertions regarding pupils' motivations for sex and having children, predominantly implicating their parents. Young women's sexual behaviour is attributed to their need for attention, which they fail to receive from their parents (*"so it's attention off somebody"* Line 139). What is more, in asserting that these pupils are merely following in their parent's footsteps, these young people are implicated as being those who become pregnant as teenagers, based on their own low aspirations. These pupils are thus alleged to have expectations of their futures as being realised through motherhood, again attributed to their parents circumstances and a (false) belief that it will provide security in the form of money from the Government (Lines 148-149).

Using a number of discursive devices in order to construct young people and their parents, Rachel constructs her discourse as being based on fact rather than of personal opinion or more problematically, prejudice. As such, these views stand as a rhetorical construction. Nowhere in this passage of talk does Rachel appear to orient to the fact that she is expressing what may be construed as strong opinion giving. Furthermore, the talk doesn't include any features that typically characterise strong opinion giving, such as the use of disclaimers,

concessions, hedging or stake inoculation. These features of talk which are often used in order to mitigate against negative inferences for the speaker or utterances which effectively deny that discrimination and prejudice is taking place (Billig, 1991; Van Dijk, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). What does feature in Rachel's talk however, almost immediately after this passage, is the admission that she had her own children at a relatively young age and found this difficult. By adopting the subject position of a 'mother', this allows her to make such assertions effectively *without* the need for the aforementioned features.

Whilst the previous excerpts have highlighted teachers' constructing young people to support the aims of their health promotion provision, by drawing on statistics and emphasising young people as vulnerable for example, the following teacher mobilises similar arguments to justify his very different approach. This further highlights the rhetorical nature of these accounts and their discursive function.

#### Excerpt 15 [p. 3&4]

87 Bob: in (.) in (*name of area given*) and (.) I think th:e (.) the idea of being able to stand up for  
88 what you believe in has been (.) a really difficult place for students to be in the past (.)  
89 because (.) they've almost been forced to go with the flow (.) in the past (.) and there's been a  
90 stro:ng (1) influence on (1) promiscuity in a sense I suppose

91 Interviewer: right

92 Bob: I mean it's been a (.) there are issues on teenage pregnancies (.) there are issues around  
93 drugs of course (1.5) er (.) which again has an issue on (1) I (.) I suppose it has a knock on  
94 effect on sex ed (2) AIDs as well but last I heard it was (.) seco:nd in (.) I think it was second  
95 in the country for AIDs

96 Interviewer: right (2) I didn't know that

97 Bob: and (.) e:r (2) <it peaked (.) as the top place fo:r STI's I think

98 Interviewer: right

99 Bob: in Europe at one stage (.) certainly in the country



100 Interviewer: (2)(.hh) do those kind of facts influence you in any way (1) do you feel any  
 101 pressure (.) you know to put certain things on the programme in response to these external  
 102 factors

103 Bob: I know some schools would (hh) I know (.) and I suppose our number one (1) view on  
 104 a:ll our sex ed (.) is abstinence rather than (1) trying to er (1.5) bolt the door after >°the  
 105 horses bolted sort of thing°<

We can see in this excerpt that Bob is making a number of claims regarding the wider communities that both the pupils and schools are located in order to justify his abstinence approach. In attempting to provide justification for what he is aware may be perceived as being a more controversial approach, Bob makes claims about the local area, constructing the residents as holding poor community values. We can see this in most explicitly in lines 87-90, where Bob implies there is a strong (negative) community culture in which young people are situated. Although there lies a level of strategic vagueness here from a number of general statements, the meaning of this talk becomes clearer in his explicit claim that there is a problem with promiscuity (lines 89-90). In making this claim the vague previous talk, becomes heard as directly related to values around sexual relationships that exist in the community. Specifically, this claim of ‘promiscuity’ is directly attributed to the community culture; he implies there is difficulty in going against the grain. Being able “*stand up for what you believe in*”(lines 87-88) refers to various assumptions around the community and the nature of those that live in it, suggesting the presence of certain cultural norms within the community that don’t comply with Christian principles, perpetuating certain outcomes. Furthermore, use of the phrase “*almost been forced*” implicates this community as having a regulatory role in preventing young people to be able to diverge from these norms. Similarly to Rachel, Bob is therefore setting up the notion that people in the community serve as negative role models in young people’s lives.

The use of the term promiscuous is characteristic of religious discourse, with its use here directly relating to both the teacher’s Christian belief and the Christian ethos of the school. This type of discourse is also commonly used within an abstinence model. The use of this term functions here to infer the sexual behaviour of young people as problematic and therefore the use of the label ‘promiscuous’ as pejorative. To corroborate this point, Bob

references the local area's pregnancy and STI rates in lines 92-99, which works to establish this 'promiscuity' as primarily responsible for these negative outcomes. Bob presents these statistics in a way that presents local figures in the context of both the international and European rates (lines 95 & 99) in order to emphasise them as rather extreme.

As teachers set about problematising young people's more localised contexts in order to emphasise young people's vulnerability, the nature of the accounts contained a number of strong claims, particularly those related to local parents. Where teachers did express a number of strong claims about young people (in a non-professional rhetoric which varied from their normal responding), this almost invariably involved a shift in their subject position. Where this particular device was utilised by certain teachers it allowed those teachers to make stronger claims as part of their justification, those typically considered at odds with the neutral position of an SRE teacher.

Excerpt 16 [p. 16-18]

- 451 Judy: yeah (2) °< we've got a lack of family values°>
- 452 Interviewer: right
- 453 Judy: °so I'm big on that (.) I'M a SINGLE parent well (.) I was a single parent (.) I brought  
454 my children up (.) so I know what these kids are (3) to expect
- 455 Interviewer: yea:h
- 456 Judy: I'm quite (5) O:h (hh) My (.) I did my degree after my children and everything and I  
457 know what it's like (.) it's a tough life and I don't want that for them (.) so I've got a real  
458 drive
- 459 Interviewer: umm mmm
- 460 Judy: to er (.) lecture them almost (laughs) (.) and I do lecture them
- 461 Interviewer: yeah
- 462 Judy: er (.) > "well you don't want to be doin this" (.) and "you don't want to be doing that "(.)  
463 <because> "how are you gonna feed your baby" (1) "if you have a baby" (.) "what about being  
464 livin' in a top floor flat"

465 Interviewer: yeah

466 Judy: with a baby (.) and your husband smacks yer (2) or you're not married (.) your  
 467 boyfriend smack's you (2) you've got no money (1) what you gonna do

468 [ ]

485 Judy: they're a lot of single parents around here (2) a lot (.) I go for the family (.) for the  
 486 family thing erm (1) but you've got (.) I'm not stupid and I'm not naive and I know (.) erm  
 487 the kids will go off (.) but I would like to think they've got me barkin' in the back of their  
 488 heads somewhere (2) you know (.) and probably later like (god you were right there) (3)  
 489 °d'you know what I mean°

In this excerpt we can see that Judy makes reference to the local community as she claims there is a lack of family values (Line 451), a claim she repeats a number of times. Although the term 'family values' and its use here is rather vague, it is associated with various social beliefs, and typically used to represent the traditional nuclear structure. Its meaning here however becomes clear where after stating she is "*big on*" family values, she makes the pronouncement that she herself was a single parent (Lines 453-454). This firstly implies that one-parent families lack family values and secondly, serves to attribute this lack of values to the single parents in the area, which is further evidenced in another segment of talk later in this extract (Line 485). Implicit in this talk then is a negative evaluation of single motherhood. Notably, this evaluation is achieved in a way that avoids having to explicitly make this negative appraisal: namely, through a change in subject position similarly to Bridget in excerpt 12, this change in subject position qualifies her to make a number of stronger claims regarding the life of single parents based on her becoming the subject of that discourse (line 457). This also allows the strength of Judy's concern for these young people and her emphasis on issues within her provision, to be heard as more authentic, given that it again appears to stem from a having the pupils best interests at heart (line 457). This switching of subject position also then warrants more overtly prescriptive and stronger messages within SRE (line 460). While this style of teaching is not considered appropriate with SRE, we can see that it becomes more acceptable from Judy's subject position as 'single mother', as this identity provides her with the authority to make such assessments. As such, this membership



categorisation (Sacks, 1992) is being used as a form of stake inoculation (Potter, 1996), in that it is used to firstly to claim authority on the issue of single parents and to protect Judy from being heard as prejudiced about single parents. The issue of making this disclosure from the subject position of her personal role over her professional role is also apparent. The importance of this is clear; making some of these admissions is at odds with her role and therefore have to be done through her more personal (and therefore reasonable) role as a mother herself.

In problematising the local community in terms of its lack of family values, we can see that Judy goes on to further make a number of explicit assertions regarding teenage motherhood, which from the shared subject position, become all the more powerful as they work to establish this as an accurate account for motherhood. In building this account we can see that Judy presents a series of over-formulated assessments of teenage motherhood designed through the use of active voicing, (again, women in particular) scaring them away from early parenthood (Lines 462-467).

As part of producing justification around the various tenets of her SRE provision, this passage of talk around constructing a problematic community, does important work as part of this justification. Positioning young people (particularly, young women) as vulnerable within their communities based on their risks they face in falling victim to perpetuating certain perceived cultural norms, namely, those that foster early motherhood. Those implicated here are the lack of family values that are specifically attributed to the single parents to which are also portrayed as being a defining characteristic of this community, all of which become a cause for concern and thus are in need of reactive provision.

### **5.3.3 Constructing Young LGB People as ‘Isolated Cases’**

Within teacher’s accounts of their sexual health programmes, young people were constructed as almost always heterosexual. As teachers constructed a sexual health imperative around teenage pregnancy, by utilising a discourse of danger, this was further explicated it worked towards establishing this danger for the majority and thus, provided a means from which to argue that young LGB were anomalous cases. 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 pupil sexual diversity. While many of these teachers acknowledge that there may be a number of gay pupils in their classes, given their minority status, these SRE needs appear only as secondary to heterosexual pupils or as an after-thought in provision. As these teachers appear to be aware of the importance of having provision that is inclusive of pupil diversity, they inevitably attempt to account for how their own provision fulfils this criteria in spite of the fact that such issues are not considered to be fundamentals of SRE provision. The following excerpts highlight the various ways these teachers (mainly, Carl and Heather), account for their provision as being inclusive of young people's sexual diversities.

Excerpt 17 [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 thir:ty 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, disability and faith, he 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 felt to constitute the ‘promotion’ of LGB sexuality, is reminiscent of the discourse used within Section 28, suggesting that this understanding of this aspect of SRE provision has a dialogic element to it, based on the way Carl appears to be utilising the discourse of this policy here. Most significantly, this reformulation works to downplay both the nature and importance of this information; it suggests that, within this context, promotion would be inappropriate. Certainly, the lack of LGB material in Carl’s provision suggests that this resistance comes from having to acknowledge this, an act that works against the promotional element of his teacher’s accounts. 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). This formulation is interesting for the way it suggests that sex and relationships information for LGB young people is considered as separate to SRE information and as such, is not considered to be a basic part of young people’s SRE needs.

In building adequate justification for why this information is not covered in SRE, Carl constructs an LGB identity as a troubled one, constructing these pupils’ need for information only in terms of the concerns (line 397) they have about their sexuality. 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.

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 and appears to be more appropriate based on the premise that 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 mainstream. Although he appears to offer a number of reasons as to why he doesn't feel the SRE classroom is an appropriate context for individual fears to be discussed, he breaks off before completing this (Line 407).

While the reason given for not providing students with SRE provision, particularly in the example given, reflects a climate of intolerance around LGB sexuality and same-sex sexual practices within the school context, the solution Carl provides in response to this 'problem' is conceived principally as on an individual level. This is based on the process of 'signposting' these specific pupils elsewhere, instead of tackling on a more collective level the issue of homophobia. Furthermore, the nature of LGB sexuality or same-sex sexual practices is not considered relevant for all young people but just for those pupils who identify as LGB. While this is only conceived in terms of this specific concern, it highlights a heterosexual presumption that exists within the schooling context. This is highlighted in Carl's talk where referring to the "*macro level*" approach (Line 404) and "*key messages*" delivered, where the assumption remains that same-sex sexuality and sexual practice are not for the majority of pupils who are presumably heterosexual, and therefore do not need to know about non-heterosexual safe sex practices.

It is clear from the nature of this account however, that it has a rhetorical function, resulting from Carl's awareness of the importance of building a strong justification for his choices, particularly as he is aware that (under current national guidance), provision that isn't inclusive of diversity issues may be open to criticism.

The rhetorical nature of this account is most evident from his claims regarding pupils' best interests, which is a particularly noble enterprise, but 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 18 [p.18&19]

594 Carl: who don't promote it (3) since the repeal (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 that (1) what we do (.) as I said (.) as I said earlier (3) it's alluded (.) >°its not alluded (.) it's  
597 the wrong word<° (.) we signpost the 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 don't think the classroom that (.) and the environment that we have within our school is the  
606 best place to do it (.) I think they need 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 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 exceptional nature) 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). 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 and being in the pupils' best interests. 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 its 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.

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.

#### Excerpt 19 [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)

Heather's SRE provision features a standalone lesson on homophobia where issues around stereotypes and prejudice are discussed. As Heather provides a description of the types of activities and discussions that take place within these lessons, it serves as a way that Heather can both establish and reinforce their importance of this issue. The promotional nature of this sequence of talk is evident in the rhetorical questions Heather poses: (*"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, particularly by politicians. In this case, it serves 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 from this section of talk, this is aimed at producing a shared sense of agreement on the importance of this issue and the use of the phrases such as *"work at it"* and *"can't run away from it"* highlights the rhetorical nature of this talk. 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 appears to marvel in the fact that these pupils were dealing with homophobia 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. The discussion of this issue also signals its difficult and pervasive nature amongst young people, which 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 pupils 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.

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 heterosexuality as inconsistent feelings that are explained away as a momentary 'lapse' or misplaced feelings.

Overall, in trying to account for the inclusion (or otherwise) of sexual diversity, teachers' accounts are produced tentatively and are largely rhetorical. In addressing how their programmes cater for diversity, they use 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. The strategies used involve reinstating the presumption of heterosexuality, problematising same-sex sexuality and accounting for inclusivity in terms of homophobia only. Within this work teachers reinforce a hetero/homo binary and promote fixity of sexual identity as a basis from which to tackle homophobia.

#### **5.4 *Summary***

This chapter examined the way SRE is constructed at the level of the individual SRE teacher and the way they sought to formulate and justify their provision. As highlighted, teachers' constructions functioned as a means of accounting for the nature of that provision and helped



to establish it as having a coherent underpinning. Irrespective of the specific approach taken, their justifications involved creating certain SRE imperatives in line with the focal elements of their individual provision. Specifically, they constructed young people as vulnerable within their localised communities and at risk without clear provision. Additionally, in the accounting for their (largely heteronormative) provision, teachers constructed young LGB people, in addition to WSW/MSM as isolated cases. Despite this, teachers nevertheless claimed their provision is inclusive, which paradoxically served to maintain heteronormative provision.

## 6 Managing the Controversial Nature of SRE

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### 6.1 *Introduction*

The previous chapter examined the ways in which teachers formulate their SRE provision and subsequently provide justification for that provision. The analysis revealed that teachers, in building this justification, constructed young people in ways that principally upheld and validated their overall SRE approach. Following on from the last chapter, which essentially highlighted the level of autonomy afforded to SRE teachers in establishing the nature and scope of their SRE provision, this chapter sought to examine teachers' accounts about their provision, with particular focus on the way SRE is discursively negotiated within the interview context as a 'controversial' subject. In keeping with the previous chapter, the current chapter continues to examine the way SRE is discursively constructed at the level of the individual SRE educator, but additionally, seeks to take a closer look at the function of this talk.

As teachers' accounts highlight a level of rhetoric around provision, this chapter examines the nature of this rhetoric and its function in this context. What appeared most striking was that teachers managed their accounts in a way that reflects clear attempts at presenting provision in a positive and desirable manner. In doing this, the teachers drew upon competing discourses of SRE as both inherently problematic *and* trouble-free. These contradictory discourses achieve various interactional goals, particularly as they manage the presentation of both the teachers' programmes and themselves as SRE co-ordinators, as markedly positive. While the extent to which these teachers explicitly acknowledged this was relatively limited, where issues did feature in these teachers' accounts, they served an important function within the interview context, namely setting their provision up as exceptional. In managing these competing discourses, teachers' accounts evidence a number of dilemmas (Billig et al, 1998) when producing evaluations around their provision. As such, their accounts illustrate a number of strategies these teachers employ for managing these dilemmas, and for accomplishing their overall interactional goals.

## 6.2 *SRE as Problem-Free and as a Site of Struggle*

As teachers work to establish a particular SRE ideology (as highlighted in chapter 5), their accounts reflect various attempts at establishing and marking their individual programmes as decidedly positive. The most basic way that teachers sought to evaluate their provision positively was by highlighting its successes and omitting its shortcomings. This appeared most explicitly in their responses to questions directly concerned with problems around provision. Amongst efforts to dismiss these problematic aspects, their talk invariably marked SRE as a site of struggle, made so by the nature of its content. This did however raise a number of potential dilemmas, based on the nature of these admissions and their potential to undermine the evaluations of their provision. In managing these competing discourses (and dilemmas), teachers' used a number of strategies for ensuring these (contradictory) discourses work towards positively promoting their provision.

### 6.2.1 Refusing the Problematic

The most common attempts to uphold the image of provision as problem-free came in response to initial questions regarding problems with provision. Teachers refused these suggestions with a high level of conviction and with very little hesitation.

Excerpt 1 [p.2]

54 Interviewer: do you feel that that are any sort of barriers that affect your ability to deal er to  
55 deliver essentially what you want to deliver?

56 Heather: not really no no

Heather gives an extremely fast and unqualified refusal in response to the question. This short response that offers no attempt at justification illustrates the high level of commitment in producing this refusal. Despite this, Heather's response does imply there could be some level of curtailment, as indicated through the use of a conditional "*really*" (Line 56), which works to destabilise the degree of commitment and 'truth' of this refusal. As we can see however,



Heather reverts to her initial refusal, indicated by the repetition of the word “no” that works to ensure this is heard as absolute, indicating a high level of commitment to refuting problems within provision.

Whilst refusals were common amongst such talk, it was in response to questioning that emphasised the tensions teachers may face on a more personal level, that their refusals appeared much stronger. Moreover, these types of refusals also appeared where issues around stake and interest (Potter, 1996; Potter & Hepburn, 2005), were particularly high. Given the positions of these teachers as co-ordinators, these teachers are constructing their talk in a way that functions in doing some level of “interest management” (Edwards & Potter, 1992: 7). As a result, many of these strong refusals were also paired with reasoning for why they felt their provision was problem-free.

#### Excerpt 2 [p. 8]

220 Interviewer: Have you ever found that any of your own values (.) o:r beliefs have come into  
221 conflict with any aspects of your teaching in this area?

222 Rachel: No

223 Interviewer: no

224 Rachel: absolutely not (.) I’m con- I’m really confident in everythin’ that (.) that you know  
225 (.hh) we teach in PSHE and I don’t (1) I’m quite open minded (.) I don’t have any religious  
226 beliefs so (1)

Rachel provides a somewhat similar response to the initial excerpt as she outright refuses any notion that she experiences any problems in teaching this subject. Rachel both emphasises her refusal (Line 222) and uses a qualifier to establish the level of certainty around this refusal (“*absolutely*”, Line 224). Here Rachel is attempting to dismiss the suggestion that her personal feelings interfere with her teaching. Such a direct and resolute response marks this particular line of questioning as important, mainly for the way it threatens to undermine the provision. The importance of her response is further highlighted as Rachel continues to provide reasoning for this claim in Lines 224-226. She structures this in the form of a three-

part list (Jefferson, 1991) to illustrate why her personal opinions do not conflict with her provision. Use of this device in this instance establishes Rachel as a certain kind of person, with a particular set of qualities, which wouldn't compromise her teaching. Interestingly, Rachel implicates religious beliefs as a source that may lead to potential imposition.

Where teachers emphasised their provision as problem-free, there were also attempts at dismissing any notion of problems or curtailment by over-emphasising aspects of provision that highlighted its success and/or its smooth organisation. Examples of this include reference to the amount of funding available for their SRE provision and the level of enthusiasm of their SRE teaching staff. These examples not only work towards emphasising provision as problem-free but also present it as successful.

Excerpt 3 [p. 9; In response to a question around potential pressures they feel may shape their provision and after Judy stating that she doesn't feel any pressure from the LEA].

244 Interviewer: so you feel pretty erm (.)

245 Judy: RELAXED

246 Interviewer: and able to [make decisions

247 Judy: [do do whatever] I want

She returns to reiterating the freedom she has over her provision in subsequent talk:

296 Judy: I've been given a (.) complete free reign

297 Interviewer: °right°

298 Judy: when I was actually put on board one of the stipulations that I said you let me do what I

299 want (.) and give me all the money I need

Here the interviewer is following up on previous talk where Judy dismisses feeling any pressure over what is included in her SRE programme. Lines 244 show the interviewer's

attempt at summarising Judy's response. We can see however, this question is interjected as Judy provides her own formulation: "*RELAXED*" (Line 245). In intervening here, Judy assumes that the interviewer's question related to her personal feelings about her provision. Therefore, this intervention grants Judy the ability to impose her preferred interpretation (and response) to this question, which in turn gives her some control over how the information is heard. This need for control over the nature of the interview is further highlighted in Lines 246-247 in Judy's response to the inquiry about her autonomy over decision-making. Judy's attempt at setting the nature of the question (and response) is again evident as she completes the interviewer's question, resulting in some overlapping talk. This enables Judy to emphasise both her freedom and control over her provision. Moreover, she maximises this claim using an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986): "*Do do whatever I want*" (Line 247), giving the impression that she is in a position of complete control. The rhetorical nature of this talk is subsequently highlighted where Judy states numerous things she would like to change in her provision. For example, she expresses her desire to go departmental, her dislike of SRE being form tutor lead (tutors as non-experts) and her admission around the on-going tentative status of having a sexual health clinic on the school site. In expressing these contradictory claims, it appears highly unlikely that she has the level of freedom she claims to have, yet she wishes to emphasise control in order to legitimate her original claim of being "*relaxed*". Judy further reinforces this position in her return to the issue of autonomy (Line 288) where she emphasises the freedom she has over her provision, again using extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) emphasising her "*complete free-reign*" (line 296).

Claims of autonomy are present within all of the interviews and are as rhetorically strong as featured in the last excerpt. In dismissing notions there may be problems within their programmes, teachers' accounts of their SRE programmes clearly evidence a concern with managing the presentation of their overall provision positively.

In the instances where teachers did offer some problems related to their provision, these appeared after repeated questioning and only represented relatively minor concerns such as the gender balance of staff and some (passing) observations around the order and presentation of the programme. In offering relatively superficial 'problems' in their provision, they are managing the dilemma of stake and interest (Potter, 1996: 1997) within their accounts.



Within this context, in providing some examples of 'problems', teachers pre-empt the argument that they have a vested interest in promoting their provision as problem-free based on their positions as authors. More simply put, the teachers are inoculating against having their account discounted on the grounds of stake and interest (Potter, 1997). The act of citing what are ultimately inconsequential issues therefore further highlights the rhetorical nature of these accounts, specifically the way they are constructed in a way that upholds these teachers' desire to present their provision positively.

Despite this very strong rhetoric, particularly around the smooth running of their provision, teachers' accounts inadvertently highlighted SRE as a site of struggle, where issues inherent to SRE are considered problematic. While teachers primarily strongly resisted such evaluations, the problematic elements of SRE were set amongst talk primarily designed as a means of promoting their SRE provision. The level of struggle was particularly evident when accounting for various decisions at a policy making level, issues around dominant stakeholders (school governors and parents) highlighted certain elements of SRE as problematic. This talk inevitably marks SRE as a site of trouble for teachers and particular elements within it, as issues of contention.

The following excerpt illustrates a struggle for Judy in accounting for her SRE policy, which can be understood in relation to a number of concerns around the presentation of the provision itself and Judy herself as the coordinator. Judy is aware that all schools are required to have an SRE policy under current legislation and therefore the implications of not having one. It is also apparent throughout the rest of Judy's interview that she is concerned with portraying a strong sense of autonomy and control over her SRE provision. It is in light of these concerns that we can see the importance Judy attributes to managing her accountability over this policy making. Here we can see that Judy attempts to firstly account for not having the policy and secondly for not having written it. In doing this she employs a number of strategies in order to avoid negative appraisal.

Excerpt 4 [p.13 & 14]

354 Interviewer: currently then (.) do you have an SRE policy (1.5) [erm

355 Judy: [we do

356 Interviewer: for the school (1) and have you written that in accordance with (2) < you>sort of

357 takin on your new role or

358 Judy: er:m (3) °let me just double check (inaudible) I wrote all the policies for the school but

359 (1) there was one that I (.) I refrained from writing (.) and I do:n't know if it was that one (4)

360 I've got a funny feeling it was (2) cos I took a look at it and I thought (.) that's possibly (4.5)

361 not e:r (2) I think it was saying something to do with the Head (1.5) If I remember rightly (3)

362 I thought it was above me°

363 Interviewer: right

364 Judy: d' you know what I mean

365 Interviewer: yeah

366 Judy: erm (1) if you just let me have a look I'll tell you (7) I've got the anti-bullying policy,

367 the confidentiality policy, the enterprise policy, drugs policies (2) race, equality, smoking

368 policies (.) and it is the SRE I wouldn't touch

369 Interviewer: right ok

370 Judy: and I didn't touch the SRE and I think it was purely because (.) er:m (2) the head was

371 Catholic (.) and I felt that (.hh) a more senior

372 Interviewer: umm

373 Judy: member of staff (.) should write that policy

374 Interviewer: right ok

375 Judy: and s:o (.) if there is a policy it lies with (1) a more senior member of staff

376 Interviewer: right

377 Judy: °for now°

After initially committing to having an SRE policy in Line 355, it then becomes less clear as to whether a policy actually existed, as she states there is one policy she "*refrained from*

*writing*". Judy initially refrains from identifying this as the SRE policy, and goes on to offer a number of reasons for this; "*something to do with the head*" and "*I thought it was above me*" (Line 361-362). This is an indication that Judy is not only aware of the potential issues of not having this policy but that she is also trying to account for it. In making a point of mentioning the policies she does have before confirming it was the SRE policy she "*wouldn't touch*", Judy seeks to minimise the effect of not having this particular policy by highlighting those she does have in comparison. Judy then specifies the reason for not having written the SRE policy as due to the head teacher's religion and the fact that it requires "*a more senior member of staff*" (Line 375). Interestingly, in a previous stretch of talk, Judy used the head teacher's religion to account for her provision as 'problem' free, based on the support the head teacher provides (as someone more "*senior*"). As this justification contradicts her earlier claims, it is clear Judy is attempting to manage her accounts in a way that presents both herself and her programme favourably. Furthermore, in diminishing her level of responsibility here, we can see a very different discourse used by Judy in comparison to that used elsewhere, where claims of autonomy and control were emphasised. In temporarily relinquishing her claims of control, this grants Judy legitimate reasons for not having personally written this policy.

While teachers' accounts of their SRE promote their provision as generally positive and problem-free, the very strong rhetoric mobilised by teachers is invariably compromised in response to questioning regarding the problematic areas of this subject. As teachers wish to conceal problematic elements of their programmes in favour of promoting beneficial aspects, they stumble around issues about their provision, marking SRE as a site of struggle. As teachers attend to these dilemmas, their accounts evidence a number of strategies that they use for managing these in order to uphold their provision.

### **6.2.2 Distancing the Problematic**

As teachers attempt to bolster their provision, their accounts reflect a number of attempts to distance these problematic elements. This strategy was used by all of the teachers in various ways, but this predominantly featured around their talk of sexual health services.



### 6.2.2.1 Downplaying Problems

In managing the issues associated with their provision, many teachers would downplay their level of influence. We can see this in the following excerpt, where Carl marks the sexual health elements of SRE as controversial, but then manages the level at which this is heard as problematic.

Excerpt 5 [p.3&4]

101 Interviewer: Has there ever been any tension between you and the governors of (.) in terms of  
102 what you want and what they think ah that's- [inaudible ]

103 Carl: [The only (.) I mean] yeah (.) the only point we  
104 ha:ve (1) had (2) was (1.5) about six seven years ago we had the opportunity to put in (.) an  
105 emergenc:y (.) er clinic (1) drop in clinic (.) so where the pill could be issued

106 Interviewer: umm

107 Carl: a:nd (.) the governors didn't think it was appropriate that (.) it was done on the school  
108 site (2) so what th:ey were suggesting (.) they weren't against the idea of students having  
109 access to emergency contraception (.) but they were suggesting that it had to be done off site  
110 and (.) the learning centre which is backed on behind the shops on (street name  
111 given) >which is about two hundred yards away < (.) was identified as a location (.) and also>  
112 with having a new youth club< (.) which is mo:re central to a:ll the student

He goes on to reflect on the relationship with the governors further in a later section of the interview where he acknowledges the problems contraception raises:

630 Carl: and that (1) I think we've come up with the best of both worlds with that (.) we've  
631 satisfied the governors and the kids are still getting the information (.) that they need (p. 20).

In responding to a question assessing the relationship between himself and the governors, Carl emphasises this relationship as essentially good, describing only one disagreement (Line 103). This incident surrounded the rather contentious proposal to establish an on-site sexual health clinic where pupils can get access to emergency contraception. Although Carl doesn't explicitly state his opposition to the governors by wanting the clinic on the school site, it is assumed that he at least originally wanted this to be the case. By admitting tension, but not

explicitly stating this, Carl can be seen to be minimising the actual level of tension experienced between both parties. This is clear throughout the passage of talk, but mostly in Carl's immediate response, as he prefaces this admission by marking this as an isolated incident (Lines 103-104). In making this stipulation, Carl appears keen for this to be heard as a one off incident highlighting it as an exception rather than the rule. In further downplaying the level of disagreement be, Carl is not only quick to emphasise the resolution, (i.e. a clinic was set up in close proximity of the school), but he is also keen to emphasise the resolution as a mutual decision, (*"I think we've come up with the best of both worlds"* Line 620. emphasis added).

In further downplaying both the nature of the disagreement and the frequency of such tensions, Carl can even be seen to be managing the way in which the governors' opposition is heard by the interviewer. This occurs where he appears to soften the nature of their disagreement from an opposition to the nature of the service (i.e. against pupils getting emergency contraception), to an issue of location (Lines 108-110). In making this point, Carl is attending to the fact that the governors' opposition could be heard as an issue of providing emergency contraception to young people. In wishing to resist such an interpretation, Carl is eager to emphasise this as a simple location problem. Despite the fact that it appears the governors have an issue with the nature of this service being carried out within the school (Lines 109-110), Carl softens this objection by emphasising the upshot of this decision being that it is *"more central to all the students"* (Line 112). It is arguable as to whether this location actually is more "central" for the pupils, but it is clear that Carl is attempting to frame this incident as having a successful outcome.

Having successfully downplayed the level of tension experienced with the governors and the issue from which this tension arose, Carl is able to manage both the presentation of his provision and his own relationship with the governors. Moreover, he is able to downplay the issue at the heart of this opposition, by accounting for this tension as a difference in opinion based on the location of this service, as opposed to this being about the nature of the service itself. Although carefully resisted, what is apparent in Carl's account, is the various issues that impede the provision of SRE within a school context, particularly aspects of sexual health provision that are often deemed inappropriate for schools to provide.

Across many of the interviews, certain aspects of sexual health provision appeared to be particularly problematic based on the reactions they elicit for various stakeholders. Certain aspects of SRE provision cause particular concern for parents, those with more of a vested interest in the content of SRE. Where these teachers were asked about the level of opposition felt from parents, the extent to which it encumbers provision is minimised within their responses.

#### Excerpt 6 [p. 4]

- 108 Interviewer: and what about parents (.) have you ever had any concerned parents (.) or  
109 backlash (.) about any of the material or topics covered in the lessons?
- 110 Bridget: No (.) No (.) we've never had any (1) nothing like that (.) not to my knowledge I  
111 mean the only (.hh) sort of comments that I have had (.) because you know that we do  
112 outreach
- 113 Interviewer: yeah
- 114 Bridget: (.hh) service where they can get condoms and (.) erm (1) morning after pill (1) we  
115 do pregnancy testing (.) is a couple erm (2) we had (.) we had quite a good parent turnout  
116 when we set that service up (2) erm and you know (.) parents were concerned (.hh) as to why  
117 (1) you know (.) we thought we should be (.) issuing condoms (.hh) erm and then (.) I mean  
118 it's been up and running now for about four years (.) and in that time I've perhaps only had a  
119 couple (.hh) of parents who've been concerned about (.) issuing condoms in school (.) but  
120 I've just given copies of the city wide (2) protocol and you know (.) direct it's all (.) you  
121 know within the safeguarding (.hh) er policy and guidance as well as (.) you know (.) it's not  
122 just an ad hoc thing that (.) we decided to do its its (.) quite firmly monitored and (1) erm (.)  
123 as far I know I mean (name given) might know (.) but she's never (.) you know- (.) I've never  
124 had anything directed

In response to the idea of parental complaint, despite Bridget's initial refusals that "*nothing like that*" has happened in response to her SRE provision, she goes on to describe various concerns from parents regarding a sexual health service provided by the school. Although Bridget is admitting some issues, like Carl, there are various attempts to downplay the



significance of these incidents. Almost immediately, Bridget resists the interviewers original formulation; “*parental concern*” and “*backlash*” (Lines 108-109), reformulating it in terms of the “*sort of comments*” received from parents regarding a sexual health service (Line 111). To further downplay this, Bridget refers to the active opposition as “*a good parent turnout*” (Line 115). This effectively obscures the nature of their attendance, presenting it as something that signifies a level of support, as opposed to opposition.

Despite the rather direct nature of the question, Bridget’s response only fleetingly attends to the nature of these parental concerns (Line 117). Moreover, her attempt to downplay these concerns is also evident from the way she offers them. Use of the phrase “*why... we thought we should*” serves to query the legitimacy of the concerns by questioning the reasoning for issuing condoms, as opposed to the action of issuing condoms itself. Thus, Bridget is inferring that whilst parents are fully aware that a number of places *do* and *can* issue condoms, they are taking issue with the fact that the school is doing so. In turn, this implies that these parents are simply unaware that such provisions are commonplace within secondary school SRE. Bridget’s concern over how this admission is heard by the interviewer is apparent in the remaining stretch of talk; after ensuring the nature of the concerns parents have are managed, she moves onto managing the extent to which the service could be implicated as problematic. In lines 117-119, we can see that Bridget cites the relatively few complaints they have received during the time it has been running to do this. As part of this more promotional rhetoric, Bridget then outlines the various procedures in place that ensures this service is carried out in the correct manner (“*within the safeguarding*” Line 121; “*It’s quite firmly monitored*” Line 122). The reference to “*safeguarding*” here emphasises the protective role of this service in young people’s lives, which ensures the concerns parents have about this service are not warranted. In doing this, Bridget is further assuring that any parental concerns discussed here, are not attributed to the service. In not wishing to compromise the way in which her provision is heard, Bridget’s admission around receiving some parental opposition is presented in a way that firstly, downplays the level of concern received and secondly, attributes it to unjustified parental anxiety.

Where teachers did admit to experiencing some parental conflict as a result of their SRE provision, similarly to Bridget, they often downplayed or even dismissed these issues as

misplaced concerns. Even where this parental concern was particularly adverse, teachers still sought to soften the opposition levelled against both themselves and the provision. This was particularly evident in one teacher's account, where as the author of the provision, she fell foul to such anxieties.

Excerpt 7 [p. 12 & 13]

- 403 Sarah: erm like I said "apart from that one young woman out of one lesson (3) that's been it" (.)  
404 the only other (1) concern that somebody raised once was about th:e (2.5) what I call bits (.)  
405 and pieces lessons with the genital pictures (1) because one of the things that (.) I say in the  
406 lesson is that it's really important for you to get to know your own body (.) because if you  
407 know what's normal for you (.hh) then you'll know if something's not quite right (1) erm (.)  
408 with er (1) you know (.) and they can (3) do that or not if they wish (.) but I often say to them  
409 go home and have a lo:ok (.) if you don't know what your bits (.) look like (1) then go home  
410 and have a look (1) and erm (2) and (.) there was one complaint about that (.) and so what I  
411 did this year was ask (name given) the Head to come in and watch me teach that lesson  
412 (.hh) >I taught it exactly the same (.) said exactly the same things< (1) just so that she was  
413 absolutely informed and fully aware (1) erm (.) and she's been very supportive anyway
- 414 Interviewer: yeah
- 415 Sarah: but erm (1) that wasn't a very nice incident (1) because his (.) his parent was having a  
416 (1) a real rant and then there was (2) erm (.) some follow up from that <when er (1) they were  
417 kinda sending emails to all the (.) national papers and all sorts of things>

In keeping with the other teachers, Sarah emphasises the scarcity of incidents with parents (Lines 403-404). We can see this where she is keen to mark having only one child removed from her lessons as the only incident ("*apart from*" ... "*That's been it*", Line 403). Despite making this rather definitive claim, Sarah goes on to relay a much more problematic issue she faced in reaction to a specific lesson included within her provision. Where she does this however, she attempts to downplay this incident. This is evident in the way in which Sarah highlights the irrational and thus, unfounded nature of the complaint. This is evident in her own formulation of the lesson; "*What I call the bits and pieces lesson*" (Line 405) which

works to establish the lesson as something more innocent than the complaint would suggest. By further providing detailed description around the nature of the message included in this lesson (lines 405-410), Sarah can be seen to be further downplaying this complaint by providing necessary context in which to consider this complaint and establish adequate justification for this message. This is evident through the various justifications and disclaimers that preface the complaint: (Lines 405-406). This justification is also based upon a strong health rhetoric, which again works to warrant the inclusion of such messages in SRE. Following this statement with a disclaimer around its proscriptive nature “*and they can do that or not if they wish*” (Line 408), further works to minimise its dubious nature. By also framing this message as being only for those who “*don’t know what your bits look like*” (Line 409), Sarah is further attempting to validate the nature of this message by reinforcing its value as a health promotion message. Moreover, in presenting the message she presents to the pupils using active voicing (Wooffitt, 1992), in an attempt to further authenticate the way in which this message is delivered to the pupils.

In line 410 Sarah finally (albeit briefly) specifies, the nature of the complaint before returning to her dismissal, as she outlines her personal request that this lesson be observed in order to validate its nature (Lines 411-413). By doing this, Sarah is ensuring that this parent is heard as having no grounds for their complaint. To further corroborate its authenticity, Sarah emphasises how she did not change the nature of the lesson during the observation (Lines 412-413). In the last part of the excerpt, where Sarah refers to her personal reaction to this complaint (Line 416-418), the enormity of their reactions becomes evident, although this again is slightly muted by Sarah: “*kinda sending emails to all the national papers*”(Line 418).

#### 6.2.2.2 *Doing Comparisons*

While there is a general tendency amongst these teachers to downplay the various problems that impinge on their SRE in order to bolster their provision, they also only refer to various problems when attempting to increase their own individual status. As teachers’ accounts of their provision signal SRE is inherently problematic, they attempt to distance problems away from their own provision and onto other schools’ programmes. This allows them to justify their provision as problem-free, by setting up a number of comparisons between themselves



and other schools. Making these comparisons allows teachers to ensure their claims are persuasive.

Excerpt 8 [p.8]

249 Sarah: I think a lot of the schools (1) may not be very clear about what good PSHE looks like  
250 because they've never experienced it (.)

251 Interviewer: yeah

252 Sarah: and if you've got teachers that have never experienced it (.) why would they be  
253 enthusiastic about something which doesn't appear to be very exciting or interesting (.)

254 Interviewer: yeah

255 Sarah: and just has to be done (.) where's the passion in that (.) where's the kind of heart for  
256 those things and some teachers do think that it's (.) really worthwhile and important and  
257 therefore needs specialist teachers and they are not able to offer that

This excerpt is part of a sequence of talk in which Sarah emphasises the importance of schools having a specialist SRE teacher. As a specialist SRE teacher herself, Sarah establishes her provision as one of good practice, a position that has granted her a secondary role as the lead professional for SRE in the local district. Sarah describes this role as one that involves supporting various schools (typically those with high numbers of teenage pregnancies) in their SRE in order to improve their provision. As Sarah strongly argues for the inclusion of specialist teachers (like herself) in SRE, she makes a number of claims about schools that do not, resulting in a negative appraisal of those schools. Specifically Sarah is making the claim that specialist teachers determine good provision. This claim is designed in such a way that while she avoids making the criticism explicit, she ensures it is still heard as such. This is apparent from Sarah's inference about the quality of other school's SRE provision: (Lines 249-250). Here Sarah appears to be making a rather tactful 'guess' and in doing this, Sarah is 'troubling' a large proportion of schools' SRE ("*a lot of schools*", Line 249). In generalising this claim, we can see she is constructing this as a widespread problem

experienced by many SRE teachers. What is interesting about this evaluation, however, is the way it does not explicitly attribute blame to any particular individual, although it still works to implicate (non-specialist) SRE teachers as the problem. We can see this where Sarah attributes what she considers to be the problem (poor knowledge around good provision) to “schools” rather than specifically to SRE teachers.

While the issue of attributing blame to individual teachers and schools is strategically managed here, Sarah does go on to implicate teachers in this issue (lines 252-255), where she jumps from claiming that teachers haven’t experienced good SRE to implying that they are not enthusiastic about it, although she does this implicitly, by posing the rhetorical question “*why would they be enthusiastic about something which doesn’t appear to be very exciting or interesting*” (Lines 252-253). Here, Sarah is attributing blame outside of these teachers’ control; given that they haven’t experienced good PSHE, the teachers can’t be expected to be enthusiastic. Moreover, the disclaimer that the subject is “*something which doesn’t appear to be very exciting or interesting*” (Line 253) provides further rationale for a lot of poor SRE. Although Sarah is clearly criticising other schools here, she ensures the blame remains external to those teachers involved whilst strengthening her initial argument regarding the importance of specialist SRE teachers (in Line 257) simultaneously positively reinforcing her own position as a specialist teacher in this area.

This talk also functions as a means of promoting SRE more generally, which appears to be a result of the Sarah’s wider role as lead professional. We can see this in Lines 255-256 where she attempts to convey a level of passion and importance using further rhetorical questions: “*where’s the passion in that (.) where’s the kind of heart for those things*” (Lines 255-256). In line with evidence for people tailoring their talk in a way which to suit the rhetorical demands of the moment (Billig, 1991; Edwards & Potter, 1992), Sarah’s argument becomes more persuasive as she ensures her point resonates more strongly. Although not explicitly stated here, this talk ensures that Sarah is portrayed as someone who has both passion and heart for these matters, and thus again promoting herself and her provision. By doing this comparison in this segment of talk, Sarah is ensuring that her role and provision stands as the “yardstick” against which all other provision is to be measured.

Sarah's talk markedly differs from the other teachers who were interviewed; it signals a more tactful attempt at expressing opinions on other schools' SRE provision. While making comparisons with other schools' provision acts as an effective persuasive strategy, in cases like Sarah's, where there is a certain level of stake at play (stemming from her wider role), these evaluations are managed accordingly. Conversely, for teachers without responsibilities outside of their own schools' provision, these evaluations are done somewhat differently.

Excerpt 9 [p.7]

- 200 Rachel: at the minute N:O (.) <cos we're very fortunate in (name of school stated) (.hh) cos  
201 most schools just aren't (1) really interested in PSHE I do believe > they do it because  
202 they've got to< (.hh)
- 203 Interviewer: umm mmm
- 204 Rachel: this school (.) is really supportive of the subject (.) I mean I've got a huge budget  
205 (.hh)

This excerpt shows Rachel responding to a question as to whether there is anything she would like to change in her SRE programme. After refuting potential change, based on what she states is a result of being in a very "*fortunate*" position, Rachel makes an inference about other schools' SRE provision to substantiate this claim (Lines 200-201). She does so by using an extreme case formulation "***most schools just aren't interested in PSHE***" (Line 201, emphasis added). By generalising this claim to a majority of schools this formulation works to exaggerate the extent of this problem amongst other schools. It also therefore works to mark Rachel's provision as distinct in comparison, suggesting that she *is* a motivated and supportive SRE teacher.

From these examples, it is clear that teachers commonly set about making comparisons to features of other schools' provision strategically, in order to make their provision seem desirable. Where teachers referred to other schools' provision, this typically involved making inferences around levels of motivation, experience and the expertise of other SRE teachers along with the level of importance and time afforded to SRE. This allows them to distinguish



both themselves and their provision from other schools in a way that enhances their own evaluations and further distances the problematic.

### 6.2.2.3 *Creating Boundaries*

Another strategy that teachers used to fend off potential negative inferences about their provision was to outline boundaries around aspects of their provision, such as language use and conduct within class. This was most evident amongst more promotional talk, where teachers sought to highlight the way in which their provision is tailored towards young people's own cultural needs. As there is now an increased pressure on teachers to acknowledge young people's more localised realities, teachers' accounts evidenced a clear concern with outlining the ways in which their provision met such needs. This was particularly evident in talk around pupil demographics, where teachers sought to establish their individual understanding of their pupils more personalised cultures. This also appeared in teachers' talk around the nature of the content they deliver such as language use. Where this occurred however, teachers' accounts evidence attempts at showing an equal concern between meeting young people's needs and ensuring that the provision delivered is seen to be informative and 'appropriate' to the school context. As such, teachers attempt to strike a balance between being seen to be catering their provision towards young people's realities, whilst balancing this against more formalised health and morality-based messages. In doing so, these teachers sought to minimise the extent to which problems could be found in their provision whilst simultaneously maximising the degree to which they can be evaluated positively.

#### Excerpt 10 [p. 13 & 14]

- 395 Rachel: I think the main thing is that the kids (.) I know from the last school I was in (2) they  
396 wanted to be able to speak in their own language (3) so (1) oral sex became a blo:w job (.)
- 397 Interviewer: right

398 Rachel: things like that (.) and I did explain to th- (.) I don't (.) I'd not got a problem with  
 399 them using their language

400 Interviewer: umm

401 Rachel: I mean they (.) there were some that would say (2) (*Spells it out*) F.U.C.K >you'd go  
 402 right that's takin' it a bit too far you know< (.hh) but there are others that don't know (1)  
 403 other words they don't know oral sex (.) they only know(.)<Blo:w job>

404 Interviewer: umm

405 Rachel: you know and er (.) different things for different parts o the- (.) they might not know  
 406 Penis (.) they only know cock(h) yo(h)u kno(h)w (*Laughs*)

407 Interviewer: ye(h)ah (.)

408 Rachel: s:o <it was important that they were allowed to [use their]

409 Interviewer: [yeah

410 Rachel: language (.hh) so I'll incorporate that in this curriculum that yeah (.) you can use  
 411 your own language but (.) there are limits

In this excerpt, we can see that Rachel is keen to point out the pupils' level of freedom in being able to use their own language through which to express their understandings of their provision. She is also quick to point out the limits put in place however, to ensure this approach is not viewed as inappropriate or unfounded. Initially Rachel is setting up a strong justification for this approach, one that is endorsed *and* requested by the pupils themselves (Lines 395-396). Again, the importance of outlining this point is understood in relation to the onus now placed on SRE to deliver pupil focused provision. Her use of phrase "*their own language*" (Line 396) marks this language as *belonging* to young people, differentiating it from the more formalised language typically utilised by SRE teachers.

Rachel offers an example to illustrate the types of language differences ("*oral sex became a blow job*", Line 396). Here we can see that the example offered is a more colloquial name used to describe a particular sexual practice. In this instance, she is attempting to be specific

about what is authorised within this context (made explicit within Line 398-399). This is then contrasted strongly with an example of the type of language that is not permitted (Lines 401-402) that she incidentally spells out, further marking it as inappropriate. Whilst both terms are popular colloquial terms to refer to sexual activity, the latter is expletive. Rachel refers to this particular use of language as *"taking it a bit too far"* (Line 402). What we can also decipher from the unacceptable term above, the type of terms which fall outside the boundaries are also used as profanities. Rachel also makes a point of outlining that acceptable language has a necessary learning need: *"here are others that don't know other words they don't know oral sex they only know Blow job"* and then again in Lines 405-406 *"they might not know penis they only know cock"*. This way of accounting for young people's language use works as a means of authenticating some uses of 'their' language and works to mark others as less legitimate in comparison and inappropriate.

The nature of language use (and indeed, the nature of SRE itself) attracts a level of trepidation, particularly for the way it often incites anxiety in key stakeholders. As such, it is therefore something that teachers have to carefully account for. We can see this in the way that Rachel works to establish clear boundaries within her account for what is and isn't acceptable in this context. It highlights the point that limits still exist in terms of just *how* much freedom they are granted here, which is managed carefully by teachers. The importance of making this explicit within their accounts is further illustrated in the following excerpt with Heather.

Excerpt 11 [p. 7]

222 Heather: so hopefully (.) erm what the students are saying is going to be reasonably  
 223 positive >there's one or two things that they never understand like they always say things like  
 224 'well we want to know more about oral sex"< (.) and things like that and we have to (.hh)  
 225 when we sta(h)rt doing (.) you know SRE we we do draw the ground rules we talk about (.hh)  
 226 and we do say> that you know as PSHE teachers (.) you know were gonna be very aware (.hh)  
 227 we've gotta be very careful that we're not insulting people, that were not talking about things  
 228 inappropriately and so on <(.hh) and were not the:re to kind of advise on technique and things  
 229 like that (.) we can answer questions if we feel that they are appropriate (.hh) erm (.) but we  
 230 can't be seen to kind of promote one practice over and above another (.) is that- (hh laughter)



231 Interviewer: yeah, like a fine line?

232 Heather: it is, it is, it is and certain (.) it's the same with erm you know that language that you  
 233 u:se (.) you might be a little bit more explicit if you'd agreed and everybody knew (.) what  
 234 that meant (.) you know you would teach in terms of proper terms but then (.) you might use  
 235 or if a student used another expression (.hh) it wouldn't necessarily be taboo in that situation  
 236 because it was acceptable (.) [you know like the word shagging or something like that]

237 Interviewer: [well I yeah yeah]

238 Heather: you know if you were talking about it with year ten or eleven then that would be  
 239 probably acceptable in that context (.) where as you wouldn't perhaps (.hh) accept it in  
 240 another lesson (.) do you know what I mean?

241

Within this excerpt, Heather is answering a question around the nature of pupil's feedback about their SRE. It forms part of a larger stretch of talk where Heather outlines the importance of the 'student voice', particularly for Ofsted inspections. Here we can see that in postulating about the nature of her own (imminent) pupil feedback, Heather predicts this will be positive (Lines 222-223). Interestingly, after making this assertion, Heather begins to provide some explanation for why pupil feedback may not always be a representative gauge of a programme's quality. In doing this Heather outlines the restrictions that exist around how much SRE can respond to requests made in pupil feedback. This accounts for any potential negative feedback received, by emphasising these limits, whilst also emphasising the extent to which provision adapts to young people's needs (a notable mark of good provision). Like Rachel, Heather is thus keen to outline the various measures put in place for ensuring that young people are made aware of the limits of their SRE provision whilst also emphasising their relative freedom. To emphasise restrictions placed on pupils (based on their inappropriate nature), Heather provides another example: "*they always say things like well we want to know more about oral sex*". We can see that the types of comments deemed inappropriate revolve around requests for more instructional information. Use of the extreme case formulation "*always*" and active voicing, works to emphasise the frequency of these kinds of requests and their representation of the kinds of things many pupils say. By framing

these types of pupil requests as unreasonable, Heather is asserting the boundaries of SRE's scope and locating these types of requests firmly outside of its responsibilities.

Similarly to Rachel, Heather is therefore keen to emphasise her attempts to meet pupils' requests, whilst maintaining certain required restrictions. She explicitly acknowledges this with her reference to "*ground rules*" Line 225. Again, such measures prevent "*insulting*" or "*inappropriate*" discussion (Lines 227-228). Not wishing to be portrayed as entirely dismissive however, Heather then highlights the difference between what can and cannot be done in provision (Lines 228-229). In making this point, Heather can be seen to be making the necessary measures for ensuring pupils' needs are met whilst ensuring they are protected. Also like Rachel, Heather sets out her restrictions placed around appropriate language use. For example, Heather refers to the age of pupils as being one factor which determines more "*explicit*" language use. She also refers to way in which acceptable language is often determined on an individual class level as is negotiated between herself and the pupils (Lines 233-334). These types of decisions appear to reflect the dynamic relationship and interplay between the pupils and teacher.

The importance teachers place on having balance within their SRE provision appears to reflect concern for both pupils and teacher, and is evident in the way in which their accounts are designed in a way that emphasises that the ways in which young people are subject to both a level of freedom and certain limits. This becomes important as pupils' satisfaction is taken as a measure of SRE's success; any issue of negative feedback threatens to undermine provision. In these instances, teachers wish to manage such issues, without dismissing the voice of the pupil and without damaging the nature of their provision.

### **6.3 Summary**

This chapter highlights the inherently problematic nature of SRE, as oriented to within teachers' accounts of their provision. It also highlights the highly rhetorical nature of their accounts in managing provision as such. This involved refusing aspects of the problematic or controversial in their provision by various strategies such as by distancing and downplaying these issues. As teachers' accounts evidence clear attempts made in promoting both

themselves and their provision positively, we can see they utilised various strategies in order to do this. This included comparing their own provision with other schools, in order to differentiate and bolster their provision further. In making these comparisons, this functioned as a means through which these teachers could also (indirectly) establish their own teaching credibility. In further attempts to fend off any potential inferences about their provision, these teachers also emphasised the boundaries present in their provision regarding the nature of information discussed and the types of language used. In emphasising the parameters they build into their programmes, this functioned as a means by which these teachers could not only present their provision as balanced, but also rebut any potential negative inferences about their provision.

The next chapter will continue in exploring the construction of SRE, but from a pupil perspective. This chapter provides an examination of how young people experience their SRE, along with the messages they receive within their individual programmes.



## 7 Examining young people's accounts of SRE

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### 7.1 *Introduction*

The previous two chapters focused on examining teacher's talk around their SRE provision, specifically how they formulate their provision as part of an overall approach taken towards SRE and how they justify their various approaches. This involved the teachers constructing young people and their communities in ways that ultimately highlighted a need for their specific approach, thus providing support for it. Teacher's talk was also constructed in a way that emphasised their freedom and autonomy over all aspects of their provision and functioned as a means of promoting their provision. As such, both of these chapters emphasised the highly rhetorical and strategic nature of teacher's accounts.

While teachers' talk emphasised their provision as positive and adaptive to pupils' needs, this chapter seeks to examine how pupils conceptualise their provision. More specifically, this chapter aims to examine the significance they attribute to their provision, in order to gain some insight into how these pupils experience their individual programmes. Of particular interest was pupils' evaluative talk about provision and most importantly, the messages presented to them. Consequently, this chapter sought to locate pupil's accounts in the context of the 'ethos' set out by their teachers. This approach was felt to be important for exploring the way varying SRE approaches positioned and shaped pupils' meanings and understanding of their SRE. Pupils' talk was therefore informed by the classroom lessons observed, in order to further locate the context of their accounts.

### 7.2 *Overview*

In talking about their SRE programmes, pupils expressed a variety of (mostly negative) opinions and experiences about the SRE they had received, both in terms of its content and delivery. In keeping with the literature, pupils were highly critical of the way their SRE focuses on the issue of STIs and contraception, information they felt was given at the expense of other more realistic information. While not extremely surprising given the wealth of

studies that indicate young people's overall dissatisfaction with their SRE (Measor et al, 2000; SEF, 2011; UK Youth Parliament, 2007), this analysis does highlight differences between the types of evaluations these pupils make according to their individual programmes. Specifically, the most negative evaluations came from pupils located within programmes with a strictly health promotion focus, namely, Hatfield, Hansway and Low-Valley (see chapter 3 for a breakdown of each school's SRE programme). Despite some variations, these programmes focused on the negative outcomes of young people's sexual behaviour and therefore, pupils' criticisms related mainly to the problem based nature of their provision. The point of contention for these pupils appeared to rest on the assertion that teachers proscribe negative outcomes (such as STIs), as a foregone conclusion to their sexual activity. Most interestingly, this contrasted rather markedly with those pupils located in Middleton, who in comparison, evaluated their provision positively. Although this programme still has a strong health focus, it also has what is classified as a more progressive 'ethos', characterised by the alternative discourses utilised within SRE lessons, i.e. those it mobilises around sex and sexuality. While these pupils represent a small proportion of those that took part in this research, their accounts represent a departure from that of pupils located within the other three schools.

### ***7.3 The disjunction between the discourses authorised within SRE and those espoused by pupils.***

#### **7.3.1 Sex for pleasure**

Inherent within pupil's accounts were the positive ways in which they talked about sex, which stands in contrast to the meanings attributed to sexual activity in their SRE provision. While meanings around sex on offer within Hatfield, Hansway and Low-Valley carry connotations of risk (and in some instances, death), those mobilised by pupils were inherently more positive. In particular, pupils utilised a discourse of pleasure and fun as opposed to danger.

Excerpt 1 [p.3] [Hatfield, Year 10, group 2]

61 I: (laughs) right (.) ok (.) and erm (1) why do people have sex?

62 Kirsty: like it (.) they enjoy it

63 Ben: <it's fuckin' ace>

This excerpt follows one groups discussions about the meaning of sex and the different terms they use when referring to sex amongst one another. As we can see, the meaning and reasons for sex are simple and centre around a discourse of pleasure. Although this is not entirely surprising given the common conceptualisation that sex is both pleasurable and actively engaged in by most people, it is contrary to the way in which most people (e.g. parents and teachers) think that young people should be talking about sex. As such, it is contrary to the way sex is presented in SRE, where sex is promoted as something people do only in specific circumstances, (e.g. as adults, in the context of love, reproduction or marriage). However, as these accounts show, pupils don't primarily speak about sex in this way.

The notion of sex within the context of love was mentioned in several of the groups, evidencing its common use as a discourse within SRE. Although many pupils drew on this discourse (either by troubling/rejecting it), it also appeared alongside an alternative (and competing) discourse where sex was conceived and legitimated without love. While the meaning of sex as pleasure was present in these pupil's talk, a level of tension was also evident, as they attempted to acknowledge both forms of discourse within their accounts. This is highlighted in the following excerpt where one young man attempts to answer whether he thinks love and sex are interdependent.

Excerpt 2 [p. 5-6] [year 10 boys, Low-Valley, Group 13]

161 I: you know you mentioned love? (.) is love and sex something that's gotta go together?

162 Damien: [yeah

163 John: [yeah

164 Stewart: yeah

165 (inaudible)



166 Tom: it's changed now

167 Damien: somethings (.) SOMETIMES (.) it's this dirty thing but then (1) most of time it's  
 168 like this passionate thing int' it?

169 Stewart: that dirty thing is called po:rn

170 Tom: it's changed hasn't it though because (1) say like (1) I don't know (.) fifty years ago it'd  
 171 be (2) to have kids or for passionate but now its turned [to like

172 Damien: [it's just for pleasure

173 Tom: just for pleasure and fun

174 I: ok (.)

175 Tom: and like you have it if it feels right but

176 I: but you don't have to be in love?

177 Damien: no

178 David: no cos like people have one night stands and they don't even know each other

179 John: yeah

The question of compatibility of love and sex initially generates agreement from the group (Lines 163-165) until Tom raises the point that "*it's changed now*" (Line 166). The majority of the group then agreed and continued to discuss this contradictory opinion. Damien is the first to offer his own reasoning for this: "*somethings sometimes it's this dirty thing but then most of time it's like this passionate thing int' it?*" (Lines 167-168). While this statement doesn't appear to be structured as a direct response to why love and sex don't always have go together, it stands as a way of summarising both sides of the argument (i.e. conceptualising sex as either dirty or passionate). These different meanings of sex are used for their different connotations; sex as something 'dirty' connotes a lack of emotion and absence of love, whilst 'passionate' sex denotes emotional feelings, thus implicating love. Of particular interest here is the false start "*somethings*" which Damien subsequently repairs with the word "*sometimes*". This contrast serves to mark out a distinction between sexual acts, but marks this as a tentative formulation. The subtle downgrade of this statement to refer more to how sex is

perceived ("*sometimes*") rather than talking more essentially about sex (as would be suggested by using the term "*somethings*"), is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it allows this young man a way of acknowledging acceptance and his position within both discourses; allowing him to acknowledge the love discourse present in SRE, whilst also managing how the interviewer hears this more traditional male discourse of sexuality, namely the 'dirty side' to sex. The discomfort in presenting the latter is highlighted with the subsequent conjunction '*but*' which is used to mark this particular version of sex as more infrequent ("*but then **most** of the time its like this passionate thing int it*", Line 167-168). From this we can see that the two contrasting discourses these young men use to describe sexual experiences are almost pitted against one another, where one is perceived as more permissible than the other.

Subsequent talk from the other members of this group further highlights their reconciliation of these competing discourses; Tom talks about the way sexual values have changed over the years in order to highlight the way that sex has moved from being "*to have kids or for passionate*" (Line 171) to a more recreational activity: (Line 173). In making this point, Tom appears to be setting up a more comfortable position from which to emphasise the more casual nature of sex. After doing this, he then oscillates back towards a more traditional discourse of sex as compatible with love, as he adds the following point: "*and like you have it if it feels right but*" (Line 176). This almost appears as way of buffering the effect of previous statements, so they can return to the idea that love doesn't have to precede sex. David takes up this point in Line 178, where he uses the example of people who have more casual and short term sexual relations through one night stands.

This kind of seesaw effect seen here, where these young men move back and forth between the competing discourses, illustrates their recognition and acknowledgement of the more socially sanctioned ideals around sex, such as the relationship between sex and love, as they indeed equate the two; whilst at the same time they also recognise (rather problematically for SRE providers), sex as fun and pleasurable.

### 7.3.2 Relationships as short-term and casual

As SRE that adopts a predominantly health promotion approach most commonly peddles the notion of sex within loving relationships (typically envisaged as something young people will encounter in their futures), pupil's accounts of their sexual subjectivities and practices highlight the incompatible nature of this message for them. Although, many of the pupils located within these programmes did describe themselves as being in relationships or indeed having previously been in relationships, most of these were described as relatively short term (i.e. a few months). While most expressed their desires for long term, loving relationships, these were envisaged as future events, with the majority of pupils feeling that love and long-term relationships are unrealistic at this stage in their lives. As one young man put it: "*well nobody's really in love at our age anyway but people still have it (sex)*" (Group 13, page 7, Line 194). This is also illustrated in the following excerpt where talk of relationships and sexual activity highlights this stage of pupils' sexuality as characterised by curiosity and experimentation:

Excerpt 3 [p.13] [Year 10 girls, Low-Valley, Group 12]

- 389 Lucy: it's just like for a laugh and that (.) you dunnt want nowt serious like 'I wanna marry  
390 you when I'm older' (.) at fourteen years old (*Group laugh*)
- 391 I: ok (.) so is it not (.) it's not very (.) it's common then for you to have (.) you know for  
392 young people to have a lot of relationships that are quite short or
- 393 Caroline: 'it's just° tryin' (.) [TRYING things out innit?
- 394 Lucy: [yeah
- 395 Leah: everybody puts like they love you and that (.) [like (*inaudible*) and they're like 'oh I  
396 love you so much'
- 397 Sian: [oh god
- 398 Leah: it's to sleep wi yer (.) we aren't in love (.) it gets boring and like (.) in our year



As we can see from this excerpt, sex and relationships are discussed in terms of fun, curiosity and experimentation. In Line 389, Lucy rejects any notion of long-term or serious relationships. In using the pronoun 'you' here, although Lucy is offering one particular interpretation as to why young people are not looking for a serious relationship, in doing so, we can see she is also speaking on behalf of the other young women her age as well. In response to the interviewer's question around relationship status and length, Caroline refers to these relationships as those where pupils can experiment (Line 393). This excerpt is interesting for two reasons; it firstly illustrates the way these young women describe relationships as more casual and experimental. It also highlights the way that discourses depicting a more active (particularly female) sexuality, have to be justified by young people. Such justification, may reflect the way that young people's sexuality is not socially sanctioned within their particular SRE (and society in general) and although this talk positions young women as active desiring agents, this position doesn't appear an entirely comfortable one. This assertion is based on the way this talk features a number of devices aimed at reconciling the more active discourses these young women mobilise. This is evident in Lucy's talk following her claim that young people don't want anything "*serious*" and relationships are "*just for the laugh*", where she (sarcastically) expresses the alternative for someone of her age: "*like 'I wanna marry you when I'm older' at fourteen years old*" (Line 389-390). Here she is trying to emphasise the inevitably more casual nature of relationships at this stage in these young people's lives. What appears as a rather obvious point is highlighted by the laughter it generates amongst the rest of the group. It also highlights Lucy's need to justify the more casual and short-term nature of these relationships. This occurs again (Line 393) in response to the interviewer, who sought further clarification regarding the attitudes mobilised about relationships (Lines 391-392), and notably, where the phrasing of this question is such that it implicates the more casual nature of young people's relationships. These justifications both trouble the idea that young people can be in love and highlight a level of scepticism of the intentions of those who may claim to be in love, namely young men who they claim use the rhetoric of love as a strategy for getting sex (Lines 395-398). As these arguments serve as a reaction to potential criticisms of their relationships, these young women appear both savvy and sceptical about the issue of love. Therefore, while these accounts may reflect the more active and desirable arrangement these young women are

negotiating for themselves, this could be driven by their scepticism of the intentions of young men, and therefore reflects a different discourse around relationships (one that is negotiated and forged in light of the types of young men mobilise around relationships). While this scepticism is only touched upon here, it featured in many of the young women's accounts. As such, while it is clear that these young women talk of sex in a similar fashion to the young men in the other groups, i.e. sex as principally for pleasure and as part of more short term and casual relationships, it is not clear as to whether this is their own formulation or those mobilised by men. Nevertheless, these young women also mobilised a discourse around their (sexual) relationships directly in opposition to those presented in their SRE. Importantly, this was produced rather tentatively. This level of caution they appear to display appears to be reflective of the tension young people speak of within a context which fails to sanction their sexuality or their sexual activity, despite constructing themselves as sexual subjects.

### **7.3.3 Sex as rite of passage for pupils**

Pupils' talk that naturalised sex also served to undermine the message presented in SRE. Across many of the groups, particularly from year 8 upwards, pupils spoke of sexual activity as normative and in a way that implied some level of personal experience. While (perhaps predictably) a couple of the young women interviewed displayed a level of active decision-making when discussing when to have sex, for the most part, the norm was a more haphazard approach to sex. In these instances, these young women spoke of sex as something they expected to have at some point before leaving high school. Whilst they naturalised sexual activity through much of their talk, it appeared most explicitly in response to questions that explored their thoughts about abstinence and delay messages within SRE. In voicing what appears to be unanimous disagreement regarding the nature of this type of message, they then set about putting forward a number of arguments for defending such a position.

Excerpt 4 [p.22] [Year 9 girls, Low-Valley, Group 10]

655 I: so if your sex education teacher said (.) ok everyone should wait (.) you're all underage it's  
656 not legal (.) you shouldn't (.) have sex until you're married or until you or until you're in a  
657 long-term relationship over the age of sixteen (1) would that be useful?

658 Rebecca: no

659 Laura: no

660 Rebecca: no cos if your mates have already lost it (.) (*inaudible overlap*) they go 'its right  
661 good, it's right good, it right good' and that so you just want to lose it more (3) that's the only  
662 reason why I lost mine because people were saying it were good

663 I: right ok

664 Kate: when people tell you not to do it (.) you feel like you want to do it more to see wh-(.)  
665 what is the big deal for not doing it

666 I: right

667 Kate: why shouldn't I do it?

Pupils categorically discredited the effectiveness of a range of arguments regarding delay or abstinence from sexual activity that are utilised in SRE. In offering some reason for this response, Rebecca refers to the practicality of being able to abstain in the knowledge that her peers have had sex and in the face of their encouragement to follow suit: (Lines 662-663). The full weight of the type of pressure is demonstrated through the use of active voicing (Woofitt, 1992), where Rebecca is using this strategy as a way of mimicking the types of rhetoric used by peers for encouraging others into having sex, which appears to rely on promoting the nature of the act itself as desirable. As evidenced elsewhere in further talk, although influenced and spurred on by peers' endorsements of sexual activity, these young women speak of actively seeking sex through talk around their natural curiosity, thereby invoking readiness and choice. This is highlighted in Kate's talk where she emphasises the role of curiosity and personal autonomy in sexual decision-making (Lines 664-666). As part of her reasoning, Kate also constructs her talk in a way that effectively downplays the significance of this decision: After raising the common argument regarding the appeal of the forbidden (i.e. when you're told not to do something, you want to do it more) she questions the significance of abstinence "*whats the big deal for not doing it?*" (Line 665). This



resistance is further bolstered in the subsequent rhetorical question made: “*why shouldn’t I do it?*” (Line 669). Notably, this level of peer pressure doesn’t appear to be considered as a negative influence, particularly as these young women construct peers as conveyors of valuable and crucial information. This is further demonstrated in the challenges made to their sexual behaviour and the notions held around the importance of resistance.

Clearly, if pupils mobilise scepticism around the notion of sexual delay or abstinence and have positioned themselves outside of the bounds of love, the messages contained in SRE (regarding both abstinence and notions such as the ‘ideology of love’), are likely to be met with high opposition. Furthermore, the meanings offered of sex as a natural and essential part of adolescence is fundamentally at odds with the message contained within SRE, where a discourse of danger often dominates. This more naturalised discourse around sex emerged in many of pupil’s accounts and is illustrated most poignantly in one year 11 group of young men’s talk, as something that was not only monumental for them but also transformative.

Excerpt 5 [p. 8-9] [Year 11 Boys, Low-Valley, Group 15]

- 249 Carl: dunnt really have to talk about it (.)
- 250 Liam: no (.) because we’ve (1) you can guarantee (2) what (.) 60 to 70 percent of the year
- 251 have already done it
- 252 I: right
- 253 Liam: so (.) they just think oh yeah (.) but you can tell when someone’s done it (.) I can tell
- 254 when someone’s done it
- 255 Craig: they change
- 256 Liam: they change
- 257 Craig: totally change
- 258 I: right (.) what do you mean (.) like in their behaviour or what [they say
- 259 Carl: [Like personality (.)

260     Liam: like everything

261     Carl: stuff they talk about (.)

262     Liam: like me (.) I were in year eight when I first did it (.) then year seven and eight (.) I used  
 263     to get bullied a lot and I was right quiet and that but (.) year nine like th-(.) your six week  
 264     holiday between year eight and year nine (.) I opened up and I came back a different person (.)

265     I: umm

266     Liam: never got bullied again (.) or owt like that (.) I don't mess about on that just totally  
 267     different person once you've had sex really (.)

Here these young men talk about their first sexual experiences as something particularly memorable in their lives. Sex is thus portrayed as significant in their overall development and adolescent adjustment. This we can see is invoked through talk which signals sex as transformative for these young men, something that is felt on a more qualitative basis. In addition to being a milestone in their adolescence, these young men tended to refuse the idea that sex was in fact, a big issue. In refusing this idea, Liam estimates the percentage of people he believes have already had sex by their age (Lines 250-251). In expressing this partly as a statement, and partly as a question for others to confirm, the majority of pupils are portrayed as having engaged in sexual activity. This is then used as a means from which to argue that young men don't need to talk about it. This doesn't appear to be the only marker by which young people decipher those who have had sex, as he also claims that it is almost instinctively easy to recognise those who have had sex (Lines 253-254). This is corroborated by the others in the group who invoke sex as transformatory: "*they change*" (Line 255) which they conceive in the first instance terms of "*personality*" (Carl, Line 259) and then more significantly and as being all encompassing: "*like everything*" (Liam, Line 260).

In further attempting to illustrate this, Liam goes on to share his first sexual encounter, which he emphasises as something formative. We can see this where he sets up a contrast between how he was before and after sex; where before he describes himself as "*quiet*" and "*bullied*" (Line 263) before he "*opened up*" (Line 264) and came back to school a "*a different person*"

(Line 268). He then talks about sex being an indicator of maturity and development. In framing sex this way, we can see that these pupils speak about being sexually active as both a central and desirable part of growing up. These accounts therefore indicate a clear disjuncture between the ways young people construct themselves and their sexuality and the way in which their SRE attempts to position them.

## **7.4 *Pupils Scepticism of SRE Provision***

### **7.4.1 Voicing scepticism over teachers**

The discourses mobilised by pupils located within Hansway, Hatfield and Low-Valley not only marked a level of scepticism around the nature of their SRE provision they received, they also appeared to express suspicion of the teachers who delivered it. They questioned whether their teachers were the most appropriate providers of SRE on the grounds that they that teachers lacked the knowledge and expertise to ensure pupils felt comfortable within their SRE. This of course stands in contrast to the strong rhetoric teachers themselves deployed in their accounts around the quality of programmes and their expertise. The types of attitudes displayed in pupils' accounts regarding the delivery of their SRE appear in the following excerpts.

Excerpt 6 [p. 8] [Year 7 girls, Low-Valley, Group 6]

225 I: do you not want sex education off your teachers?

226 Leila: [no

227 Sian: [no I'd rather have somebody different so you're [able to talk to em

228 Carla: [I'd rather (. ) I'd rather it be someone

229 [professional

230 Kylie: [someone like you really trust because then it's not gonna get spread around the school

231 Carla: °and like someone'll keep it quiet (. ) not (teach it)°



- 232 I: sorry what were you saying over here
- 233 Leila: someone who's a professional
- 234 I: a professional yeah? someone who's got a lot of knowledge (.) someone who goes out of  
235 school so that you don't have to see em in a different subject lesson?

Excerpt 7 [p.14-15] [Year 8 girls, Low-Valley, Group 8]

- 459 I: what (.) what kind of (.) what would you feel comfortable with (.) would you feel  
460 comfortable with it coming from a teacher (.) someone [who just teaches sex education
- 461 Amy: [no (.) no
- 462 Bella: no (.) [like a proper professional
- 463 Emma: [I think everything we learnt (.) like professional like (.) is it (xxxx)

Rather unanimously, several of the young women in both excerpts are quick to affirm that they would rather receive their SRE from 'professionals' as opposed to teachers. In making this distinction, we can see that teachers are dismissed as professionals in this particular area of young people's education, or as Bella puts it in excerpt 7: "*proper professional*" (Line 463), the latter of which are equated with a number of qualities that they don't attribute to their current teachers (excerpt 6). These accounts highlight the fact that these pupils afford professionals greater trust: (Lines 230-231), and confidentiality. In making these points, it would appear that pupils perceive their SRE needs as marked by delicacy and potential problems, given that they require an educator who can offer them confidentiality and privacy. From this, pupils' requests for professionals over in-school teachers appears to rest on the assurances professionals can provide. In most cases, these 'professionals' were referred to as qualified nurses and those who work in sexual health (i.e. in sexual health clinics). Consequently, 'professionals' are determined in terms of the sexual health information they can provide, or more specifically, the more practical services they can provide (e.g. confidential contraceptive service etc.). In doing this, these pupils appear only to conceive

their SRE within the limited confines of sexual health and risk. Thus, the requests appear to reflect the limited way in which pupils currently conceive their SRE entitlement, namely as that concerned with risk and danger.

Even in the schools where pupils receive more of an 'extended' health promotion provision, where the provision is more consistent and includes specialist teachers such as Carl (Hatfield), pupils didn't appear to voice any more positive attitudes around their provision. In fact, these pupils troubled not only the types of messages presented, but also intentions and ability of their teachers to understand their personalised realities. The following excerpt highlights the way these pupils appear to reject their SRE on both these grounds.

Excerpt 8 [p. 4-5] [Year 10, Hatfield, Group 1]

115 I: you know (.) sort of then when your programme's say (.) wait make sure you're with the  
116 right pe:rson (.) make sure you're ready (1.5) is that something then that you think (.) is  
117 realistic and you listen to and you think (.) yeah maybe do you sort of walk (.) walk out and  
118 reflect on what has been said in your programmes?

119 Louise: no

120 Francis: °I don't either° (*group laughs*)

121 Anna: °I do°

122 I: why not (.) why not

123 Francis: cos (.) what they say is kinda like (.) plastic it's not really (.hh) [they're] not

124 Joanne: [Yeah]

125 Francis: really sayin' it to you it's just (.) like (1.5) they just say it

126 Poppy: °>they say it cos they have to<°

127 Francis: but (1) yeah (.) they say it so they have to if you know what I mean (.) It's like

128 Joanne: It's like (.) it's like sayi:n' (1.5) oh yeah don't do this (2) but then they've gon- (.)

129 probably gone and done it before

130 Francis: YEAH

- 131 Joanne: so its jus-
- 132 Francis: IT'S NOT LIKE
- 133 Kyle: > problem is you never know what's [gonna happen<
- 134 Poppy: [YEAH but (2) maybe (.) they've done it before > yeah it
- 135 might be a lesson and they don't want you to (2) <
- 136 Joanne: (.) yeah but they don't even know who I am
- 137 Louise: umm
- 138 Joanne: 'why are they tryin' to tell me what to do?
- 139 Louise: (1) 'it's for your own safety
- 140 (Male participant laughs)

This excerpt highlights pupils' scepticism of the messages within their SRE programmes, particularly the motivations behind such messages, their authenticity and teachers' reasoning for their prominence.

What is interesting about this excerpt is despite the majority of pupils rejecting such messages and their validity, Anna disagrees with the group ("*I do*" Line 121). In Line 122, the interviewer asks the group to provide some reasoning for their responses, which, in subsequent talk, revolves around the authenticity of the message. Francis critiques these messages in line 123: "*what they say is kinda like plastic it's not really saying it to you it's just like they just say it*". In querying some of the messages they are delivering, this appears to represent an attempt at undermining the motivations behind such messages. This is subsequently picked up by another pupil "*they say it cos they have to*" (Poppy, Line 126). In raising these points, the nature of these pupils' scepticism appears to centre around the nature of these messages as they are part of a generic and standardised message mobilised by teachers, that is, those that are merely set out in the curriculum rather than being delivered as part of a more personalised and meaningful basis. As such, these pupils appear to be



questioning the sincerity and legitimacy of these messages and their teachers' personal motives for delivering them.

This can be seen more explicitly in the subsequent debate where Poppy voices some justification for this rhetoric, highlighting the possibility of teachers' good intentions behind such messages: "*yeah but maybe they've done it before yeah it might be a lesson and they don't want you to*" (Lines 134-135). Joanne attempts to undermine such a claim, by questioning teachers' ability to give sound advice to young people, based on their lack on knowledge concerning the realities of individual pupils: (Line 136). It therefore appears that rejection of these types of messages contained in their SRE provision is conceived mainly in terms of prohibition around young people's autonomy and sexual activity, and based on the fact that they appear critical of the intentions behind these messages.

Excerpt 9 [p. 5-6] [Year 10, Hatfield, Group 1]

- 148 Kyle: they're just (.) they (.) get told what to say and [(inaudible)]
- 149 Francis: [yeah] I don't [reckon they know what goes on
- 150 Poppy: [yeah whatever's on the curriculum they'll say
- 151 Joanne: (.) I'(h)m guessin' th(h)ey can guess w(h)at does on (laughs)
- 152 Francis: NO but they don't know like (1)
- 153 Kyle: or they wouldn't be allowed to just go 'oh yeah (1.5) you [never know what's gonna
- 154 happen]
- 155 Joanne: [< as long as you're careful>]
- 156 Kyle: yeah (.) ^you just kind of (.) go along with it

Again, the issue with the authenticity of teachers' messages relates to whether they are authors of these messages or simply parroting a scripted message (Line 148). Subsequent talk constructs teachers as disconnected from pupils' realities due to their perceived lack of

knowledge about young people “*I don’t reckon they know what goes on*” (Francis, Lines 149-150) and their (perceived) failure to respond more personally to pupil’s SRE needs “*yeah whatever’s on the curriculum they’ll say*” (Kyle, Line 151). As we can see in subsequent talk, the messages lack further integrity with these pupils, based on the limited autonomy they perceive their teachers have to go outside of these restricted and ‘authorised’ messages (Lines 154-155).

In stating that certain information is off-limits or at least somewhat stilted, the scepticism these pupils are mobilising appears to centre around claims that teachers are not being frank enough with them. This has implications for how these messages are then received, as Kyle articulates: “*you just kind of go along with it*” (Line 158). In highlighting the rather superficial nature of how pupils see their SRE, this comment invokes an image of SRE lessons almost like a play that is acted out between the teacher and pupils.

As pupils’ accounts highlight the fragility of the pupil-teacher relationships, they appear to be very critical of their SRE teachers overall. Their scepticism did not appear to relate to every in-school teacher however, only those deemed unsuitable for teaching SRE. In addition to teachers’ level of expertise and knowledge being influential factors in this distinction, their personality and overall approach to the subject were also made relevant. It was amongst talk where pupils were comparing SRE teachers, that the attributes of what they constructed as a good SRE teacher become clearer.

Excerpt 10 [p. 21] [Year 10, Hatfield, Group 1]

615 Francis: he knows more about how your (.) you think about it

616 Joanne: yeah

617 I: oh right ok

618 Francis: they seem to be like tellin you information and then just gettin’ it over and done wi

619 but (1.5) he seems to talk

620 Joanne: It’s like (.) read it off a book

621 I: yeah

622 Joanne: but he jus like talks to yer jus (.) jus [( )]

623 Poppy: [they'll (.) they'll set a lesson plan out and  
 624 they'll just tell you eveythin' but [he'll like just (.)]

625 Joanne: [°and just talk°] and if you've got [any questions

626 Poppy: [get your opinion and  
 627 everything

628 Joanne: go over lesson and (1.5) > so say like if you ask a question (1) at the beginning of the  
 629 lesson he teks up all the lesson

630 Poppy: yeah (.) and he wouldn't just answer it (.) he'll explain it

631 Joanne: he'll (.) he'll explain it all and then next week (.) he'll do what he planned or summat  
 632 (.) but if you did that in there (2) they'd just like [skip that lesson and rush through

633 Francis: [his lessons are more you tellin' (1) < him (.)  
 634 what you're views are than him tellin

This excerpt is part of a stretch of talk where this group talk about their preferred SRE teacher. In explaining why they like this teacher they compare this teachers ability to go more 'off-script' more than the other teachers (Francis, Lines 618-619). They also identify his ability to engage in a meaningful and open way with them as another reason for why they prefer him to the other teachers (Poppy, Line 630). The distinction these pupils appear to draw between this teacher and others, is further highlighted through the use of the descriptor 'they' when referring to the latter.

In marking this teacher out as favourable, these pupils appear to be identifying this teacher's personalised approach as a reason for him being able to better meet their SRE needs. Joanne highlights this in lines 628-629 where she provides an example of how he approaches questions that arise in class. The positive appraisals given by these pupils of this teacher then appears to rest on his ability to venture 'off piste' of the more formal curriculum when his



pupils require him and his ability to conduct his lessons as a two way dialogue (Lines 631-633). The comparison made to the alternative approaches (taken by other teachers in the department) reflects an attempt to emphasise the strength of this approach. These accounts produced around SRE teachers, particularly these that focus on evaluations, highlight pupils as shrewd consumers of SRE as evidenced by their ability to so acutely assess the efficacy of their provision and to delineate what they want and need from provision.

From these pupils' accounts, we can see that their relationships with SRE teachers are both fragile and complex. While the nature of evaluations varied slightly between pupils within different schools, overall they appeared to be highly sceptical of many teachers that delivered their SRE. Again, this was based on what they articulate to be a lack of teacher autonomy with the messages delivered. In being critical of the messages contained in their SRE, these pupils remained cynical of health-focused provision. As teachers play a crucial role as the conveyors of SRE, these accounts have crucial implications, particularly as these seem to determine the authenticity, credibility and enjoyment of SRE for pupils.

### ***7.5 Pupils positioned by a discourse of danger***

Although pupils appeared highly critical of what they considered limited provision, they didn't appear to be able to conceive what comprehensive SRE should be like. In fact, when exploring opinions regarding what they would like their SRE to include, they continued only to draw on those elements of provision linked to the negative aspects of sexual activity.

Excerpt 11 [p. 14] [Year 9 girls, Low-Valley, Group 10]

- 413 I: ok (4) erm (4) right you know when I mentioned about having sex education and you  
414 mentioned that you'd had a little (1) If (2) if you were to have a say in what your sex edu- (.)  
415 sex and relationship education includes from year seven to year eleven (.) what would you  
416 want it to sort of include?
- 417 Rebecca: (3) all problems like STI's and that
- 418 I: ok

419 Rebecca: and what they can do so (.) they don't really tell you what they're like

420 Susan: like what they look like how you can catch em well obviously you know (*participant*

421 *laughs*) but I mean like (1) what the (.) what [symptoms you get

422 Rebecca: [so you know what symptoms you get what

423 starts it

424 Susan: what they look like

425 Rebecca: how to get rid of em

426 Susan: what you need to

427 Rebecca: people who do sex education (.) it would be nice if they were there to talk to them

428 as well you know > say you had a problem you could talk to them and they could help you<

Despite expressing that their SRE provision is limited to the negative aspects of sexuality, these young women's conceptualisations of SRE still emulated this view, as their requests for provision centred around these same negatives. For example, Rebecca highlights: "*all problems like STI's and that*" (Line 417) and the rest of the group outline exactly what this information should encompass (i.e. symptoms of STI's, such as visual features and treatments). These requests appear to reflect a clear desire to learn more information about SRE currently lacking in their programmes. This is implied within a further comment Rebecca makes: "*they don't really tell you what they're like*" (Line 419). Perhaps most significantly, these pupils specify that they would like to know more about the STIs themselves, as opposed to information limited to contraction (Lines 421-422). As their requests centre around information they want, these also related to type of help they would like from their SRE teachers, which again was problem focused (Lines 428-430).

This same problem-based focus is evident in the following excerpt with a different group. Here, despite acknowledging that they have received information regarding the elements of SRE they request, they still appear unable to conceive SRE outside of a problem-based focus.

Excerpt 12 [p.14-15 ] [Year 8, Hansway, Group 3]

418 I: So (1) can I ask you all (.) what you would (.) what you would all like to learn about and to  
419 sort of do in your PSHE lessons (.) to do with sex and relationships (.) what would you like to  
420 learn?

421 Katherine: er

422 I: what would you like to be included?

423 Katherine: keeping safe

424 Emily: yeah but we know that

425 (crosstalk)

426 Michelle: the different types of condoms and stuff like that

427 I: so different types of contraception

428 Michelle: yeah (.) and yeah (.) and how it effects it (.) what it does

429 Katherine: and then how to have an abortion and stuff like that

430 I: right so you (.) are you saying you all know those things or are you saying you want to  
431 learn about them (.)

432 Katherine: want to learn more

433 Emily: IN year (.) in year nine though (.)

434 Tracy: well suppose it's not if you want to it's because if you need to

435 Emily: yeah

436 Lee: yeah

437 Tracy: it's more important if yo-(.) cos if you, even if you don't want but it means it's gonna  
438 help

439 I: right

440 Tracy: and it (.) it's it's better



Like the previous excerpt, we can see that requests for SRE remain limited to negative outcomes, specifically preventing and terminating pregnancy. The phrase “*keeping safe*” (Katherine, Line 423) is articulated here, reflecting a health promotion discourse, and is used as a blanket phrase typically to cover both avoiding pregnancy and STIs. The importance pupils afford this information is evident in Lines 437-438, where Tracy makes a point of emphasising necessity over desire in requesting this information. Both this excerpt and the previous one, highlight the limited repertoire available around SRE. The requests made for more sexual health information came from the pupils located firmly within health promotion programmes. It was also amongst these pupils' accounts that knowledge around the main tenets of this approach (topics such as contraception, STI's and puberty) appeared to be most limited. These pupils appeared to mobilise a considerable amount of misinformation, particularly around HIV and STI contraction.

From these accounts, it appears that despite their strong objections, pupils ascribe priority to knowing or being educated about health precautions within their SRE. This emphasis on knowledge of facts shares the agenda of health education discourses and is likely driven by the focus of their SRE classes on preventing pregnancy and avoiding STIs. The importance of a different type of knowledge appeared elsewhere however, which appeared to represent young people's own informal and unofficial SRE curriculum. While the acquisition of this type of knowledge appeared to be important for these pupils, it was not amongst their requests for provision.

This unofficial curriculum largely pertained to the different types of sex acts and slang terms used. Amongst young men, pornography was used as an indicator of their sexual knowledge, with many perceiving pornography alone as providing their sex education. Conversely, young women expressed concerns over their sexual performance. In light of these concerns, particularly amongst young women, knowledge appeared to be something more than just the facts imparted by SRE, but more informal information such as different sexual positions and foreplay. The discrepancy between the knowledge proscribed by SRE and that which pupils afforded significance, appeared most at odds for young women, who seemed to express more concerns over having the ‘right’ types of knowledge than the young men. It is important to note that the concerns of young women appeared to stem from the amount of ‘knowledge’

they perceived young men have in comparison, and thus, how they would fare in light of (often very public) dissemination of their sexual relations with the opposite sex. Presented below is the stretch of talk where the interviewer asks a group of young women what they felt being knowledgeable about sex and relationships effectively constitute.

Excerpt 13 [p. 23-24] [Year 8 girls, Low-Valley, Group 8]

- 746 I: if you said I've got good knowledge about (.) sex and relationships. (.) what would that kind  
747 of mean? what would it mean you've got good knowledge about
- 748 Rachel: you'd know what all slang words mean
- 749 Bella: yeah (.) you don't have to learn about slang words though (.) slang words are nowt you  
750 need to [know really
- 751 Emma: [you'd know about stuff that goes on before sex as well (.) like foreplay
- 752 Amy: what to do
- 753 Bella: exactly cos your slang (.) slang words are just stupid words that other kids have made  
754 up and we've carried on saying them (.) so it doesn't seem right need to learn them like every  
755 day
- 756 Abi: you need to learn all proper words but (.) not scientific words cos nobody understands  
757 them but like (.)
- 758 Bella: you can't even pronounce them can yo(h)u
- 759 Abi: like words what they mean (.) what the big words mean (hh)
- 760 I: umm mm and sorry you said?
- 761 Samantha: like if (.) if you're quite knowledgeable then you have to know about stuff like  
762 foreplay and you have you know about different kinds of sex
- 763 I: right
- 764 Samantha: [cos different people like different stuff

765     Abi: [(*participant whispers*) °what's foreplay?°]

766     (*the rest of the group quietly laugh*)

As two of the group debate the importance of learning slang terms within their SRE, Emma in contrast, offers good knowledge as being that which pupils hold around different sexual practices (Lines 751-752). This is reiterated by another pupil who specifies this knowledge in terms of instructional information regarding “*what to do*” in sex (Line 753). Both of these comments highlight concerns amongst pupils hopeful of gaining more ‘how to’ knowledge; the type of information which, despite pupil’s common requests, is considered to be firmly outside of SREs remit. The comment made by Emma highlights a ‘coital imperative’ (Mcphillips et al, 2001), where foreplay is considered only as a precursor to sex, but not as a sexual act in and of itself. Through these comments we can see that being knowledgeable is about gaining information not typically authorised in the formal SRE curriculum; for example, information around sex and sexual experiences which is more instructional and pleasure focused. This is highlighted in a further comment made by Samantha (Lines 761-762). While this group regards having information about foreplay as an indicator of knowledge, she also adds the need for information about “*different kinds of sex*” (Lines 762) as a further marker of knowledge. This comment signals a wider conceptualisation of sex, and this is further highlighted in Samantha’s subsequent comment “*cos people like different stuff*” (Line 765). Also present, is some recognition of sexual pleasure in their talk around sex. The accounts here portray these pupils as having awareness regarding the more unofficial knowledge they need around sex, that which is currently sanctioned amongst pupils but not their SRE. The value of having this knowledge is evident in the comment made by Abi as she asks: “*what is foreplay*” (Line 765) which receives laughter from the rest of the group (Line 766).

Although the young women here hint at the importance of topics such as sexual pleasure and other sexual practices, these topics did not feature in their requests of what they want from their SRE. Perhaps more interestingly, when these types of topics were put forward as suggestions for what could be included in SRE, this was met with a level of confusion as many of these pupils appeared to struggle with what this would actually entail.



Excerpt 14 [p.18] [Year 9 girls, Low-Valley, Group 10]

- 497 I: what about talking about different forms of sex (.) so masturbation oral sex and things  
498 about desire and pleasure (.) girls [physiology and boys' physiology
- 499 Laura: [yeah
- 500 I: do you think that would be better?
- 501 Laura: that'd be better
- 502 Debbie: yeah
- 503 Rebecca: what does physiology mean?
- 504 I: it means basically that (.) It's like almost aspects of your biology things like arousal for  
505 boys and girls
- 506 Rebecca: we've got lumps and bumps
- 507 Laura: does that mean (.) no does it mean like different ways like you can talk about how you  
508 get like what sex you like gets pleasure from summat she tells us and we say well we get it  
509 that sort of thing
- 510 Rebecca: O:h
- 511 Debbie: I don't get it
- 512 Susan: boys masturbate by wanking (.) girls masturbate by (1)
- 513 Rebecca: fingering them sen

As part of a discussion about what this group would like from SRE, the interviewer offers a variety of topics that address the positive aspects of sexual activity which these young women accept as being "*better*" (Line 501) if included within SRE lessons. While the group question the nature of the terminology, their overall agreement signals a desire for information that falls outside of the boundaries of the sexual health rhetoric. Despite this unanimous response, Rebecca raises a degree of uncertainty as to what this would ultimately mean they would

learn (Line 503). Many of these young women are able to conceive what such information could entail. We can see this where Rebecca then goes on to offer her own understanding: “*we’ve got lumps and bumps*” (line 506) and where Laura interprets this information as that which could potentially focus on different ways of gaining pleasure (Lines 507-508). This is also perceived as being more instructional (and rather prescriptive) information from teachers: “*she tells us and we say well we get it that sort of thing*” (Line 509). This particular formulation appears to resonate with the rest of the group as it signals a moment of clarification for Rebecca as indicated in her utterance of “*Oh*” (Line 510), but raises more confusion in another “*I don’t get it*” (Debbie, Line 511). In trying to respond to this confusion, another group member offers her own, more condensed explanation, where the notion of pleasure with SRE is conceptualised (more fundamentally) in terms of the differences in masturbation between the sexes: “*boys masturbate by wanking girls masturbate by*” (Susan, Line 512). As Susan pauses, we can see she appears to struggle with naming the female equivalent. While this is remedied by Rebecca who articulates female masturbation as “*fingering them sen*” (Line 513), this appears to reflect a knowledge gap around female sexuality and masturbation.

Ultimately, discussion around alternative SRE messages only occurred in response to those offered by the interviewer, as opposed to these spontaneously occurring in pupils’ talk. This limited ability to actualise how the role of pleasure (and more fundamentally, more positive messages) could feature in their SRE, most likely reflects the prominence of more anti-sex rhetoric and health-focused discourse, under which these pupils are currently positioned. Most pupils clearly found it difficult to see outside of this limited discourse to envisage alternatives. The incorporation of sexual pleasure (and indeed positive sexual experiences) into SRE is often fiercely opposed; paired with the strong anti-sex messages mobilised within SRE, any notion of sexual pleasure or acknowledgement around sexual activity may be perceived by pupils as an impossible request.

## ***7.6 Reconceptualising the SRE experience: pupils alternative narratives***

As previously illustrated, pupils from schools with a health promotion approach spoke of their SRE largely in negative terms, which most fundamentally related to either the content or approach. While limited to only one focus group, some pupils' accounts deviated considerably from those in other groups. These pupils (located within Middleton) not only differed in terms of the type of provision they received (as illustrated through a number of observations) but they also diverged considerably in the types of accounts they produced about this SRE which were markedly more positive. Their provision (led by Sarah) is characterised by a far more progressive 'ethos' as characterised by a more liberal attitude towards young people's sexuality. The SRE of both the school and the individual teacher stand apart from other programmes in the way they mobilise a wider range of discourses around sex and pupils' diverse sexualities. As the school is often conceptualised as a model of good practice within SRE nationally, it often opens its doors to those wishing to observe its content and practice. Indicative to the type of approach taken in this school, the observed lessons were part of a seven-week equal opportunities module around LGB sexuality, race and gender stereotypes. The content of lessons differed from those in the other schools based on the different ways sex and sexuality was conceptualised, along with the materials used, the topics included, and the types of discourses mobilised by the teacher. While this provision had a clear health focus (i.e. it promotes safe sex and gives time to discussing the negative outcomes of sexual activity such as unwanted pregnancy and STIs), in contrast to the other schools observed, this aspect of provision was only one element amongst a broad range of SRE content.

Unlike schools with a health promotion approach, the nature of pupils' accounts from within this provision, were very positive. Their accounts illustrate the influence of this provision and the value these pupils' attribute to having a specialist SRE teacher within their school, which they highlight by delineating between the provision they received before and after her arrival.



- 58 Lilly: I don't know because she might have a different name (.) but erm (.) when (*name of*  
 59 *SRE teacher given*) came then we learnt more about it and then (.) °when (inaudible)°
- 60 Josie: yeah cos before we didn't have a proper PSE teacher and it used to go round teachers
- 61 Michael: It were just a form tutor that used to teach us

Excerpt 16 [p. 4][Year 11, Middleton, Group 16]

- 92 I: and how have you felt about that? Has that been-
- 93 Josie: A:h [it's been great
- 94 Lilly: [really good
- 95 Michael: it's better that you have mixed lessons because you can get different opinions<  
 96 about different things >

97

In pointing out the changing nature of their SRE provision, its perceived quality is clearly attributed to the arrival and efforts of a specialist teacher (Sarah). In contrast to the evaluations made by those pupils in Low-Valley, these pupils speak of this SRE teacher as a specialist, inferred by their comparison with previous SRE teachers (Lines 60). As such, their conceptualisation of current provision is generally positive (Line 93). Interestingly, through this positive evaluation, Michael signals an indicator by which pupils judge the quality of SRE; in terms of the variety of discussions that take place in the lessons: "*it's better that you have mixed lessons because you can get different opinions about different things*" Lines 95-96). While the benefit of a full time specialist teacher appears significant for these pupils, the basis from which this provision is deemed useful for these pupils is linked to the nature and scope of the discussion produced within it, and not solely based on the information delivered. Again, this appears to contrast with the accounts produced by pupils located within a health promotion approach, who interpreted the messages presented within their provision sceptically.

It is also evident that these pupils attribute greater value to their provision, due to the fact that they considered the provision to be their main source of information around sex and relationships. Additionally, the benefits of this provision were further illustrated where the pupils cited the importance of peers in further exploring the information discussed in their SRE. Again, this is markedly different from the role peers play within pupils' accounts elsewhere.

Excerpt 17 [p.7] [Year 11, Low-Valley, Group 16]

- 197 I: right (.) so your friends are sort of (.) the more [informal side  
198 Will: [yeah your friends in your lessons  
199 Michael: like the ultimate is like sex and education lessons cos you tal-(.) you mainly talk  
200 with your friends about what they learn (.) even though you talk to your friends about what  
201 they've learnt in the lessons so it mainly does come back to the lessons what you've learnt

Having mentioned the importance of having been separated from their tutor groups, and put into different groups for their SRE, the interviewer explores the role friends play in their sexual education. Despite inquiry about the role of peers outside of the SRE classroom, Will refers back to those within their SRE lessons: "*yeah your friends in your lessons*" (Line 198). Although this may reflect the focus of the discussion being on SRE, the subsequent comment made by Michael confirms the significance of the more formalised SRE for these pupils as he refers to SRE as "*the ultimate*" (Line 199). Here we can see that SRE for these pupils is considered the foundation for any further information as it is perceived as both authentic and relevant (Lines 200-202). Within these accounts then, in contrast to other groups, formalised SRE is legitimised. This is highlighted in their talk around its status in comparison to peers, and indeed, its prominence in peer interaction.

In line with positive evaluations of their SRE, these pupils' offer a further reason why they regard their provision so highly, as they outline the various provisions that ensure their comfort within lessons. What is interesting about these responses is the way they illustrate a high level of comfort and confidence with their provision and the way it is delivered. The

significance of this is illustrated most pertinently in schools without this progressive ethos, where pupils indicate that their anxieties receive relatively little discussion. This is clearly not the case in schools with a progressive ethos however.

Excerpt 18 [p. 9] [Year 11, Middleton, Group 16]

- 245 I: (.hh) are there any (.) are there any sort of issues and topics that have like (.) people have  
246 got embarrassed over? that there's been lots of laughs about?
- 247 Lilly: °the tools°
- 248 Michael: I don't (.) I don't know (.) no-one really gets embarrassed because no one really  
249 gets singled out (.) it's like not [saying
- 250 Will: [you don't really talk about like (.) (*inaudible*)
- 251 Michael: you don't really talk about get singled out you just talk about generally a friend of a  
252 friend
- 253 Will: yeah(h)
- 254 I: oh right ok (.) so you don't ever sort of (.) °go there °
- 255 Josie: you're not allowed to use (1) names really
- 256 Darren: you never go into personal issues
- 257 Michael: no

By referring to the way in which: "*no one really gets singled out*" (Lines 248-249), Michael is pointing out that SRE does not involve individual disclosures. Implicit in this comment is the idea that a focus on individual pupils would presumably cause embarrassment.

Nevertheless, the absence of personal disclosures doesn't appear to prohibit meaningful discussion, as highlighted by the method of speaking in the third person: "*you just talk about generally a friend of a friend*" (Lines 251-252). The strategies referred to here represent the 'ground rules' observed within this school. As these ground rules are agreed within each



individual class, this reference appears to reflect an investment in the group rules. We can see these rules pertain to protecting pupils' confidentiality as highlighted in the 'no naming' policy (Line 255) and the nature of disclosures: "*you never go into personal issues*" (Darren, Line 256). Their 'listing' in this context, appears to not only stand as a means by which these pupils can share these rules, but also the way in which they can promote their place in SRE. As indicated in these accounts, having clear boundaries and a shared understanding for what is and isn't expected allows pupils to feel assured when contributing towards their SRE, a process that all pupils claim to value.

While the accounts produced around this group's provision indicate differences in how these young people evaluate their provision, there were other significant differences in the type of provision they receive. The most striking difference between these pupil accounts within Middleton and the three other schools is the way they reflect a broad and more varied SRE curriculum. More importantly, they reflect a number of alternative discourses around sex that replace the more dominant discourses around sex and sexuality utilised within health promotion approaches. The differences between these schools was also evident in the more 'fundamental' topics within many SRE programmes (e.g. contraception and STIs). Even with information about sexual safety, various classroom observations and pupil's accounts highlighted how alternative discourses appear in Middleton. As pupils refer to these elements of provision as some of the most enjoyable, this appears to reflect the way their provision commits to acknowledging pupils' realities and their sexualities. This is highlighted most aptly in this groups talk around their more favourite elements of their provision.

The first example of a memorable SRE lesson given was about sexual safety, more specifically, a condom demonstration. While condom demonstrations were mentioned in many instances across the different schools, it was mostly memorable for the way it represented a practical element of their provision. Amongst this group of pupils however, this lesson appeared memorable for its departure from conventional approaches.

Excerpt 19 [p.5] [Year 11, Middleton, Group 16]

- 131 Michael: I remember that lesson er (.) when we all got given condoms and were practicing  
132 how to put it on dildos (.) [that was right good
- 133 Will: [O:H and when you had to go under that blanket
- 134 Lilly: (*laughs*)
- 135 Josie: yeah (*name of male pupil given*) went under this blanket and started °putting it on°

The laughter produced in recollecting this lesson signalled their level of enjoyment, an assertion reinforced by Michael in Line 132 “*that was right good*”. The account of this lesson appears to represent the classic condom demonstration, in the way these pupils describe being given condoms in order to practice using them correctly on demonstrators. Although memorable in itself, Will adds that the pupils had to negotiate this in hypothetical and more representative conditions, such as under a blanket: “*OH and when you had to go under that blanket*” (Line 133). The blanket is used in order to emulate certain scenarios in which young people typically negotiate their condom use, such as putting a condom on in the dark.

As these pupils continue to recall the lessons that they found memorable (presumably because they were more enjoyable), each was characterised by an acknowledgement of young people's sexuality (through their sexual realities) and SRE as fun. Most significantly, the approach taken here diverges from the more traditional approaches observed within health promotion programmes, where considerable emphasis is placed on condom demonstrations. These however, only typically involve pupils being taken through a series of ‘steps’ on how to use condoms safely. While the latter approach can be classed as what Gagnen & Simon (1974) term a ‘de-eroticised instructional repertoire’, the lesson described within Sarah's provision, distinguishes itself from this as it reflects a more liberal and novel approach to the more rudimentary aspects of provision.

In addition to being enjoyable and acknowledging young people's sexual realities, fundamentally, this approach acknowledges sex within SRE. This is evident again as the pupils recall elements of their SRE, where sex clearly appears along with a discourse of pleasure.

Excerpt 20 [p.5] [Year 11, Middleton, Group 16]

- 142 I: OK (.) can you (.) kind of briefly then (.) brain storm some of the topics that you remember?
- 143 Michael: [condoms
- 144 Will: [contraception
- 145 Lilly: STIs
- 146 Darren: contraception
- 147 Michael: yeah (.) how to handle erm (.) being pressured into sex and stuff like [that
- 148 Josie: [what we
- 149 did what makes good sex and what makes bad sex (2) that were a good lesson

Excerpt 21 [p. 6] [Year 11, Middleton, Group 16]

- 172 I: so (2) so you've not just focused on (.) you've not just focused on (.) sort of the facts about
- 173 things so like (.) you know STI's and con- different (1) sort of contraceptives you've also
- 174 looked at (.) different aspects of what makes good sex and the relationship side (2) whi-
- 175 which kind of stuff have you (.) have you most enjoyed then? has it been the relationship side
- 176 of things? or
- 177 Darren: Na:h (.) the sex side
- 178 (laughs)
- 179 Will: °talking about sex°
- 180 I: right

Like most pupils' accounts, recall of their provision largely pertained to sexual health (contraception, STIs, pressured sex: excerpt 21). Amongst these topics however, was the implicit notion of sexual pleasure, as indicated by Josie: "*what makes good sex and what*



*makes bad sex*" (Excerpt 21, Line 148-149). This comment contrasts strongly with those made elsewhere where young people noted silence around sex in their provision. It also highlights the difference between accounts where in talking about their SRE, pupils did so in relation to a discourse of danger.

These accounts reflect the nature of this provision as observed by the researcher in various visits made to observe provision. Again, the comment made here by this pupil, is recognisable as a lesson observed by the interviewer, in which Sarah firstly discussed the meaning of sex as she explored their views regarding what constituted good and bad sex. Within this lesson the definition of sex encompassed a range of sexual practices, encompassing oral sex, anal sex, and masturbation. Within this lesson, the teacher explored sexual pleasure, often in the pursuit of deprioritizing coitus and in acknowledging sexual diversity. The way in which pupils' entitlement to sexual pleasure and autonomy were emphasised within this provision is reflected in these pupils' accounts of their SRE as they recalled other lessons dedicated to this topic elsewhere, specifically those delivered by an external speaker around pleasure. While this talk around these pupils' SRE reflects comprehensive content, it also reflects its influence in creating much broader understandings of sex (as highlighted by pupils' talk). Ultimately, these pupils' accounts reflect an altogether different SRE experience.

## 7.7 *Summary*

As this chapter illustrates, there appears to be a large discrepancy between the accounts produced by pupils according to the specific programmes they are located in, and more specifically, according to the type of discourses mobilised within that provision. The accounts given by pupils located in the three schools with a strong health focus were far more negative than those given by pupils located under more progressive provision. The differences between these accounts appear to stem primarily from the limited, and rather stilted health focus with the three schools (Hansway, Hatfield and Low-Valley). Pupils appeared particularly dismissive of the risk messages presented in these health-oriented approaches, partly because they appeared wise to the way these messages are typically used as deterrents to sex. The root of their frustrations appeared to stem from what they perceived as ‘unrealistic inevitability’, the assumptions made by teachers that all young people will fall foul of these outcomes (i.e. contract an STI or fall pregnant). As such, it is apparent that their frustrations centred on the way they felt that all of their SRE was taught in this vein, i.e. directly about or in relation to this discourse of danger. Thus, the nature of their criticism didn’t appear to rest on the rejection of this message’s authenticity, but the way it is presented at the expense of alternatives. This then, appeared to create a level of confusion for pupils in terms of the conflicting messages they were being given, on a formal and more informal level (the latter from peers). As such, pupils accounts heightened a considerable amount of disjunction between how they personally experience this information, and the way their teachers appear to want them to interpret this information.

Also evident was the way pupils were not only sceptical of their provision, but of the intentions of many teachers responsible for SRE. Their accounts illustrate that messages of danger are evaluated particularly poorly, based on the way that teachers present them in an extreme and exaggerated fashion. Their accounts also illustrate that regardless of its more serious implications, these messages are less credible for pupils, most notably because they are perceived as those relating to sexual abstinence, merely in the guise of health promotion. As such they appear most critical of the way teachers often use sexual health as a ‘tool’ for trying to encourage sexual abstinence.

Both the approach and the messages within provision have a considerable influence on how pupils experience and formulate their views around their SRE. As was illustrated, their inability to conceptualise alternatives outside the problem-based framework is indicative of the way in which these pupils become positioned by the discourses within their SRE. This was further highlighted in the contrasting accounts of pupils from Middleton, who accounted for their SRE in a way that evidences an alternative set of discourses and more importantly, a different SRE experience. Moreover, in the case of this particular group of young people from Middleton, there appeared to be less disparity between the accounts given about their SRE and that given by their SRE teacher (Sarah) as both appeared positive and in sync. This contrasts sharply with the accounts produced by the other pupils located within the remaining three schools and their corresponding teachers, where the accounts given by the pupils about their SRE, conflict strongly with the more promotional accounts given by their teachers.



## 8 General Discussion

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### 8.1 *Introduction*

This thesis highlights that research on SRE is a complex and highly political topic of study, mainly as a result of dominant (and contradictory) ideologies surrounding young people's sexuality. This continues to reflect the long running issues around this subject, particularly as it occurs on a socio-political level. As these issues continue to hamper SRE, the nature of these debates (and their effects) is reflected in this thesis. As a result of its lack of statutory status, provision has been patchy and poor, with many teachers confused as to what they should be teaching on this subject. Amidst rising public sexual health concerns and a series of restrictive and discriminatory policies, the overall picture for SRE remains limited to the dangers of sex and the avoidance of early heterosexual activity, unwanted pregnancy and STIs.

At the inception of this research project, debates related to the role of schools in SRE were increasing, particularly in response to growing impetus for statutory SRE. Consequently, in spite of this often-fierce opposition, a number of changes were proposed under the then Labour Government (as discussed in chapter 1). These changes offered promising developments around improving the status and scope of SRE by making it statutory. In the course of carrying out this research, little has changed in this regard. Despite the efforts to make SRE statutory with the draft guidance, the subsequent change in government (to the opposition) thwarted this and similar proposals. As highlighted by the governmental challenge of the draft proposal, the nature and role of SRE continues to be politically contested. In turn, the policy content for SRE remains contradictory and as such, unresponsive to the lives of young people. Moreover, its status in the school context continues to vary considerably, despite maintaining a high profile in the media. In addition to its contested nature, the lack of consensus around what SRE should contain is largely attributable to its lack of statutory status; provision continues to be shaped at the level of individual schools and teachers in line with their preferred (and often, personally driven) approach.

## **8.2 *Purpose of the research***

In light of a wealth of literature highlighting the failings of SRE, and the highly contested nature of its provision, this thesis set out to examine how SRE is discursively constructed at a number of important socio-cultural levels for and within UK secondary schooling, namely, at the political, social and interactional levels at which it is constituted. The impetus for this research came in response to the plethora of literature highlighting the problems associated with the provision of SRE at each level, most specifically, the way it fails to meet young people's varying needs. Further focus of this research was determined in line with an increasing body of research that documents the problem-focused and heterosexist nature of provision. With a long history of problematising young people's sexualities in light of sexual health imperatives, in addition to a complex and largely unsupportive policy context, it was thus examined how SRE is currently constructed in light of changes that seek to open up the nature and scope of provision (specified in chapter 1). Such changes to overcome these barriers were examined at the different levels at which both SRE and young people's sexuality, is constituted, i.e. by those most involved in determining the trajectory of SRE (those at policy level and at the level of individual practice).

The construction (and justification) of SRE across a number of important levels is a key feature of this thesis, in addition to the way it attends to the more subtle barriers that feature in discourse. This is particularly important given that young people report dissatisfaction with their SRE experience, despite the increased freedom schools have in determining their provision, which is paradoxically paired with greater expectations around provision in terms of quality and inclusivity. In the context of the aforementioned issues, the purpose of this thesis is to examine how effective SRE is in acknowledging pupils SRE needs, along with how it may impact on young people's current and emerging sexualities.

## **8.3 *Summary***

This thesis found that a lack of consensus and clarity around the nature and scope of SRE continues to hamper SRE. This was found at each level of analysis, most specifically the policy making process, as highlighted in the draft guidance (chapter 4). Despite governmental attempts to promote clarity of provision by establishing an overall approach, this was

hampered by the fraught socio-political context. This is encapsulated most pertinently, in the political opposition levelled against the proposals of the guidance, but is also evident within the document itself, which primarily reflects social, political and the concerns of certain interest groups over and above those of young people. As such, this analysis highlights the many ways these concerns continue to curtail developments towards ensuring young people receive comprehensive provision.

Importantly, the analysis also provided a context through which to understand the current SRE provision and practice at the level of the individual SRE teacher. Specifically, it provides the foundation for understanding how teachers construct their own concerns and how they understand young people's SRE needs under such political discourse. As policy strongly reflects socio-political discourse, the discourse drawn upon by teachers, along with the ideological positions advocated, are inextricably linked. This was highlighted in chapter 5, where teachers' accounts of their provision were shown to reflect similar concerns to those held on a political level. Their accounts were also shown to reflect more personal or localised concerns within their provision i.e. those guided by the wider school ethos, wider sexual health figures or more individual assumptions around young people's SRE needs. As such, the two chapters examining teachers accounts of their provision (chapters 5 & 6), highlight the great level of variability in SRE provision and the various attempts made by these teachers to formulate, justify and set up the credibility of the approach taken. A key example of this is how they attempt to formulate their provision as part of some overarching philosophy or set of underlying 'core' tenets. This is then justified by constructing young people and their sex education needs in ways that created a need for central tenets of that provision. As such, the analysis revealed the way young people's sex and relationships needs are inextricably linked to assumptions about their sexuality. The assumptions made around young people's (hetero)sexualities at the level of both policy and teacher, worked to determine the nature and scope of provision which was heavily gendered and heteronormative provision, in addition to being reductionist. The socio-political context that teachers and policy makers work within served to uphold this focus further.

Despite this, across all levels of analysis, considerable disjunction was found in terms of SRE provision, with regards to its nature, practice and its evaluation. There was also significant



disjuncture between policy and practice, evident from the analysis of SRE policy teachers' accounts (chapter 4 & 5), in addition to disjunction between teachers' and pupils' evaluations of their individual provision (chapter 7). While chapter 6 highlighted the strong and positive evaluations made by teachers regarding their SRE, chapter 7 in contrast highlighted the more negative evaluations made by young people positioned under the more traditional (and limited) provision. Additionally, it provided insight into how young people construct SRE provision in comparison to their SRE teachers and policy makers, with their accounts revealing dissonance between their discourses around sex and relationships and those presented within SRE provision.

This chapter will summarise the main findings of the thesis as they intersect across the analysis chapter and as they address the main research questions and aims of the thesis. This chapter will also evaluate the theory and methods used in this research. Implications of the research findings will be discussed in this chapter, along with future directions arising from this research.

## ***8.4 How is SRE constructed within and for the school context?***

### **8.4.1 SRE as a highly political subject**

Across all analyses, it was clear that SRE is constructed as a highly political and contested subject. While not surprising given the literature outlined in chapter 1, the thesis reveals some aspects of SRE that deem it as such. The highly political nature of SRE is evident at the policy level, where the nature and scope of provision is subject to much debate and therefore subject to a large amount of curtailment. This is most explicitly highlighted by the rejection of new (draft) policy for SRE (chapter 4) by the succeeding Conservative Government, along with their opposition against a number of key reforms put forward by the previous Government. The (draft) guidance withdrawal represents the opposition between governments in the content and delivery of SRE, along with the current Governments reluctance to take a position on SRE since taking power and establish or develop new policy on this subject.

As highlighted in chapter 4, the document itself attends to the problematic nature of SRE. The analysis provides insight into the more ‘problematic’ policy moves, such as the proposals to make SRE statutory (which includes lowering the age at which SRE is delivered) and those around contraceptive provision. While highlighting the more political aspects of provision, it also aimed to address these issues as part of the policy-making process, through the rationalisation of both the subject itself and of the proposed changes. This is highlighted in the persuasive nature of the document and the strategies it used to generate support for the proposals outlined: strategies such as justification, fact building and legitimising. Even the nature of the changes proposed and their intended enactment in the school environment reflects the political nature of this subject as it features in this context. This is evident in the curtailments that worked to undermine the effectiveness of these changes, namely, the contradictory and placatory nature of the guidance itself, made most explicit in the proposal to restrict, but ultimately retain parents right of withdrawal, in addition to maintaining the rights of religious groups and school governors’ in determining SRE content.

Such policy moves, as discussed in this chapter, have significant implications for those who teach SRE, who despite the level of autonomy, are effectively curtailed by certain ‘key’ stakeholders and subject to being overruled over the nature and delivery of their provision. As such, this process highlights the way policy can have a considerable impact on what teachers do in their provision. In turn, this has a significant impact on how young people experience their SRE, highlighted most aptly, where analysis revealed that young people’s understanding around their provision are shaped considerably by that which they receive (Chapter 7): Those located within strong health-oriented provision received limited information and struggled to conceive aspects of SRE outside the confines of this approach.

While the prescriptive nature of policy can work to shape young people’s experiences, its contradictory nature means that its ideas may not be actually met in practice, or are at the very least, subject to some amount of recontextualisation, particularly at the level of each individual teacher. In the absence of statutory status, this vague guidance (DfEE, 2000) only makes recommendations around what should be covered in SRE, creating space for provision

to be formulated in ways that uphold varied and often opposing individual SRE frameworks. This is also evident both in chapter 5, where teachers' accounts reflect different concerns and understanding around what SRE should include and young people's SRE needs. Furthermore, they reflect different ways of formulating provision that reflect the values of either the wider school context or those of the individual teachers. Thus, whilst the nature of provision is similar between those who advocate a health-promotion approach, it can differ considerably in terms of its aims, content and delivery and terminology (i.e. meanings around 'sexual health' and 'safe sex'). The disparity in provision is also further illustrated in chapter 7, where young people talk about the nature of their provision in markedly different ways.

In addition to being evident in policy, despite strong rhetoric around the unproblematic nature of SRE, teachers' accounts also highlighted SRE as intrinsically political subject. Similarly to SRE policy, teachers' accounts attended to aspects of provision that are problematic, particularly young people's sexuality, sexual activity and attempts to reduce the latter. Although their provision attempts to address this (through sexual health services, contraceptives, pregnancy and STI testing), as mirrored in the guidance, these particular issues are problematic for key interest groups, particularly when delivered in the school context. This was evident in the teachers' accounts of stakeholders' concerns surrounding their provision of emergency contraceptives. Aspects of provision also veering outside of health promotion (i.e. those aspects linked to STIs or pregnancy) that produce strong reactions in stakeholders also reflect the highly political nature of provision. An example of this is the level of backlash against the messages Sarah provides around self-screening. Whilst such messages work within a health protection framework (equipping young people with the skills to protect themselves from the unwanted outcomes of their sexual activity), they illustrate the way in which alternative messages and discourses within SRE (e.g. those that promote young people's sexuality more positively) are perceived more adversely than those that centre on protection.

Consequently, despite their high level of autonomy regarding their provision, teachers' abilities to primarily cater for young people's needs may not be as easy as they claim. This appears to be a result of the nature of the subject and the role stakeholders continue to play in



its provision. This is illustrated in individual teachers' talk around their school SRE policymaking, their negotiations with school governors and their attempts to produce accounts of their SRE that indicate that this provision is balanced and has clear boundaries. Thus, while teachers claim to have a considerable amount of autonomy, this often appears to rest within the limits of more traditional frameworks such as abstinence approaches and to a certain extent, health promotion approaches, where provision is subject to less scrutiny from certain interest groups.

Given this vulnerability to scrutiny and backlash, teachers appeared to only want to present a positive view of their provision as opposed to a more encumbered (and arguably more realistic) one, presumably for the way they felt this could be attributed to their leadership. This was evident where teachers rebutted any notion of the problematic. They were therefore managing competing discourses, simultaneously constructing SRE as both problematic and trouble-free. This notably, stands in contrast to previous research, which highlights the way teachers' accounts focus on the problems they experience in its provision (Buston et al, 2002; Atkinson, 2002; Chambers, 2004). While this dilemmatic talk highlights the way teachers attend to SRE as a troubled subject, interestingly, this was managed in such a way that it rebutted this implication and bolstered their provision further. Such strong rhetoric was not anticipated and highlights a barrier from which teachers can develop SRE. These attempts to portray SRE as problem-free further highlight clear concerns for this issue and therefore a strong attention to SRE as a site of struggle.

Pupils' accounts of their provision also oriented towards the political nature of this subject (chapter 7), mainly through their display of awareness over the largely curtailed nature of their provision. This was shown in their scepticism of teachers' ability to step outside of the socially sanctioned messages into more personalised and meaningful messages. In raising this issue, pupils appeared to recognise the way their more personalised SRE needs deviate from those within the bounds of what can be addressed within their current programmes. Generally, they appeared acutely aware of the political nature of SRE and the subsequent limits imposed around the nature of their provision. This stands in stark contrast to the accounts produced by the pupils from Middleton. On the whole though, pupils appeared savvy to the more

politically endorsed messages and aspects of their provision that centre on abstinence, delay, and protection. As such, young people questioned the intentions of teachers on these grounds, perceiving them as conveyors of standardised and depersonalised messages, which lacked integrity and credibility. While this obviously has implications for the efficacy of provision, it also has various implications for how provision is delivered.

While young people's accounts highlight their awareness of its politically driven nature, their accounts also attend to the inherently sensitive nature of SRE. This appeared in talk where pupils spoke of the constraints they felt encircled their provision and when making requests, they demonstrated some awareness around what was and wasn't feasible within their SRE. As such, pupils appeared to have some understanding around the limits placed on school provision and more specifically, the types of information authorised in this context. Finally, the political and sensitive nature of SRE is highlighted in their requests for teachers to make certain assurances around the confidentiality of their SRE.

#### **8.4.2 SRE as problem-based**

Largely as a result of its highly political nature, this research highlights the way SRE is inherently problem focused. Specifically, across all aspects of data, analyses revealed the way SRE is predominantly characterised by a discourse of danger and risk. As such, provision is conceptualised primarily as a means of avoiding sexual ill-health and the myriad of negative issues that young people face as a result of their sexual activity. This is established most formally at a governmental level through policy as illustrated in the current SRE guidance (DfEE, 2000) and in the proposed draft replacement guidance (chapter 4). As highlighted, policy works to establish the nature and scope of provision, along with its aims and commitments. In light of increasing sexual health statistics, since its inception, guidance has established the role SRE is expected to play in reducing these statistics. This however, rests on problematising young people's sexuality and ultimately, their sexual activity, of which SRE is geared towards reducing and delaying. As such, the discourses around young people are characterised by a discourse of danger and risk, where young people were constructed as

victims of abuse and unwanted pressure and SRE is advocated through a child protection discourse.

While the existing guidance remains firmly focused on harm reductionist approach, in contrast, the draft guidance did attempt to open up the nature of SRE through a more holistic approach. This was represented most explicitly in its encapsulated framework, PSHE. Despite this, concerns around young people's sexual health (that limited to more reductionist conceptualisation relating to unwanted outcomes of sexual activity), remained a firm feature of this guidance, further reinforced through the rights it sought to retain of key stakeholders. As such, policy continues to prescribe problem-focused information as the mainstay of provision, where provision is inherently reductionist in nature for the way in focuses mainly on penis-in-vagina sex and reproduction.

Despite clear attempts made at providing inclusive provision (i.e. as indicated in the definitions produced around SRE and sexual health, Chapter 4), the guidance appeared to centre on a number of 'core' tenets of provision, that remained predominantly biased towards biological and health related facets of provision. Additionally, it also appeared to prescribe a hierarchy of knowledge, which prioritised the above aspects as 'core knowledge'. This was also evident in teachers' accounts; in formulating their provision and overall 'approach', they constructed what they considered to be fundamental aspects of their provision. We can see this most clearly in chapter 5 where teachers formulated their provision around elements of provision ('the facts of life'/'morality' and 'safety'/'love'), which invariably determine focal aspects of provision. Where a discourse of danger was utilised, this was used alongside a discourse of morality, to reinforce messages of delay and abstinence. Utilising both these discourses appeared as a means by which teachers could reconcile the (often uncomfortable) position of having to acknowledge young people's sexual activity and the more health-oriented elements of provision (i.e. the elements of provision that focus on protection).

While issues of teenage pregnancy remained central aspects of health oriented provision (i.e. within health promotion approaches), these aspects of provision were justified by constructing young people in various (and often crude) ways that effectively created a need for this, such as constructing them as vulnerable. This was used to uphold opposing SRE approaches (both health promotion and abstinence approaches) and the contrasting tenets of



these programmes. Both approaches used the sexual health context (i.e. high rates of pregnancy and STI's) as a way to justify these elements, in addition to young people's more localised contexts as contributing to young people's vulnerability. For example, where provision was predominantly health-oriented, pupils' local communities were emphasised as particularly problematic due to their high rates of pregnancy, STIs and single parent families. The emphasis on single parent families often involved teachers making a number of assertions regarding the parents' ability to be adequate role models for their children. This talk also worked to implicate young people as vulnerable based on their assertiveness, aspirations, sexual decision-making and level of sexual knowledge. Where provision was characterised by an abstinence approach, teachers set about emphasising young people in much the same way. As part of this talk, young people were constructed as vulnerable within their communities that promoted promiscuous behaviour. Provision therefore was utilised to promote moral behaviour as opposed to sexual health promotion.

The analysis of both policy and teachers' accounts illustrates that provision is based on the concerns adults *believe* young people face in their localised contexts as a result of their (often early) sexual activity. As such, provision reflects an adult agenda that, as illustrated in chapter 7, contrasts significantly to those articulated by young people. Most markedly, in the way young people construct sex and their own sexual subjectivities, which starkly contrasts to this more problem-based approach. In particular, messages that underpin much of SRE (such as those around risk, marriage and love) appear at odds with the discourse young people mobilise around curiosity, experimentation, pleasure and those that promote sex as formative. The disjunction between how young people experience their sexuality and how it is constituted for them in their provision is in line with previous research (Allen, 2008, 2005; Measor, Tiffin & Miller, 2000). This was also evident in the type of information young people say they want from their provision, which centred around the more positive and affirming aspects of sexuality and sexual activity. As young people conceive sex as a rite of passage to adulthood, in addition to the risks, they wanted to know more about navigating their way through sex, as they afforded great significance to sexual relationships. As such, they spoke critically of the messages of danger present in their provision, particularly those in the more health-oriented programmes as opposed to the more progressive provision. Young people appeared most critical of provision affording prominence to the discourse of danger

and a subsequent limited nature of information on offer. While, the dissatisfaction young people report around health-oriented provision has been highlighted extensively in the literature around SRE (Measor et al, 2000; SEF, 2011; UK Youth Parliament, 2007), this analysis highlights the basis from which young people contest these messages. Their accounts reveal it is the prevalence of this discourse of danger in their provision they are most critical of, not the message itself. Moreover, while they spoke of their concern over the associated risks of their sexual behaviour, they were equally concerned with the more positive aspects of their sexual development, along with their more personalised experiences of sex. As such, pupils appeared most sceptical about their teachers' inability to provide them with a 'complete' and authentic picture of sex. These more 'authorised' discourses of risk and danger, were therefore rejected on the basis that they failed to reflect the full nature of sexuality and young people's own concerns or experiences.

Such criticism highlights the need for teachers to acknowledge and incorporate the diversity of young people's backgrounds and experiences. This includes acknowledging gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, culture, age and religion in order to recognise the diversity in family life and settings in which young people live their lives. As such, space and opportunity should be given in the programmes for young people to raise activities not specified in the curriculum, which ensures that SRE meets the interests of young people as conceptualised by themselves (Aggleton & Campbell, 2000). This can be achieved throughout SRE programmes as teachers incorporate evaluation time for young people, in addition to feedback that provides them with the opportunity to speak about their experience and its application in their lives. This can help to get a better 'fit' for the information they are taught. The teacher can do this continuously; at the end of the session for example, by encouraging pupils to answer quick questions identifying what they have learned, enjoyed, or disliked most about the session. This could be done using either a self or peer review. Alternatively, idea boxes are a favourable and anonymous way of generating views and ideas on SRE content, whilst providing teachers with a way of assessing the relevant needs and assets of the target group (Kirby, 2007). Obviously, teachers would need to be open to change, possibly amending the lesson as a result of feedback and suggestions.

While young people's accounts signalled their dissatisfaction with the problem-focused nature of much of their provision, they also highlighted the effects of being positioned within this discourse of danger. For example, young people appeared unable to conceive their SRE provision outside of this framework, as their requests around provision were limited mainly to the negative aspects of sexual activity. This contrasts strongly with those located under the more progressive approach where a wider variety of discourses around sex are embedded in their SRE. Emerging here was an alternate experience that was inherently more positive and encompassed a more varied and diverse experience. Not only did these young people utilise a number of alternative discourses (outside of a problem focused discourse), but they spoke of the significance they afford their SRE and the teacher who provides this provision. Moreover, these accounts illustrate the way SRE can gain credence amongst young people over and above their peers, particularly as the most important source of information. Nonetheless, the alternative discourses young people do utilise around sex, particularly, the discourse they mobilise around pleasure and desire, present invaluable opportunities for all provision to incorporate a more holistic and positive discourse around sex. As such, this thesis contributes to the body of research that advocates the many health benefits that can be gained from including pleasure in SRE (Hirst, 2007; Ingham, 2005). By including a discourse of desire and pleasure, teachers can ensure that they match the discourse mobilised by young people and thus, ensure the programme seeks to reflect young people's concerns. They therefore need to promote the value of sexual pleasure in a safe and responsible manner, as is recommended when used within a values framework. This can be achieved by advocating the practice and enjoyment of consensual, non-exploitative and mutually pleasurable sexual relationships (Allen, 2004). Ultimately, it requires that teachers frame messages about the body and sexual activity in a way that acknowledges young people as sexual subjects. This should also include more practical information around sex that ensure young people are more confident sexual subjects (Measor, 2000). Involving external agencies in the delivery of SRE can also provide young people with a wealth of experience and knowledge about the practical aspects of sexual activity. In order to get these agencies involved in the provision of SRE, teachers will need to build links with agencies such as local youth services, health promotion agencies, school nurses, local family planning and sexual health services.



As this research highlights the disjunction between the discourses authorised in SRE and those utilised amongst young people, it highlights the importance of pupil driven SRE. SRE should be built in collaboration with young people in order to provide meaningful provision that reflects young people's concerns and experiences, in addition to their own meanings. Ways in which this can be done include getting young people involved in the design of SRE, including the policies and services. Evidence shows that when they have input into provision, SRE meets young people's needs (Ofsted, 2002). One way of accessing opinions is by using existing forums such as school and class councils. Establishing advisory panels also ensures that young people have a continued participation in the development of SRE and that they become crucial stakeholders in SRE (UK Youth Parliament, 2007). An important way of getting young people involved in the consultation process is for teachers to use an initiative that has been developed the SEF called the SRE audit 'toolkit' (a resource developed for consulting young people on SRE). The toolkit is a set of structured activities that allows young people to reflect on their provision by identifying gaps and recommending improvements (Martinez & De Meza, 2008). Such an approach encourages young people to set their own agenda for learning and fosters an approach acknowledge their opinions and respect the reasons why they hold them.

This does however need to be supported at a policy level and at the level of individual schools and SRE teachers. While the importance of involving young people in the design of their SRE was reflected in the draft SRE guidance (and indeed in advice from expert organisations) it features in a limited way in the existing guidance. It appears only where the guidance outlines schools' responsibility to consult parents and the community in various aspects of provision such as, choice of materials, work done on puberty, school nurse conduct and policy-making. The accounts given by these pupils certainly support a thorough consultation process, in addition to the importance of fostering what Hirst (2007:18) advocates as "honest and open communication" between pupils and teachers around aspects of their provision and their aims. This is particularly evident in the concerns young people expressed around the importance of trust and confidentiality in their SRE. Despite this being a crucial means through which teachers can evaluate their provision, the current policy context fails to support teachers in this process. As such, teachers should ensure that pupils have some input into how learning and teaching is conducted. One way of doing this is for

each SRE group (with their teacher) to negotiate a formal working agreement or a code of conduct (referred in chapter 7 as ‘ground rules’) at the beginning of their SRE which works to establish ownership of the process for young people around appropriate boundaries and conduct. Examples of codes may include the group listening when someone speaks, respect other people’s viewpoints and ensuring that examples are given anonymously. Developing a working agreement ensures that students ‘opt in and take responsibility for the way in which the group is going to work. The agreement should then be displayed clearly during lessons and should be reviewed and amended over time (De Silva & Blake, 2006). This process is thought to foster trust amongst young people and their teachers as it helps to create an open and honest dialogue with young people and can help to think about rights and responsibilities.

As illustrated, the importance of gaining insight into the meanings young people ascribe aspects of their sexuality is clearly highlighted in this research, particularly for the way it provides valuable means of improving SRE. Like previous research (e.g. Measor, 2004; Hirst, 2004), young people’s accounts highlight pupils as astute consumers of SRE; they provide crucial insight into what constitutes useful provision. The discord illustrated between how SRE is prescribed and how young people experience their sexuality in the more prevalent programmes presents teachers and policy makers with something to consider, particularly in traditional SRE provision which remains predominantly problem-focused. Most importantly, a more comprehensive and sex positive approach to SRE needs to be supported at policy level to ensure individual teachers have protection against any backlash. This type of recognition however may take some time given the nature of opposition seen in response to the more subtle changes proposed in the draft guidance (i.e. those made around lowering the age at which SRE is delivered). This also means changing some of the more deeply entrenched ideologies around sexuality and young people, which again prove difficult to address.

Nonetheless, SRE as it currently stands serves to reflect the concerns of adults primarily over and above those of young people, warrants some considerable deliberation. This is perhaps most urgent given the diverging evaluations given by young people and their SRE teachers. Moreover, the contrasting experiences of pupils (and discourse) located within different SRE approaches as highlighted in this research, illustrates the significant role SRE plays in

shaping young people's sexual subjectivity and their understandings around sexuality more broadly. Such findings provide strong evidence for how SRE can provide pupil sanctioned provision contrary to much research that shows the opposite. More than this however, it presents strong evidence for how SRE can attend to sexual health concerns (safe sex) under more positive conceptions of sexuality, including those around sexual practice. Most significantly then, this research highlights the way SRE can provide a fundamental role in young people's sexual education by acknowledging young people as autonomous sexual agents.

#### **8.4.3 SRE as gendered and heteronormative**

Emphasis on SRE as predominantly problem-focused highlights the way it is largely gendered and heteronormative. Most explicitly, as a result of the discourse of danger that dominates in traditional SRE (both health promotion and abstinence), meanings around sex within both these approaches were limited solely to penis-in-vagina sex and therefore, heterosexuality. This was evident where these programmes reinforced sex as heterosexual through the focus on (hetero)sexual health i.e. where safe sex related only on how condoms are used on a penis in preparation for vaginal sex, and in the case of abstinence programmes, where sex was used synonymously with marriage. While both these programmes reinforced heteronormative constructions of sexuality, through the meaning mobilised around sex, relationships and sexual health, this focus on provision also reinforced gendered sexuality. This appeared mainly where teachers appeared to prescribe certain SRE messages to specific individuals, particularly messages around teenage pregnancy that appeared to be aimed mainly at young women. As highlighted, this appears to afford greater significance for young women based on their ability to get pregnant. Consequently, they are perceived to be at greatest risk of sexual health outcomes and therefore appear to be the most in need of sexual health messages. As such, teachers appear to aim their sexual health messages most specifically at young women, by their increasing contraceptive knowledge and (assertiveness) skills. Implicit within this is the assumption that young women have the greater responsibility around sexual activity and sexual health than young men, most evidently in talk around sexual assertiveness skills training (i.e. those around self-esteem, body image and the 'just



say no' techniques). This works to reinforce stereotypes around gendered sexuality, in particular, the notion of passive female sexuality in contrast to active male sexuality; it assumes young women lack the skills to negotiate safe sex or unwanted advances of the uncontrollable male sexuality. As such, teachers continue to reinforce young women as sexual 'gatekeepers' to male sexuality within their talk and practice of provision, and thus prescribe different levels of responsibility for sexual activity. Most problematically they place the majority of responsibility for the outcomes of sexual activity (i.e. for conception and STIs) on young women, thus abdicating young men of this same responsibility. Additionally, while sexual activity is condoned and almost expected in young men, reinforced through the stereotype about men being sexually driven, it is in contrast, often condemned in young women, based on this notion of passive femininity. This is embedded in teachers' accounts of their provision where they draw upon this notion of male sexuality that resembles the 'male sex drive discourse' (Hollway, 1984, 1989).

With a heavy focus on female sexuality (under this discourse of danger) there is a stark absence of discourses around male sexuality in comparison, and a notable lack of discussion around the problems linked to traditional 'active' constructions of male sexuality. As such, these messages appear to be less essential in mobilising the discourse of danger than those messages perceived as being more female relevant, (i.e. such as those around pregnancy, STIs and abuse). Where such talk highlights the way provision reinforces gendered and heteronormative sexuality, it further indicates how teachers conceive young women to be the main recipients of sexual health messages. The nature of these messages works to undermine the more global aim of SREs to foster young people's autonomy around their sexual experiences, particularly as it prescribes different levels of autonomy and responsibility for young men and women. Furthermore, these messages increase young men's disengagement with SRE and their tendency to be overlooked in SRE provision (Measor, 2004). In particular, this inherently gendered nature of young people's sexuality fails to encourage young men's sexual autonomy and responsibility in sexual activity, especially where it excludes them from aspects of provision i.e. those concerned with developing skills such as contraception negotiation and assertiveness. Placing the onus on young women with regards to these aspects of provision assigns them a heavy and unequal burden in sexual activity and positions them within unequal power relations, where they are subject to this double standard around

sexual behaviour and sex roles. It is therefore important that teachers actively encourage young men's participation in SRE and assist them to engage with the messages delivered. Teachers need to dissolve gendered messages by including young men in the messages they appear to direct predominantly at young women. For example, this will involve development of young men's self-esteem and emotional resourcefulness. As such, young men must be involved and consulted at every stage of the SRE process, from the initial planning to the delivery and evaluation. This will encourage them to take responsibility and make informed choices about their learning. A useful tool for engaging young men in SRE is peer education, this approach is widely recognised as having a positive effect on young men's attitudes and behaviour (Cowie et al, 2002), particularly in a culture where men are reluctant in talking about their worries and feelings.

While there is little research that highlights the gendered nature of provision, the findings of this research mirrors previous research which documents its predominantly heterosexist content (Ellis & High, 2004; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Stonewall, 2007). Additionally however, this thesis underlines how teachers uphold the nature of their provision as inclusive, and justify this heteronormative focus. As highlighted in chapter 5, teachers mobilised a heterosexual presumption (when accounting for pupils' SRE needs) and positioned LGB pupils as isolated cases when addressing issues of inclusivity. As discussed, this appeared within their accounts where it allowed them to be seen to be responding to majority needs instead of acknowledging this as an omission in their provision. Additionally, teachers appeared to conflate LGB pupils' sexual health needs with those related to sexual identity. This was evident where one teacher spoke of LGB pupils' SRE needs only in terms of the fears and concerns they may have around their sexual identity. This teacher therefore effectively justified excluding this provision by problematising LGB pupils and constructing their SRE needs as being outside of expertise of the SRE teacher and the SRE classroom. Additionally, in further side lining the issue of sexual identity outside of the SRE classroom, another teacher drew only on the work she did around homophobia as representing inclusivity and serving the needs of young LGB people. As such, in all these cases, despite claims around providing some level of provision to young people who may identify as LGB, there is a clear lack of actual SRE provision around sexual health and practices as they apply to same-sex relationships.

Notably, teachers' accounts of their provision highlight the way they attempt to present their provision in ways that, despite its heterosexist nature, present it as being inclusive of young people's sexual diversities. Their strong rhetoric around inclusivity within their provision actually reflects a problematic understanding of inclusivity and the SRE needs of LGB pupils. More than this though, these accounts highlight the way teachers' claims of inclusivity are rhetorically produced to meet the demands of the interaction, namely to discount claims they are unresponsive to pupils needs and manage potential criticism. Such findings can help to understand the many barriers that prevent inclusivity being realised, particularly at the level of the individual educator and those that relate to the cultural context of heterosexism. As seen in the analysis, heterosexism is evident in teachers accounts where they firstly, work under the heterosexual presumption and secondly, as they perceive same-sex sexuality (both identity and sexual practice) for LGB pupils chiefly, and therefore in terms of sexual identity only.

Another problem highlighted by these findings is a lack of understanding around what real inclusivity constitutes in this context. Certainly, as it is currently articulated there are problems for acknowledging and addressing young people's diverse SRE needs, particularly as they are set amongst provision which privileges heterosexuality above other types of sexual identity and practice. This of course has significant effects on the potential efficacy of SRE provision in being able to meet young people's varying needs and impact positively on young people's sense of self. As research highlights the variability in young people's sexual identities and practices (Dempsey et al, 2001; Diamond, 2008, Jackson, 2004), provision needs to cater for this variability to address their current and future sexual health needs. As such, SRE needs to include a wider range of sexual practices young people current engage in outside of penis-in-vagina sex such as anal, oral sex and different types of masturbation, in addition to the omissions that currently exist in provision around sexual identity. This will work to disrupt the conflation of sexual activity with penis-in-vagina sex only and open up the discourse used around sex in teacher's communications with pupils. As such, teachers will need to be more open about discussing sex, which should be fostered through on-going training around SRE and through support from senior management.



As this analysis highlights the way young people are taught about sexuality predominantly under a discourse of sexual fixity, provision also needs to take stock of the increasing fluidity we are seeing around identity and practices. As it stands young people are taught under provision that proscribes them information on the basis that their (hetero)sexuality doesn't change and moreover, under provision which makes certain assumptions around the types of sexual practices young people engage in based on their (presumed) sexual identity. This is problematic for a range of young people who move between sexual identities or relinquish these all together. As this analysis illustrated the way teachers teach about sexual identity under a discourse of sexual fixity, this only works to overlook the issue of sexual fluidity and reinforce the hetero/homo binary further.

As such, the analysis highlights the importance of conducting a detailed analysis of how provision is constituted at a discursive level and most specifically, how heteronormative and gendered provision is upheld. This is particularly important for the way in which the discourses teachers mobilise around sexuality have an impact on the resultant content of provision and therefore, on young people's developing sexualities. Teachers' discourse has the potential to establish the many possibilities around sexual desire, practice and thought for young people at an influential time in their sexual development. It also has significant sexual health implications for those who identify as LGB or who go on to identify as such. If LGB sexuality and sexual health are considered peripheral if not outside the staple concerns of SRE, then these young people fail to receive any SRE provision which matches their experiences at all. Furthermore, it also closes off a range of sexual practices and desire that young people may currently engage in irrespective of sexual identity. The nature of these findings therefore highlights the importance of deconstructing the nature of provision delivered to young people and various assumptions they contain regarding young people's sexuality. This of course again, requires training and support for those who have a role in SRE, training which requires teachers to explore their own attitudes towards the content of SRE (including young people's sexuality), and how their attitudes can affect young people. This needs to be on going and requires teachers to regularly update their knowledge about sex, sexuality and young people. Such teaching is crucial in order to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to develop an inclusive curriculum that takes account of young people's varying sexual identities, relationships and cultural backgrounds. Teachers need to be aware

of the various ways in which they can promote a balanced picture of sexual orientation. Teachers can achieve this by using resources that are inclusive of diversities, include positive images of LGB people and represent a diverse range of family lifestyles. In order to facilitate this in their teaching, teacher also need to be aware of the various ways of avoiding imposing heteronormalising practices. One way this can be achieved is by ensuring that they use inclusive terminology for example, using terms such as partner instead of boyfriend or girlfriend and by referring to a general concept of ‘sexual activity’ rather than using sex synonymously with sexual intercourse. Teachers also need to promote a strong anti-discrimination policy by tackling unacceptable language and behavior, in addition to misconceptions. All this however, needs to be developed and supported through specialist training.

### ***8.5 Evaluation of theory and method***

One of the major strengths of this thesis was the use of a constructionist approach to examine how adults and young people construct SRE, and how young people’s sexualities are subsequently constituted through the various discourses mobilised in provision. As the epistemological framework used within this thesis departs from the more essentialist approaches previously taken to studying SRE, the strength of this approach mainly rests on how it provides a more critical commitment to examination of the subject matter. As such, this thesis offers new insight into the meanings that SRE holds for a number of ‘key’ people involved i.e. policy makers, teacher and therefore uncovers how ‘knowledge’ around SRE (and young people’s sexuality) is constructed within the UK (socio-political) context.

While an essentialist approach has certain benefits when applied to the examination of SRE, particularly through delineation of pragmatic outcomes for teachers to utilise in the school context, a constructionist approach can also provide comparable means of improving provision. While the applications of this approach may not be as easy to recognise for those outside of academia (or perhaps as easy to disseminate in the school context), the value of this approach is still considerable. The strength of this approach lies in the way it generates a more critical and in-depth examination of the how understanding and knowledge is



constructed, particularly, as it examines the everyday and take-for-granted meanings around SRE, those that work to delimit the nature and scope of provision. As teachers and policy makers formulate provision, an examination of how this is done can present critical awareness about language use and its effects. While it is acknowledged that an essentialist framework would have certainly generated a different understanding of this subject and its plight, the approach taken and the questions generated in this thesis reflect the issues felt most at stake in the context of SRE, namely those bound up in language. As barriers appear in the often more subtle accounting practices of teachers, this framework provides insight into the constructive dimension of language use and provides a means of recognising how discourse can present barriers to developing comprehensive provision. As such this framework is considered to be more desirable over an essentialist approach that can't give as much attention to the critical effects of the talk.

In addition to the epistemological framework utilised in this research making a significant contribution to the research area, the discursive approach taken also contributes towards the literature. In particular, this approach responds to scholars who call for more thorough critiques into SRE and around how young people's sexual subjectivities are being influenced through their positioning in the various discourses drawn upon in their SRE. Such insight into *how* exactly SRE is constructed at these different levels is invaluable within the current socio-political context where SRE is varied and the nature of provision is contested. These findings therefore extend previous work that highlights the significant role of teachers in determining the nature of provision. More specifically, this research provides insight into how teachers account for their provision and fashion their accounts in ways that highlight their understanding around SRE. As evidenced in this thesis, teachers' understandings of their SRE and their pupils' sexual health needs has considerable implications for what is taught in SRE. As demonstrated, this is primarily driven by individual values, thus warranting a more detailed (discursive) analysis of how this is done and more importantly, how this is justified.

The strengths of this research are further illustrated through the way it reveals numerous barriers which prevent comprehensive (and therefore inclusive) provision. This is particularly important given recent calls around making SRE more inclusive for pupils' diversities. For example, on the level of the individual educator, it highlights how a heterosexual



presumption is used to uphold heteronormative provision and to explain away the importance of addressing LGB issues. Furthermore, the way this research examines and contrasts the discourse of adults and pupils, has allowed further evidence for the competing meanings around young people's sexuality. Of particular significance is the way this research delineates how discourses vary according to the different tenets of an SRE approach and therefore appear to be indicative of the various approaches i.e. those that relate mainly to health promotion and those mobilised within more progressive SRE. This research indicates the potential impact of different approaches (via these diverging discourses) on young people's subjectivities, as they appear to have considerable implications for young people as emerging sexual agents.

The limitations of this research are largely methodological, and as such have some influence on the data collected and the subsequent analysis conducted. As highlighted in chapter 3, these were mainly experienced in the field: Limitations were imposed in certain schools around level of involvement with the research and their participation across the differing aspects of the research project. This invariably compromised the extent to which comparisons could be made and curtailed the ability to provide a more ethnographic approach. A more detailed case-study approach would have been desirable for the way it facilitates more systematic insights into the differences and commonalities between the schools. Additionally, while the observation data informs all aspects of this research, there was no direct analysis on this, given this it was not interactional data. While this type of data was important to the research project, ethical curtailments, mainly those around recording young people and potentially sensitive material, prevented this from being obtained. While the observation notes I took are valuable to any research project around SRE, for the purpose of this research focus was placed on the discursive construction of SRE and therefore on the recorded data only.

Curtailments around participation may have invariably affected the strength of the findings. While this research does offer a glimpse into the effect of different types of provision on young people's sexual subjectivities and the influence of a more progressive and sex positive approach on the efficacy of provision, only one group were located in the latter type of approach (i.e. Middleton) compared to those located within the health-promotion provision.

Additionally, those located within the abstinence provision (Trencham) were also absent from this study despite the involvement of this school within other aspects of this research (observation and interview elements). As such, the accounts from pupils given in this research remain biased towards those located in health-promotion provision. The reach of the findings therefore would have been improved if greater consistency had been possible across the different research methods within each individual school.

### **8.6 *Personal reflexivity***

The focus of this research project was not only driven by theoretical interests and issues around ontology and epistemology, but also by strong personal and political motivations. These personal and pragmatic reasons are expressed in both my review of the literature and analysis, in addition to my own reflections of carrying out the research. These reflections are important for how they provide further insight into the subject and therefore to the research produced.

I am very aware of what attracted me to this area: I was fiercely passionate about SRE as a subject and disappointed by the quality of provision on offer in schools. This positions me as politically interested the nature and scope of provision and in particular, how comprehensive it is. While this potentially shaped aspects of my data collection (see chapter 3), it is important to consider how my interests may also have shaped my treatment and analysis of the data. Firstly, such opinions made me particularly sensitive to abstinence based provision and provision predicated on a discourse of danger. My prejudices and indeed, passions for the research area may also have influenced my ability to interpret the data from a more detached, objective and value-free orientation. Most specifically, it may have shaped how I interpreted some of the teachers' talk and motives, along with some of the pupils' evaluative talk. My interests are also likely to have resulted in focus on particular stretches of talk in the early coding stages of the analysis. I was particularly interested in the more rhetorical and promotional aspects of teachers' talk, in addition to the stretches of talk that included justification around aspects of provision. These aspects were particularly appealing where provision was limited and/or moralistic. I wanted to highlight the various accounting devices

teachers used to uphold the decisions they made about their provision. As such, I was guilty of focusing on their descriptions and justifications and opening these up to examination, particularly where I felt the provision was lacking. Additionally, my analytic focus may have been influenced by my desire for the research to contribute to literature that aims to improve SRE. As such, I may have placed more focus on the shortcomings of both the approaches taken and teachers' discursive practices, which had exclusionary effects. Similarly, the emphasis on pupils' SRE experience may also have determined the nature of analysis. As such, the analysis resoundingly reflects my values, interests and political commitments, particularly those I have for young people.

The strong emotions I experienced when observing in schools are also worth considering here for the way they may have unwittingly shaped my interpretations of the teachers' accounts and indeed, pupils' evaluative talk. Clearly, aspects of the observations were also open to the same issues of 'cherry-picking' that occur when deciding which segments of transcripts should be selected for analysis. As such, the analysis may have been driven by the personal and political concerns experienced in the 'field'. This may have played a role in how I categorized the different types of provision in the analysis (as either abstinence, health oriented or progressive). These categories were applied in an attempt to classify the main tenets and features of the provision that were observed, and were used to contextualize the pupils' accounts. These categories were those imposed by the researcher rather than those employed or validated by the teachers themselves (with the exception of Trencham). As such, these categories may be open to some contention; in particular, in employing these categories, I may be guilty of imposing some unnecessary divisions between each school's SRE. In reflecting on the analysis, I was certainly keen to highlight the contrasting experiences of the pupils located in Middleton school relative to the other schools. This emphasis on the potential differences between these schools could have been at the expense of excluding potential similarities.

My own subject positions (as both female and heterosexual) may also have significantly influenced the analysis. As a female I felt particularly sensitive and aware of the needs of the young women who took part in my research. I was also sensitive to the way SRE focused heavily on female sexuality. Certainly my position as a heterosexual female raises questions



about whether I had gained insight into the potential diverging experiences of those more marginalised young people (i.e. males and LGB pupils). The direct absence of the experiences of LGB pupils' account in my sample (to my knowledge) is significant, given their continued marginalisation in the SRE classroom. While some of the views expressed may be those of LGB pupils, it is hard to determine whether I facilitated an environment that each of the young people felt comfortable to contribute to. The implications that SRE provision holds for these young people can therefore only be reflected upon. Similarly, the line of questioning may have established a heteronormative agenda, and placed relatively little challenge to the heterosexist nature of much provision. The anxieties I felt around challenging heteronormalising practices and assumptions in the interviews with the teachers and in the research project as a whole, continued long after data analysis.

There are also issues surrounding research ethics and performance that I also wish to highlight, not only for their potential as shortcomings, but also for how they highlight the often difficult decisions (and indeed compromises) that have to be made in research, which ultimately have a bearing on the final outcome. One particularly difficult decision was to not perform any formal analysis on the observational data. While this is fascinating data, its fleeting appearance in this thesis represents a compromise. Its absence may leave the analysis open to criticisms, mainly as it omits important aspects of the SRE context, notably, classroom interaction. Such data is in fact crucial for gaining insight into the way teachers determine the nature of their provision in the classroom: The interview accounts of teachers arguably provide a more 'polished' version of SRE and not what actually occurs in practice. This data then, can highlight the way certain messages are negotiated between teacher and pupil in the classroom, which is very important. Indeed, my observations highlight the often crucial ways in which the more 'informal' aspects of teaching and pupil-teacher interaction shape the nature of provision and determine the context in which young people experience it. My observations particularly highlighted the way teachers, often through banter with pupils, 'police' gender appropriate behaviour, in addition to delivering messages around sexual desire and activity that upheld gendered notions of sexuality. Carl in particular (Hatfield), would make comments about pupils' sexuality and gender in the face of certain comments. For example, in an instance when Carl asked the pupils to work in pairs, one male pupil asked whether he could "go with" the teacher, and after pulling a shocked face, he replied "so

when I saw you coming out of the girls changing room your happy with that are you? So your confident about your sexuality are you?” to which the pupils laughed. This wasn't the only incident and highlights clearly the way teachers more informal interactions often serve to uphold heteronormative assumptions and in some instances, homophobic attitudes.

Given the extent and importance of the observational data, I found it difficult not to incorporate and acknowledge it more heavily. I am left with some anxieties regarding whether I managed to do justice to this endeavour, particularly in providing insight into the research area, including my experience of the research process and context. I am certainly left wondering whether I have made an impact on the issues under exploration and on SRE in particular. Certainly as a critical psychologist, I sought to contribute towards some form of change with this research project. As I reflect on whether this thesis has achieved this aim, I have come to reassess the motivations that guided the research and data analysis, and how they ultimately represent a commitment to change for young people. It certainly reflects an attempt at disrupting dominant conceptualisations of young people's sexuality, in an attempt to improve future SRE. Most importantly, it also represents young people's voices and experiences. For me, the beauty of this thesis is that it highlights the importance of placing their voices at the heart of any understandings we seek to gain around provision that ultimately caters for these individuals.

### ***8.7 Implications and future directions***

Progression within SRE is obscured by a complex and fraught political context, most evident in the stake that certain interest groups continue to have (in terms of being able determine the nature of provision). This type of influence works to curtail developments in this area, and as such requires bold policy changes at government level (and indeed a united governmental approach) if progress is to be made more widely. The results of such policy-making are bound to cause controversy but will ensure more coherent provision. Establishing a framework for SRE ensures certain commitments can be made to young people regarding their provision entitlements. The challenge then comes with making some significant policy changes aimed at supporting SRE and those who deliver provision. The importance in



establishing statutory SRE becomes crucial here. Statutory status would certainly ensure a greater number of policy recommendations translate into practice.

The immediate future of SRE policy within the current Coalition Government remains unclear but their opposition towards the policy changes proposed by Labour will remain a significant hurdle for SRE to overcome. The accounts given by young people featured in this thesis certainly has resonance for those who oppose statutory SRE and a more sex positive approach. Their accounts also highlight the importance of acknowledging young people's meanings and experiences in order to improve the efficacy of any SRE approach. More significantly, the importance of statutory SRE that is underpinned by a conceptual framework is highlighted most strongly in the SRE teachers' accounts; SRE is almost entirely determined at the level of the individual teacher and is therefore subject to personal and religious bias. This is a particular issue in cases where these values contrast significantly with those held by young people themselves.

Along with existing research (Allen, 2008), this thesis clearly highlights young people's disengagement with morally loaded messages. Future research therefore needs to capture how they experience such morally saturated SRE. As illustrated, the perceived authenticity of both teachers and their messages has a formative impact on whether young people accept them. While previous research has emphasised the importance of the characteristics of the SRE teacher (Allen, 2009; Buston & Wight, 2001, Kheily, 2002), this research continues to illustrate the importance of such characteristics, particularly the more inter-discursive elements at play within the classroom that determines the kudos of provision. Young people appear to be finely attuned to the nature of the messages that teachers mobilise, their investment in these messages and most importantly, their validity. Standardised and generic messages lose sway and resonance with young people. As the effectiveness appears to rest on such subtleties, these factors warrant further exploration, certainly, as this appears at odds with the recent call for greater standardisation in SRE. This requires some careful thought however, given that standardisation offers many promising safeguards against omissions in provision. Conversely, it could also produce more scepticism if delivered too rigidly. A more appropriate approach appears to be what is referred to as a 'conceptual framework' that underpins SRE (Hirst, 2007) or a more 'rights framework' (Aggleton & Campbell, 2000).



These type of approaches offer promising means of ensuring SRE is underpinned by key aspects/principles (i.e. those around content, values etc.), but also presents teachers with the ability to go 'off piste'. As such, teacher's personalities appear to be an important tool to be brought to SRE teaching. Their energy, enthusiasm and commitment will affect the level of pupil willingness (De Silva & Blake, 2006) over and above what is specified on the curriculum. Teachers should be encouraged to employ teaching methods that actively involve pupils and personalise messages and information to the needs and experiences of the group based on feedback provided.

Perhaps the most significant issue highlighted in this thesis that requires further examination is the varied nature of provision and its potential affects. The differences illustrated between the health-promotion approaches and the more progressive approach, may have a potentially great impact on pupils. Accounts given from those under a more progressive framework acknowledge plurality of sexual identity and practices, also presenting young people with different meanings and experiences around the sexual. The differences in young people's accounts highlight the way SRE is far more valuable than just promoting safe sex. The evidence presented in this thesis indicates a progressive approach may have a greater role in shaping young people's sense of self and their social skills (including their confidence and aspirations). Whilst this only offers a glimpse of how SRE can offer such promising potential, it certainly requires further examination, particularly in the context of continued opposition over the value of SRE. The effects of being positioned primarily under a discourse of danger are most evident in young people's inability to see how sexual pleasure may be incorporated in their provision. Consequently, this has significant implications for young people through its assumption that they are unable to make autonomous sexual decisions, which therefore effectively disempowers them. Where this is perhaps most problematic is within an abstinence approach where young people are denied information around contraceptives, although this can only be surmised in the absence of their opinions as part of this thesis.

The implications of heteronormative and gendered provision for young people are highlighted in previous research (Atkinson, 2002; Ellis & High, 2004; Holland et al, 1999; McLoughlin, 2008) and impact most heavily on those who remain marginalised as a result of such provision. Although this most significantly relates to those who engage in same-sex

sexual practices, it also extends to young men, who often feel disengaged from SRE (Buston & Wight, 2006; SEF, 2009). The construction of gendered sexuality within provision has considerable effects on young women however, who appear to carry the brunt of the sexual health messages delivered, which creates a double standard around sexual activity and responsibility. Again, this has significant impact on young people's developing sexual subjectivities.

The discursive barriers in teachers' accounts that prevent inclusivity and contribute towards the aforementioned inequality (and indeed, prejudice) in provision are particularly subtle and thus require further examination particularly where they are dismissed as such. These inquiries will allow us to challenge these instances of heterosexism and promote awareness in those unaware of the way in which some of their discourses marginalise certain young people. Certainly, the effects of delivering SRE within an essentialist model of sexuality as illustrated, present further issues for being able to represent all young people's current sexual experiences. The diversity in young people's sexual practices provides a strong rationale for utilising a more social constructionist framework from which to teach SRE and convey the fluidity and plurality in sexuality, in addition to broadening the meanings held around sex, which remains largely reductionist in essence. These limited discourses mobilised around sex within much SRE, fail to capture the diversity in sexual practice and more importantly, a range of safe sexual practices on offer for young people.

Teaching SRE under a more pluralistic understanding of sexual activity of course requires more understanding around such issues for teachers who currently understand sexuality under sexual essentialism and therefore teach sexuality from this framework. This also has implications for the types of strategies teachers use for reducing homophobia that currently rely on these arguments and therefore work to reinforce hetero/homo binary and promote fixity of sexual identity.

The implications of this thesis relies on teachers and policy makers recognising the value and legitimacy of such proposals, particularly within a subject that already produces a considerable amount of controversy. Policy makers in particular 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 and as such, isn't helping to improve the position and status of SRE despite repeat requests for guidance and information.

While those at policy level certainly provide the foundation for good quality SRE, Teachers will certainly play an important role in producing such change, given their formative role in establishing provision. It will however, rely on teachers' enthusiasm to critically evaluate all aspects of their approach, including their discourse. Their concerns with managing the presentation of provision may present a potential barrier in producing change however, particularly where they appear reluctant to acknowledge problematic aspects of their provision. Partly as a result of the non-statutory nature of SRE, this thesis highlights the importance of teachers having an open and transparent approach to their SRE, in addition to supportive policy context and some external regulation. This support is felt to be crucial in light of teachers' strong rhetoric and their tendency to discount any suggestion that their provision could be improved.

While teacher autonomy is extremely important it needs to be balanced with some level of observation. In short, this thesis highlights the need for teachers to reflect and rethink all aspects of their provision regularly. That is, teachers need to demonstrate willingness in being able to evaluate (and perhaps more blatantly, interrogate) their SRE practice and discourse. Such reflexive practice may not be easy for many teachers, particularly those that took part in this research, who are responsible for SRE and in some cases, have an external responsibility around regional practice. Moreover, this may prove challenging for the level of opposition they receive from interest groups; the ramification of stepping outside of the confines of traditional and reductionist approaches to SRE was highlighted in the case of one teacher who was left vulnerable to parental and media backlash. Such an approach not only requires teachers to examine the types of discourses used but to interrogate the nature of their assumptions, the importance of which is further highlighted in chapter 5 in the heterosexist assumptions mobilised by certain teachers. This approach will enable teachers to detect the more limiting discourses identified in this thesis and to measure effectiveness of their provision more adequately. Overall, teachers' accounts highlight the need for greater critical engagement around all aspects of their provision from its content, delivery through to its evaluation.



As the initial impetus of this research came from literature that highlighted the ways that SRE felt short in acknowledging young people's sexuality and providing them with valid SRE, it is important to consider the contributions this thesis makes. Chapter one outlined the contributions this research sought to make particularly to critical social psychology and to the psychology of education. At this stage in the thesis, I wish to reflect on the nature of these contributions. This thesis makes an important contribution to the critical social psychology literature through its examination of how SRE is constructed for and within the school context. It illustrates how understanding of young people's sexuality, and therefore their SRE needs are taken for granted. Specifically, sex is conceptualised as an exclusively heterosexual and (vaginal) penetrative act. This not only limits young people's desires, practices and conceptualisations of sexuality in general, but also excludes aspects of LGB sexuality from provision. This lack of acknowledgment prevents inclusivity of these particular young people, which works to reinforce inequality within educational settings.

This critique demonstrates how young people's sexuality is constructed and informed by particular societal constructions. It fits in with the aims of critical psychology as it seeks to explicate this process of constructing young people's sexuality. As a result, it has provided practical insight and recommendations that can contribute to the promotion of social change within this context. This critique has helped further evaluate SRE and highlight the particular issues that young people face within this context. Specifically, it addresses how a myriad of factors (e.g. policy making and practice) hinder the effectiveness of SRE. Together, focus on these issues provides a novel to both the education and critical social psychology literatures and could potentially change institutional norms.

## **8.8 *Summary***

Given the formative role of SRE in shaping young people's sexual subjectivities and its highly varied and contested nature of SRE, this thesis set out to examine how SRE is constructed at the socio-political, educator and pupil level. In line with previous research, this thesis demonstrated that SRE continues to be fraught with issues that limit its ability to meet young people's varying needs. This is evident primarily at political level where policy-

making continues to be driven by political concerns and curtailed by the anxieties held by various interest groups, in addition to inter-governmental disputes over the status and content of SRE. Mainly as a result of a largely unsupportive policy context, there is still little consensus around the content and aims of SRE. As illustrated, this has a huge impact at school level where provision varies considerably, appearing to be almost entirely determined at the level of the individual SRE educator. At this level, SRE continues to address the concerns and priorities of adults, along with their values and conceptualisations of the subject matter. This was accounted for as relating to some underlying 'ethos' or philosophy, which typically centre on what they perceive to be core aspects of provision. In conceptualising their provision in this way, teachers construct young people and their SRE needs in ways that justify their approach. This focus on the negative aspects of sexual activity somewhat problematises young people's sexuality. In turn, particular types of SRE provision substantially impact how young people evaluate their provision and the meanings they ascribe to the sexual.

This thesis contributes towards the literature around SRE and young people's sexuality, as they take on meaning at a discursive level. This type of examination is primarily important for the way it provides insight into how SRE and young people's sexuality is understood, revealing how these take on meaning in this context. Given the lack of research that highlights the way SRE is constructed at a discursive level, this thesis provides valuable insight into how this is done at a number of key levels, and the way it highlights the many factors that influence provision. As a result, this thesis highlights some of the barriers (on both a policy and educator level) that require addressing in order to provide an effective SRE that meets the needs of young people. The value of addressing these issues is evident in young people's accounts, where SRE has a decidedly positive impact and holds more affirmative meanings around young people's sexuality.

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# **Appendices**



## Appendix A – Information Sheet for Teachers

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Researcher: **Keeley Abbott**

Located: Sheffield Hallam University, The lodge, Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield, S10 2BP.

Contact: 01142 2555844

Email: k.r.abbott@shu.ac.uk

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This research project is exploring sex and relationship education within secondary schooling.

The experiences of teachers and professionals involved in any aspect of teaching on SRE programmes is of interest to this research, along with the structure and content of the programmes that are currently being delivered at present. The experiences and views of teaching staff within this area is the focus of this research project, along with those pupils. Short interviews will be used to gain this information, which will last for around 40 minutes and will be tape-recorded. All information will be anonymised and kept confidential outside of my research/supervisory team. This interview will be written up as part of my research project and therefore will contain extracts from the interview to illustrate any themes/information. You can withdraw at anytime throughout the interview and any information thereafter.

Keeley Abbott

## Appendix B – Information sheet for parents

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Researcher: **Keeley Abbott**

Institutions name and location: Sheffield Hallam University, The Lodge, Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield, S10 2BP.

Contact: 01142 2555844

Email: k.r.abbott:@shu.ac.uk

I am a post-graduate researcher at Sheffield Hallam University. I am carrying out a research project exploring sex and relationship education within secondary schools in the UK. The research aims to gain the experiences of both teachers and pupils involved in this aspect of schooling. I will be exploring the views and experiences of young people by inviting them in their friendship groups, to have an informal discussion on the aspects of sex and relationship education they find useful and interesting. Those who wish to take part in this research will be asked for their consent, along with yours, as their parent. The discussion will be controlled and guided by the pupils themselves and will be held in a relaxed and friendly environment. This will take place on school premises in proximity of teaching staff. The focus group discussion will last approximately 40 minutes and will be tape-recorded. Your child's name will not be used and all information will be kept confidential. The discussions will be written up as part of the research project and therefore will contain extracts from some or part of the discussions to illustrate any themes/points. You and your child can withdraw at any point during the focus group and after this takes place. Your child can contribute as much or as little as he/she wishes towards the discussion and will not have to answer any questions they do not want to.

I want to assure you that I have had a full criminal record check and it is clear, a copy of which is being kept on file at the school for you to view.

If you have any questions about this research then please feel free to contact me using the information given above.

Yours sincerely Keeley Abbott

## Appendix C – Information sheet for pupils

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I am a post-graduate researcher at Sheffield Hallam University. I am carrying out a research project looking at sex and relationship education (SRE) within secondary schools. The research aims to explore the experiences of both teachers and pupils involved in this aspect of schooling. I am interested specifically in the experiences of young people who receive SRE in their schools. As your opinions are important in developing this subject, I am inviting you (in your friendship groups) to have an informal discussion that will focus on your views and experiences of SRE. The discussion will be controlled by you in your groups, in a relaxed and friendly environment and will take place on school premises with the researcher present. The focus group discussion will last approximately 40 minutes and will be tape-recorded. Your name will not be used and all the information you provide will be kept confidential. The discussions will be written up as part of the research project and therefore will contain extracts from some or part of the discussions to illustrate any themes/points. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the focus group and after this takes place. You can contribute as much or as little as you wish towards the discussion and will not have to answer any questions that you don't feel comfortable with answering. This discussion will be held straight after school on (insert date) and there will be drinks and nibbles. If you are willing to take part please fill in the slip below and return to your SRE teacher.

If you have any questions about this research then please feel free contact me using the information given above.

Thanks Keeley Abbott

Located: Sheffield Hallam University, The Lodge, Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield, S10 2BP.  
Contact: 01142 2555844  
Email: [k.windle@shu.ac.uk](mailto:k.windle@shu.ac.uk)

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### Response Slip

I \_\_\_\_\_ would like to take part in this after school discussion on the (insert date).

Many Thanks Keeley Abbott

(Please give this slip to your SRE teacher)



## Appendix D – Consent form for teachers

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Pseudonym:

In order for you to participate in this study it is necessary for you to give your consent in writing and for the researcher to retain a record of your written consent. By completing this form you will give your consent to take part in the following research project.

Research Project: Sex and Relationship Education

Researcher: Keeley Abbott

- ☐ The researcher has fully explained the research and my participation. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions which have been answered to my satisfaction.
  
- ☐ I understand that I am free to refrain from answering any questions I do not wish to answer.
  
- ☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study completely at any time and have been assured that I will not be penalised in any way for withholding information or withdrawing from the study.

- ☐ I have been given a copy of the researchers contact details should I wish to make contact.
  - ☐ I understand that this discussion will be tape-recorded and that only the researcher will hear this taped version.
  - ☐ I understand that matters discussed within any interviews should not be discussed outside of the interview setting.
- 
- ☐ I give my permission for extracts from the things I say to be used in the final report and in any publications and/or presentations surrounding this research project, providing my identity is kept confidential.
  - ☐ I hereby give my consent to take part in this study.

Signature: .....

Name: .....

Date: .....

## Appendix E – Consent form for pupils

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Pseudonym:

In order for you to take part in this study it is necessary for you to give your permission in writing and for the researcher to have a record of your written agreement. By completing this form you will give your consent to take part in the following research project.

Research Project: Sex and Relationship Education

Researcher: Keeley Abbott

- ☐ The researcher has fully explained the research to me and my participation within this project. I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions.
- ☐ I understand that I don't have to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or any discussion I do not feel comfortable with.
- ☐ I realise that I may stop taking part in the study at any time without giving a reason and without causing any problems.
- ☐ I have been given information with the researcher's name and a contact number and



address if I want more information

☐ I understand that the discussion will be tape-recorded and that only the researcher will hear this taped version.

☐ I understand that all conversations that happen within the group should be kept private to all of those that take part. I will therefore not share any of what is said with people outside of this circle out of respect for those that have taken part.

☐ I give my permission for the things I say in the discussion to be used in the researchers final report, under a different name to protect my identity.

☐ I hereby give my consent to take part in this study.

Signature: .....

Name: .....

Date: .....

## Appendix F – Interview guide for teachers

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### Setting the Context

**Notes to researcher:** Request a copy of the school prospectus, SRE policy and programme overview.

Brief overview of the individual's area of work (job role), how came into teaching/SRE, background and involvement in teaching sex and relationship education.

### Sex and Relationship programmes

- Have you undertaken any training in PSHE?
- Do you have a SRE policy in the school? How long has the SRE programme been in place? Updated/ reviewed/monitored?
- What is included in the programmes, what do the pupils learn?
  - What do you feel is important that the young people learn from SRE? (priorities/focus)
- Do you find that some topics/issues have to be prioritised over others? Can you explain why?
- Do you use any resources within the programme, from external programmes or services?
- How much flexibility do you have with the SRE programme? Are there any barriers or difficulties that you can identify that interfere with delivering SRE?
- Any problems with the current programmes or teaching methods, anything you would change?
- Does the programme address diversity issues; cover all sexual identities and relationships? (LGB relationships and same-sex sexual practices?)
- Are parents informed of the SRE programmes and their right of withdrawal? Do any issues included in the programme invoke parental concern? Does parental pressure play a role in shaping provision? (Consulted, Informed on content?)
- Are there any topics you find particularly uncomfortable in teaching?

- Do you feel confident teaching on issues related to sexual identity and same-sex sexual practices in the programme?
- Do you find that some of your own views and values interfere with that of which you are teaching?
- Does the school have a particular religious ethos? (Does this affect the schools ability to include issues around diversity?)
- Is there any support services offered to young people within the school? (Help lines, support services advertised with the school, sexual health services?)

### **Policies**

- Are there any incidences of bullying in the school?
- Is there a whole school commitment to anti-discriminatory practice, equal opportunities and anti-bullying? Anti bullying strategy in place? Specific to sexual orientation? How does policy manifest in practice?

### **Attitudes towards the delivery sex education**

- How have the PSHE team approached sex and relationship education? (Positively/negatively/confidently?)
- Did section 28 impact upon sex education in your time of teaching? After its repeal? Have any teachers/yourself noted any difficulties particularly around including issues surrounding sexuality diversity?
- Have you ever feel constrained by certain policy/guidelines applied to SRE produced by DfEE/school policies when devising programmes?
- What training/input might you find useful?
- Have OFSTED inspections in SRE and PSHE had any impact on PSHE?

### **Pupils views on sex education**

- Have pupils expressed any views on what they want from sex education?
- How have pupils felt about sex education from programmes you have been involved with? (feedback given)



## Appendix G – Focus group guide for pupils

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- What previous sex education have you received both primary and secondary so far? (Frequency? who delivered by?)
- Has sex and relationship education been your main source of information about sex and relationships?
- Tell me about some of the issues/topics that have been part of your SRE? (STI's (types), pregnancy, abortion, HIV/Aids, Self-esteem, contraception (types))
- Has the information and lessons been useful and relevant to your experiences/needs?
- What do you want from your sex and relationship education?
  - Topics, content and delivery
- How comfortable are you with your SRE programmes, do you generally feel comfortable with the topics and the teachers delivering SRE? (likes/dislikes)
  - Any issues and topics that you have found embarrassing or that has caused a fuss in class, gained giggles?
- Has sexual identity (lesbian, gay and bisexual identity & relationships) been included within your programmes? In what ways? Should these issues be part of the SRE or any other lessons?
- Have you discussed sexuality identity or same-sex sexual practices in any other subjects, for example history, English, RE?
- Have you ever had any outside visitors/worker within your SRE lessons? (Who and what did they talk about?)
- Have you ever witnessed/known of any bullying incidents within this school? (verbal/physical?) (no names needed)
  - Do you hear many insults or teasing in or out of class?

- Do you all have a PSHE classroom? Are there any posters/information up on the walls?  
What types? (Images/content)
- Any comments or things you would like to add?

## **Appendix H – Draft SRE guidance**

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### **SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION GUIDANCE TO SCHOOLS**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

##### **Section 1: Introduction**

This document on sex and relationships education (SRE) replaces existing guidance to schools (DfES0116/2000) (section 1.1).

It provides guidance to primary, secondary, special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) in England on all matters relating to SRE, including how good quality SRE can be planned and delivered, how to develop an SRE policy and how to support the health and social needs of all pupils with regard to sex and relationships (section 1.1).

The guidance is relevant to all staff, and those responsible for co-ordinating and teaching SRE in schools; and to senior managers in schools, LAs and PCTs. It is also useful to all professionals, working with and for young people to deliver SRE, improve sexual health and relationships, reduce health inequalities and support school improvement (section 1.2).

Effective SRE is important to ensure that children grow up able to enjoy the positive benefits of loving, rewarding and responsible relationships, to be informed, comfortable with the changes during puberty, sexually healthy and emotionally safe. Schools provide a safe place for children and young people to make sense of the information they have picked up from the media and also playground myths (section 1.3).

The guidance sets SRE in the context of the Government's strategies to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people. It recognises the duty on schools to promote the wellbeing of its pupils and outlines the contribution that good quality SRE makes to helping young people deal with the health challenges they face in adolescence and in supporting their wider wellbeing (section 1.4).

There are a number of statutory requirements on schools in relation to SRE. In particular, Headteachers and governing bodies are required by law to have regard to the guidance (section 1.5).

The Government is legislating to make PSHE education and statutory provisions are included in the Children, Schools and Families Bill currently before parliament (section 1.6).



## **Section 2: Understanding SRE**

SRE is learning about our bodies, our health and our relationships. It should be taught gradually based on factually accurate information (section 2.1).

SRE should be set in the context of clear values, including the value of family life, marriage and of loving and stable relationships in bringing up children. It should teach children and young people to develop values, attitudes, personal and social skills, and increase their knowledge and understanding to make informed decisions and life choices (section 2.2).

SRE should be taught through the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum Science Order and through well planned Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. It should start in primary schools and develop through all Key Stages (see section 2.3).

Schools should ensure that SRE is accessible to all pupils including those with special educational needs (SEN) (see section 2.3).

Evidence shows that comprehensive programmes of SRE can have a positive impact on young people's sexual behaviour, helping them to make sense of the sexual messages and imagery around them, to understand risks and consequences and to gain the knowledge and skills they need to stay safe and be healthy (see section 2.4).

Although standards in PSHE education have improved the quality of SRE delivered in schools is still variable. Young people want teachers to be better trained and to cover more about relationships as well as biological topics (see section 2.5).

Parents and carers should be involved in the development of SRE. They have the right to withdraw their children from SRE taught outside of the national curriculum, but if they choose to withdraw their children from school provision they have a responsibility to provide alternative SRE. Where good communication between schools and parents/carers has been established, the numbers of parents choosing to withdraw from SRE has usually been very low (see section 2.6).

## **Section 3: Planning and Teaching Effective SRE**

There are a number of underlying principles that guide the way SRE is presented to children and young people. It should be factually accurate, evidence-based and age-appropriate; be sensitive to faith and cultural perspectives; promote equality, inclusion and acceptance of diversity; promote strong and stable relationships; and provide children and young people with a clear sense of rights and responsibilities (section 3.1).

All primary, secondary, special schools and PRUs must have an up-to-date sex and relationships education policy, drawn up by the governing body in consultation with pupils and parents and available to pupils and parents for inspection. It should set out how SRE will be taught and reviewed (see section 3.2).

Secondary schools and PRUs should establish specialist teams of teachers to teach SRE. Each primary school should ensure that they have some members of staff who have accessed the PSHE CPD programme, who share their expertise and information with and support other teachers. Class tutors should not be expected to teach SRE if they have not received specific training to do so and SRE should not be delivered in tutorial time because there is not enough time to do it properly (see sections 3.3 and 5.2).

Every school should have a lead teacher with responsibility for coordinating SRE – often as part of a wider responsibility for PSHE education or Healthy Schools. Non-teaching staff have an invaluable role to play in supporting the delivery of SRE but should not be used as a substitute for teachers (see section 3.4).

SRE should be set within a framework for PSHE and a robust SRE policy. Other subjects can support the delivery of SRE. Schemes of work should be prepared to identify the elements of SRE taught across subjects and to show how the requirements of SRE within PSHE and the National Curriculum are covered (see section 3.5 and 3.6).

Teaching strategies include using interactive learning methods that support participation and encourage reflection; establishing ground rules, and responding to/being conscious of pupils' existing knowledge and experience (see section 3.7).

Schools should assess pupils' learning to ensure that it meets the needs of the children and young people. Every school should be providing SRE of a quality that meets the needs of all children and young people. Schools should involve children and young people in the audit and review of current provision, design, planning and evaluation of SRE (see section 3.8 and 3.9).

Building strong partnerships with parents/carers, community organisations, such as faith and cultural groups, and health professionals, will support community cohesion, minimize withdrawal as well as achieve teaching and learning of SRE in schools (see section 3.10).

As part of their general responsibilities for the strategic direction of the school, governors and senior managers have a key role to play in the development of their school's SRE programme and policy. LA SRE advisers and colleagues in PCTs and other children and young people are well placed to provide strategic advice and guidance on SRE policy development (see section 3.11, 3.12 and 3.13).

#### **Section 4: SRE within a whole-school approach**

SRE in the classroom should be supported by a whole school approach that includes the school's values and ethos, staff training and the involvement of pupils, staff, parents/carers, governors and the wider community (see section 4.1).

Specialist and one-to-one support should be available to answer questions of a personal nature and to inform children and young people about sources of help and advice (see section 4.2).

A confidentiality policy developed in consultation with parents, young people and governors, will support SRE by setting out clear boundaries for pupils and parents about the sharing of information and how to make the learning environment safe (see section 4.3).

#### **Section 5: Resources for teaching and training**

Teaching materials and resources should be regularly reviewed. Feedback from teachers should be collated by the SRE Coordinator (see section 5.1).

Teachers of SRE should have access to a range of high-quality support through in school induction and continuing professional development opportunities (see section 5.2).



## **Section 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 The purpose of the guidance**

This is guidance for all professionals involved in planning and developing Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in schools. It replaces existing Department guidance to schools (DfES0116/2000).

It provides guidance to schools on all matters relating to SRE. It sets out the current statutory position for 5 to 16-year olds (Key Stages 1-4) (see section 1.5) and supports schools in:

- developing, implementing and reviewing a school SRE policy
- providing a comprehensive and effective SRE programme for all pupils, including links to other curriculum areas and school improvement.
- supporting the personal, social, health and economic needs of all pupils with regard to sex and relationships.

The Government has announced its intention to make Personal, Social, Health, and Economic (PSHE) education statutory (see section 1.6). However, this guidance reflects the existing statutory position in relation to SRE and has the same status as the 2000 guidance. Further guidance will be developed to support the implementation and delivery of statutory PSHE education in schools but it will build upon, rather than replace this guidance. Implementing this guidance will prepare schools for delivery of statutory PSHE planned for September 2011.

### **1.2 Who is the guidance for**

This guidance is for all staff in primary, secondary, special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) and colleagues from other agencies on all matters relating to SRE as part of PSHE education.

It is particularly relevant to:

- the headteacher and senior managers

- governing bodies
- members of staff with lead responsibility for SRE and /or Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education and those responsible for liaising with other professionals working with and for children and young people
- teachers of SRE
- Local Authorities (LAs) and their Healthy Schools leads
- School nurses and other professionals, who have an input into SRE delivery, including personal tutors, Connexions personal advisers, and all those responsible for providing guidance and support to pupils.

Those post-16 provision and the independent sector will also find the guidance of interest. Separate guidance is being developed for post-16 provision.

### **1.3 Why sex and relationships education is important**

Every parent and every school wants to see children grow up safely and be able as an adult to enjoy the positive benefits of loving, rewarding and responsible relationships, to be informed, comfortable with the changes during puberty and emotionally supported. Parents play a vital role in providing the building blocks for healthy and fulfilling social and personal relationships while protecting their children and young people from harm. They should lead on instilling values, but schools have a clear role in giving young people accurate information and helping them to develop the skills they need to make safe and responsible choices.

It is important that children start to build up the vocabulary and confidence to talk openly and positively about emotions, relationships and their bodies. Learning the words to describe feelings and emotions, the correct terms for parts of the body and developing “health literacy” is vital for children to stay safe and seek help if they feel at risk or are being harmed. When cases of sexual abuse have come to light years after the event parents, teachers and young people have spoken of their regret that SRE was started so late and that they/the child was unable to report it because they did not have the language and did not know that what was happening to them was wrong. There is now anecdotal evidence where parents acknowledge their gratitude to SRE in school because their child had had the confidence and language to

tell when they have been approached inappropriately rather than after abuse has taken place.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, children and young people are also exposed to sexual imagery and content in a wide array of media including adverts, the internet, video games, mobile phones, pop songs, TV and magazines. These media often present a distorted and inaccurate view of sex and relationships, and provide increasingly explicit images of sex and sexuality. In addition some children and young people will use the new technology to bully and intimidate others or to place themselves in compromising positions e.g send revealing photos of themselves to girl or boy friends. Far from “destroying their innocence” SRE equips children and young people with the values, skills and knowledge to understand and deal appropriately with these social and cultural pressures.

School provides a safe place for children and young people to make sense of the information they have picked up from the media and also playground myths. Guided by a skilled teacher, children and young people are able to separate facts from fiction and clarify and strengthen their own values.

Some children start puberty as young as eight years old. SRE prepares children for the physical and emotional changes of puberty. Many parents do talk to their children about growing up before puberty starts – but where this is absent some girls describe their fear to see that they were bleeding when their periods started. Boys talk about feeling isolated from discussions which only seem relevant to girls and might turn to other sources of information such as the internet and pornography.

As children approach adolescence so the nature of their relationships with parents, carers and their peers begins to change. They want new experiences and want to form new friendships and relationships. SRE is critical in that it provides accurate information about social norms to correct the myth that “everyone is doing it” and can support young people in resisting pressure. While it is only the minority of young people who first have sex before the age of 16 and, while remaining sensitive to the ethos of the school, it is vital that all young people have information about contraception. Currently approximately half of teenage conceptions end in abortion, indicating that they were unwanted or unintended. Many early sexual encounters are associated with alcohol consumption and coercion and these topics also need to be addressed.

In addition, the school curriculum has a role to play in reducing the likelihood of sexist, sexual, homophobic and transphobic bullying occurring in part through addressing some of the underlying attitudes and values that underpin it. SRE within PSHE education is the most obvious location for specific coverage of issues relating to bullying, gender equality and sexuality..



SRE within PSHE education is an important part of a whole-school approach to pupil well-being. Pupils who are happy in their relationships with peers and adults at school are likely to be better able to learn. By addressing a range of personal and social issues and providing information about where and how to get help, SRE supports pupils who face difficulties to get help and thus helps them to stay on track with learning.

#### **1.4 The Contribution of SRE to Government Strategies on the health and wellbeing of children and young people**

This SRE guidance reflects significant change in the education system. In December 2007, DCSF published the Children's Plan which set out an ambitious vision for improving outcomes for children and young people. Alongside the traditional goals for increasing the skills and qualifications which young people need for adult life, the Children's Plan sets out a broader role for schools, including their role in improving children's health and well-being as a goal in itself.

The Children's Plan also set out the concept of the 21<sup>st</sup> century school which, alongside commitment to a first class education would be committed to supporting all the Every Child Matters outcomes - recognising that the health and wellbeing of the whole child has a crucial influence on his or her capacity to get the most out of life, including the most out of teaching and learning.

School-level wellbeing indicators were introduced as part of the new Ofsted inspection framework from September 2009. As well as looking at hard data, these will also take account of pupil and parent perception data. This could include, for example, how well pupils feel SRE is being taught within their own school. Within this context the effective delivery of good quality SRE can have a very positive impact on helping young people deal with the health challenges they face in adolescence and supporting their wider wellbeing.

#### **1.5 The legal position on SRE**

Under current arrangements there are a number of requirements on schools in respect of SRE. These are set out in legislation and are as follows:

- The Education and Inspections Act 2006 places schools under a duty to promote the well-being of their pupils.

- The Education Act, 1996, as amended by the Learning and Skills Act 2000, requires headteachers and governing bodies to have regard to this guidance; to ensure that pupils learn of the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and the bringing up of children, and that they are protected from unsuitable teaching and materials (see section 3.1 and 3.6).
- All secondary schools are required to provide SRE which includes (as a minimum) information about HIV/AIDS and other STIs (Education Act 2002).
- Schools must teach the statutory requirements of SRE within the National Curriculum Science Order for all phases. This includes the biological aspects of naming body parts, puberty, reproduction and infection avoidance (see sections 2.3 and 3.6).
- All primary and secondary schools are required by section 404 of the Education Act 1996 to have an up-to-date policy for SRE. This includes special schools and pupil referral units / alternative provision. It is the responsibility of the school governors to ensure that the SRE policy is up-to-date and fit for purpose. Pupils and parents must be consulted in developing the SRE policy and the policy must be available for pupils and parents to see (see section 3.2).
- Section 405 of the Education Act 1996 provides the right of parental withdrawal from all or part of SRE provided at school except for those parts included in the National Curriculum (see sections 3.6 and 3.10).

## **1.6 Changes proposed by Statutory PSHE education**

The Government has set out its intention to legislate to make PSHE education a statutory subject within the National Curriculum in key stages 1-4. Provisions are included within the Children, Schools & Families (CSF) Bill which will give effect to this change, although at the time that this guidance is being published, the CSF Bill has not been approved by Parliament.

As well as making PSHE education a statutory subject, the provisions in the CSF Bill will also introduce a number of further changes:

- PSHE education will become a foundation subject in Key Stages 3 and 4, with the existing non-statutory programmes of study for personal and economic well-being forming the basis for the statutory entitlement that all pupils should receive;
- at primary level the proposed new programme of learning, "Understanding Physical Development, Health and Wellbeing" will be the basis of the statutory entitlement that all pupils should receive;

- governing bodies would retain the right to determine their school's approach to Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), to ensure that SRE is delivered in line with the context, values and ethos of the school, but there would be no 'opt-out' from the statutory content;
- governing bodies would retain the duty to maintain an up-to-date SRE policy, with the expectation that they should involve parents and young people (in secondary education) in developing their SRE policy to ensure that it meets the needs of their pupils and reflects parents' wishes and the culture of the communities they serve;
- there would continue to be a right for parents to withdraw their children from SRE, but that right would no longer apply when a child attains the age of 15 (currently the parents' right of withdrawal applies to all school pupils up to the age of 19);
- PSHE education will be excluded from the requirement to have statutory levels of attainment; and
- the above requirements in respect of secondary age pupils would apply to equally to Academies.

## 1.7 How to use this guidance

Unless specified otherwise, whenever "pupils" are discussed within the guidance this includes pupils with SEN.

Schools wishing to **review their existing provision** in light of this guidance may want to use the **check-list provided in Appendix 1** as a starting point. Those seeking to update their policy on SRE should find the **Section 3.2** useful. The guidance can be downloaded and appendices adapted to suit local circumstances from [www.teachernet.gov.uk/PSHE](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/PSHE)

Support in developing SRE programmes and an effective SRE policy is also available from the Local Authority, their local Healthy Schools leads, from diocesan authorities and religious bodies, and from teenage pregnancy coordinators. Schools are strongly encouraged to seek their own advice in developing their approach.



## Section 2: UNDERSTANDING SRE

### 2.1. What is sex and relationships education?

Sex and relationships education (SRE) is learning about our bodies, health and relationships; with a particular focus on puberty and growing up, sexual health, sexual intimacy, dealing with emotions and managing personal relationships.

SRE is taught gradually, so that learning can be built up year-by-year in a way that is appropriate to the age and maturity of each child; responds to the needs they have, and enable them to successfully manage the challenges they face as they grow up.

SRE teaches children and young people to develop values, attitudes, and learn personal and social skills, and increase their knowledge and understanding to enable them to make informed decisions and healthier life choices.

SRE makes an essential and significant contribution to safeguarding children and young people during their school-age years and into the future. SRE should enable young people to develop skills and confidence to access professional advice and appropriate health services. It enables children to understand their physical and emotional development and enable young people to take increasing responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and that of others.

### 2.2. What should be taught in SRE

SRE has three main elements:

#### 2.2.1 Values and attitudes

Because of the personal and social nature of the topics covered in SRE, **values and attitudes** are a central part of learning and moral development. There are clear values that underpin SRE including:

- mutual respect,

- the value of family life, marriage and of loving and stable relationships in bringing up children
- rights and responsibilities, for self and others
- commitment to safety and wellbeing
- gender equality
- acceptance of diversity, and
- that violence and coercion in relationships are unacceptable

Children and young people should be supported to identify and develop these values as they progress through their school years. For example;

- the importance of fairness, equity and caring for one another is introduced in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- friendships is a central thread of primary SRE
- the importance of respect and consent in intimate relationships is developed at secondary level

The values in SRE are consistent with the values underpinning the National Curriculum, which aims to enable all children and young people to become:

- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve;
- confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives, and
- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society,

and which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of learners.

In addition each school will want to reflect the values of their school community in their SRE policy.

Throughout SRE (both in discrete lessons and in other curriculum areas) children and young people benefit from opportunities to identify and reflect on their own values and those of others including their peers. SRE in school provides a safe environment for this exploration and development of positive attitudes. Well-trained teachers are able to facilitate discussion while maintaining the underpinning values listed above as a central reference point.

### 2.2.2 Knowledge and understanding

SRE should also increase pupils' **knowledge and understanding** at appropriate stages by:

- learning and understanding emotional and physical development
- understanding human sexuality, reproduction, sexual health, emotions and relationships
- learning how to resist unwelcome pressures to be sexually active
- learning how to avoid unplanned pregnancy and STIs including learning about contraception and infection avoidance
- learning about pregnancy and the choices available
- learning about the range of local and national sexual health advice, contraception and support services available
- understanding the legal aspects of sexual behaviour
- learning about the links between sexual health and alcohol
- understanding the positive benefits of loving, rewarding and responsible relationships
- learning about the impact of coercion and violence and understanding that consent is critical.

### 2.2.3 Personal and social skills

As well as knowing facts, it is important that children and young people develop **personal and social skills** to make informed decisions and life choices, including:

- learning to identify their own emotions and those of others
- managing emotions and relationships confidently and sensitively
- developing self-respect and empathy for others
- communicating openly and respectfully about sex and relationships
- making and carrying out decisions
- developing an appreciation of the consequences of choices made
- coping with and resisting unwelcome peer pressure
- managing conflict



- learning how to identify risk,
- recognising and avoiding exploitation and abuse, and
- asking for help and accessing advice and services.

## 2.3 Where SRE should be taught

SRE should be taught within the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum Science Order and the currently non-statutory national curriculum framework for Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. PSHE education and citizenship provide an effective context for SRE because they focus on exploring values and developing positive attitudes, developing personal and social skills, learning about healthy and safe lifestyles, and about the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

### ***Continuity and progression within SRE***

SRE needs to be part of planned curriculum progression in which intended learning outcomes are made clear and in which assessment and evaluation are used to assess learning and enhance provision. It is highly unlikely that such provision can be achieved without explicit timetabled provision or if delivered through occasional “off timetable days”.

**SRE should start in primary schools** and the primary age classes of special schools. It should continue throughout a child’s development, with topics and issues being included which are appropriate to the age and maturity of pupils and revisited over time. The overall programme should be co-ordinated across the curriculum and from year to year.

Secondary schools should liaise with their feeder and receiver schools to ensure continuity and progression across the phases, and with colleges where pupils study part-time under the increased flexibility programme for 14-16 year olds. LAs and PCTs can assist with liaison, training and support. **The transition from primary to secondary is particularly important; SRE in Years 7 and 8 should reinforce and build upon SRE in primary schools.**

### ***Integration within PSHE education***

PSHE education is the key, but not exclusive, curriculum location for school teaching about personal wellbeing, including SRE. PSHE education provides the context for focussing on the less biological aspects of SRE, such as how to develop and maintain effective relationships of all types, and to learn ways of keeping safe and healthy. Many of the skills and attitudes developed and explored through SRE are common to other aspects of PSHE education.

Links between SRE and other areas of PSHE education, for example emotional health and drug education, should also be made. This is particularly relevant to young people as the misuse of drugs, especially alcohol, can have an impact on their relationships and on sexual activity and sexual health.

### ***Contribution of Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)***

SEAL is a comprehensive programme for primary and secondary schools to develop the social and emotional skills of all pupils through a whole-school approach and across the curriculum. The skills are in five groupings:

- self-awareness
- managing feelings
- empathy
- motivation, and
- social skills

The SEAL programme acknowledges that schools will have a range of different approaches to the development of the social and emotional skills of pupils. These approaches will be influenced by the needs of pupils and the priorities of schools. The materials that support the SEAL programme, largely developed by the National Strategies, can be used in variety of ways to support the development of pupils.

SEAL helps to develop an ethos that supports PSHE education but it does not replace it. It creates a safe and emotional healthy school environment where pupils can learn effectively. The skills pupils learn through SEAL helps them to become responsible citizens.

### ***Cross curricular links***

There are also opportunities for making cross-curricular links more broadly, with English, drama, religious education, history and citizenship. Cross curricular activities are not a substitute for a planned SRE programme but they can enhance and reinforce learning. Elements of SRE taught across subjects should be identified and documented and clear learning outcomes should be identified.

Citizenship at all Key Stages can contribute to SRE by, for example, providing opportunities for pupils to:

- understand rules and law and how they relate to rights and responsibilities
- consider different points of view
- explore moral, social and cultural issues
- discuss and debate topical issues

### ***SRE for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)***

Mainstream schools and special schools have a duty to ensure that children with

special educational needs are properly included in SRE. It is important to recognise that there is a wide range of pupils who may need particular support because of their learning or physical disabilities or who have social and communication difficulties or other needs. SRE should help all pupils understand their physical and emotional development and enable them to make positive decisions in their lives.

Some parents and carers of children with special educational needs may find it difficult to accept their children's developing sexuality. Some pupils will be more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than their peers, and others may be confused about what is acceptable public behaviour. These children will need help to develop skills to reduce the risks of being abused and exploited, and to learn what sorts of behaviour are, and are not, acceptable.

More active teaching methods may be needed for young people whose learning is slower, giving plenty of practice of skills and familiarisation with situations. Specialist resources will be needed, and may need to be more explicit than those used with their peers. Specific strategies or courses may need to be devised to support pupils in SRE to reflect their particular individual needs (such as pupils with autism or Asperger's syndrome who will need support with understanding social situations and communication issues).

Schools should ensure that students with special needs in mainstream schools

receive SRE. Teachers may find that they have to be more explicit and plan work in different ways in order to meet the individual needs of children with special educational needs or learning difficulties. It is important to take care not to marginalise children with SEN. It is also important that students with special educational needs are not withdrawn from SRE so that they can catch up on National Curriculum subjects. Special schools will need to address the specific needs of their pupils.



All staff including ancillary staff, physiotherapists, nurses and carers as well as

teachers should follow the school's SRE policy when working with pupils with special educational needs.

#### **2.4. What is the evidence about the impact of SRE?**

The evidence is conclusive that SRE does not increase rates of sexual activity or sexual experimentation in young people (Kirby D. *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001). Rather it helps young people make sense of the sexual messages and imagery that are around them, to understand risks and consequences and to gain the knowledge and skills they need to stay safe, be healthy and to delay until they are able to enjoy and take responsibility to ensure positive physical and emotional benefits of intimate loving relationships.

While acknowledging that the issue of contraception will be sensitive for some schools and individuals, there is UK evidence that SRE improves knowledge, develops more mature attributes, postpones the age of first sex and that those young people who do have sex are more likely to use contraception (Blenkinsop S, Wade P, Benton T, Gnaldi M, and Schagen S. "Evaluation of the APAUSE Sex and Relationships Education Programme" Slough UK, National Foundation for Educational Research, 2004). This is supported by good international evidence that 'comprehensive' programmes of SRE, covering a broad range of topics including factual information about contraception, sexual health services and sexuality and where the programme is coordinated with young people friendly confidential advisory service, have a positive impact on young people's sexual behaviour (Kirby 2007).

International evidence-reviews have compared programmes that teach an exclusively 'abstinence-only until marriage' message and do not give factual information, with 'comprehensive' programmes of SRE. Many of the comprehensive programmes had a positive impact on young people's sexual behaviour but none of the abstinence-focused programmes had a positive impact (Kirby 2008 – ref 11 in the Review report).

Research in the UK has shown that people who said their SRE at school was good tend to have better sexual health later in life. This shows that the quality of SRE makes a difference to young people's life chances (reference 9 – review report – Wellings et al 1995).

Research studies have also looked at 'how' and 'when' SRE is taught. They found that:

- SRE is more effective if it starts before a young person first has sex
- SRE has more impact if both school and home contribute to SRE
- SRE is more effective if teachers are trained and are able to involve children and young people in their learning through participatory techniques
- SRE has more impact on reducing sexual risky behaviour if it is taught through small group work with a focus on skills and attitudes (rather than knowledge) (Trivedi et al, 2007, ref 12 in review report)

Research evidence now confirms that there is a broad consensus and support for SRE in schools:

- Young people (96%) and parents (86%) support SRE
- Parents(86%) believe that they should talk to their children about sex and relationships
- Both parents and young people agree SRE should include relationships, peer pressure, contraception and STIs
- Parents (75%) agree that young people should have access to confidential contraception services
- 86% of parents believe there would be fewer teenage pregnancies if parents talked more to their children about sex and relationships

## **2.5. What needs to improve?**

Young people have said that the quality of SRE in school is very variable. More than 20,000 young people responded to a survey carried out by the UK Youth Parliament in 2007 and 40% judged their school SRE to be 'poor' or 'very poor'.

In school inspections Ofsted have found that standards in PSHE education are improving. In many schools SRE was taught well, but in other schools it was inadequate (ref PSHE Time for Change, 2007). Ofsted advice that:

- teaching of SRE is at its best when taught by trained and specialised teachers

- SRE needs to be planned and delivered within a PSHE education programme which is adequately timetabled and not taught through 'drop-down' days alone
- assessment of what children and young people are learning in SRE needs to be improved
- more time should be spent helping children and young people to develop the skills and confidence they need to manage the real-life situations they face in their daily lives

Young people consulted by the Sex Education Forum said that teachers must be better trained because they are often embarrassed and un-informed. They said that topics such as puberty and the biology of sex and reproduction are often well taught – but that less factual topics such as skills for coping with relationships were neglected (SEF, 2008).

Parents involved in the Family Planning Association (fpa) 'Speakeasy' programme have also commented that school SRE does not teach as much about relationships as they would hope. So there is widespread support from young people and from parents for the need to improve SRE.

## **2.6 School partnership with parents and carers**

*"If we had SRE when we were younger then a lot of us would have been better equipped to deal with a lot of things in life" parent speaking at a discussion group about SRE at a primary school in Birmingham*

Surveys have shown that the majority of parents and carers want schools to teach SRE. Many parents have themselves had poor SRE and want the situation to be better for their children. In particular, parents have said that they value the role of schools in providing factual information and helping their children understand risks and joys (Stone and Ingham, 1998, ref 5 in review report).

Children and young people have said that they want their parents to be the first people who talk to them about sex and relationships. Parents have a unique emotional relationship with their child and knowledge of their maturity and can respond to their questions about sex and relationships more spontaneously as they arise. Yet many children and young people grow up without ever having had a conversation with their parents about sex and relationships. Boys are less likely than girls to have talked to their parents, and fathers are less likely than mothers to start discussion. One reason why a guaranteed standard of SRE in school is so important is that the amount of SRE provided at home is so variable.



*"My own mother was brilliant but parents whose own sex education was lacking will have trouble knowing how best to teach their children"* Young person

### **2.6.1 Building dialogue between home and school**

Schools have a vital role in building partnerships with parents and carers around SRE. Open communication helps parents understand what exactly is being taught in school and supports parents in fulfilling their own responsibility to their children.

**Parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from SRE taught outside of the science national curriculum – but if they choose to withdraw their children from school provision they have a responsibility to provide alternative SRE.** The school's SRE policy should set out clearly how parents are informed of their right of withdrawal from SRE and how the school will support them in fulfilling their responsibility to provide SRE at home.

However when parents have learnt what is covered in school SRE they have often been surprised to discover how little was a statutory part of science and how late some topics are introduced (review report ref 7 unpublished findings from speakeasy). Schools have a key role in helping parents to understand what topics are taught and when, the style of teaching and the values that underpin SRE.

- At **Primary school** children will be introduced to SRE as part of the national curriculum. At this stage parents need to be informed of the school SRE policy. The school can establish a regular system of communication about SRE, for example informing parents about what will be taught each term and year and reporting on progress through parents evenings.
- At **secondary school** SRE will be taught as part of PSHE education and may be linked to other curriculum subjects. The school should include parents and carers in the development of the school SRE policy. There are opportunities for schools to talk to parents about how SRE can support the transition from primary to secondary school as children encounter new friendships and relationships. Later, parents may be concerned about issues such as teenage pregnancy, body image and self-esteem and may welcome support in talking to their sons and daughters as they approach adolescence.

Regular communication with parents helps build a shared understanding between schools and families about SRE. It also helps children and young people feel able to talk about what they have learnt at school with their parents and carers.

*“My daughter has come home and told me that she was called a virgin and she asked me what it meant and was very upset about it, if we have a programme that gives them the right information and parents also know what is being taught then we can all say the same thing and it would eliminate a lot of the teasing and hearsay.” parent speaking at a discussion group about SRE at a primary school in Birmingham*

Parents and carers are valuable advocates for improving SRE. They should be consulted on the school SRE policy, particularly when the policy is being reviewed. Schools can invite parents to discuss the policy at a parents evening, by letter and email and by meeting with the SRE Coordinator or Head-teacher personally.

#### **Case-study: Consulting parents about the SRE policy**

The first step in updating the SRE policy at Holy Family Primary School in Birmingham was to inform parents and invite their input. The school also wanted to get the views of children across all year groups. Parents gave permission for their children to be involved in the focus groups. Children were asked about their knowledge on topics such as growing up and where they got their information. The school then arranged a parents discussion group and shared what the children had said and explained the legal responsibilities that schools and parents have for SRE. The views of parents and children were shared with staff and a new policy was then written with support from the Birmingham Health Education Service. This will be shared with governors for their approval.

Parents' evenings provide an ideal opportunity to share more detailed information about SRE including the scheme of work and examples of teaching materials. In some cases it has proved very successful to try out a teaching activity with parents to demonstrate the style of teaching.

Some parents and carers will be concerned about how SRE will meet the particular needs of their child and the school should welcome partnership to work out a more individualised approach if needed.

Parents of pupils with SEN may welcome additional support from school as they may be faced with behaviour from their child that is difficult to deal with

e.g. child approaching strangers to talk to them or touch them, revealing private parts of the body in public. Some parents of pupils with SEN may be finding it difficult to accept that their child will grow up and develop physically to become an adult and the issues that this raises. Parents of children who have experienced sexual abuse or trauma are also likely to be concerned about how their child will cope with SRE. Parents may welcome the opportunity to discuss individual concerns with staff and develop common strategies to support the child or young person. They may need reassurance that SRE will reduce their child's vulnerability. Care must be taken that personal information about children is only shared with consent and only when necessary.

### **2.6.2 Practical strategies for supporting parents and carers in their responsibility for SRE**

There are a range of strategies that schools and local authorities can use to provide practical support for parents and carers in fulfilling their responsibilities for SRE. For example:

- Homework tasks create opportunities for children and young people to talk to their parents and carers, their relatives and the wider community about SRE. For example, as a research task pupils can ask their parents what kind of SRE they had when they were at school.
- Worksheets that pupils take home after an SRE lesson with a summary of what has been covered and suggestions for follow-up discussion topics at home (this information can also be given to any parents who choose to withdraw their children from SRE)
- A letter template that can be filled out after a lesson if a pupil asks a question that the teacher feels is better answered by the parent or carer, offering further support from the school if wanted
- Running short courses for parents and carers to build up knowledge and confidence to talk to their children about sex and relationships, for example the fpa 'Speakeasy' course
- Involving Parent Support Advisors, for example they might be trained to facilitate a 'speakeasy' course
- Linking with local parenting strategies, for example building sessions on SRE into parenting courses offered by Sure Start and Children's Centres and making links with Family SEAL



- Lending books and teaching materials to parents and carers

**Case-study: SRE book list for parents**

North Lincolnshire Teenage Pregnancy Partnership working together with “BigTalk Education” have produced a recommended book list for parents and carers, children and teenagers covering topics to do with body science, sex and relationships. The book titles for younger children such as ‘Let’s talk’ and ‘Body Science’ are suitable for parents to read with their children. All the titles are available to borrow for free from local libraries and are stocked by local book-shops.

Primary schools have promoted the book list to parents and carers as part of an evening session about SRE that explains what the school will teach and how parents can support learning. Sessions run by BigTalk Education are also offered to parents at Community and Children’s Centres on *keeping your children safe*. The sessions cover how to talk to your children about body science, relationships and sex, stressing the importance of starting early in order to keep them safe.

Feedback from schools that have worked to build a more inclusive culture and stronger partnership with parents shows that although the investment is long-term the benefits to pupils’ attainment and well-being are extensive.

Schools should be aware of gender and cultural differences in how fathers/male carers and mothers/female carers engage. For example, if the majority of parents taking part in a speakeasy course are female, the school may consider running a separate course for men. Similarly, awareness of the faith and cultural background of families will help ensure that parents and carers are able to engage in dialogue about SRE. For example it may be necessary to have a translator to facilitate communication.

### **Case-study: engaging with parents in Nottingham**

The role of 'Asian SRE Advisor' was set up within the Healthy Schools Team to work specifically with Asian members of the community to support parents and community members to understand the SRE programme in schools. The Asian SRE advisor runs consultation sessions for parents explaining how SRE fits with culture and faith, especially Islam, since 80% of Asian secondary students identified as Muslim in a survey carried out by the Healthy Schools Team. The consultations begin at primary school level and are offered in both single sexed and mixed sex settings. Often fathers/mothers attending the single sex sessions go home and talk to each other and then provide their feedback to the school. The Asian SRE Advisor invites a range of local community and school staff to support this process. This can include Asian language speakers to help translate, Teaching Assistants, Governors and local community members.

Consulting and engaging with parents at primary school level is proving to be a good foundation for better understanding and support for SRE at secondary level as children progress through schooling. The Asian SRE Advisor has also developed teachers confidence in creating policy, schemes of work and delivering SRE that is inclusive to the Asian community.

Where good communication about SRE has been established, the numbers of parents choosing to withdraw from SRE are usually very low or zero. Where parents choose to withdraw their children from SRE schools should discuss the alternative arrangements that parents are making to provide SRE themselves and offer support to parents in fulfilling their responsibility. Schools will need to balance the rights of the parents and the rights of their pupils. An open partnership approach, working in the best interests of the child, is recommended.

## Section 3: PLANNING AND TEACHING EFFECTIVE SRE

Effective SRE is dependent on partnerships at many levels; between parents, schools, children and young people – and at a more strategic level between the local authority, local faith communities such as diocesan boards of education, PCTs and partners in children's services. It is achieved with confident, well-trained staff delivering a developmental, planned programme, which is integrated into the curriculum and delivered over an extended period of time. This section explores a range of processes that need to be in place and the roles that different partners have in driving forward improvements in SRE.

### 3.1 Principles underpinning SRE

When delivering SRE, there are a number of underlying principles which should guide the way in which SRE content is presented to children and young people. It should be:

#### ***Factually accurate and evidence-based***

*"SRE should be about giving young people the facts so they can decide"*  
Young person

SRE should provide factually accurate information across the full breadth of the curriculum area. Information provided by schools should reflect the latest medical evidence available on topics such as: the efficacy of different contraceptive methods in preventing unplanned pregnancies and STIs; and pregnancy choices. Schools should make a clear distinction between factual information and views and beliefs. National and local data, for example about teenage pregnancy, alcohol-use and domestic violence helps schools to design relevant SRE programmes. Data can also be a useful part of learning in SRE. Statistical information about norms and averages must be presented with sensitivity to the diversity of experience of children and young people. Some pupils may already have had sexual encounters in circumstances that may or may not have been in their control. Similarly, assumptions must not be made about the HIV status of pupils or whether or not pupils have ever been pregnant.

Other useful local data should be available from the Director of public health and teenage pregnancy coordinator.

The evidence-base supporting the use of comprehensive (as opposed to abstinence-only) SRE programmes is clear (see section 2.4). The approach to



planning and teaching SRE should be based on the available evidence, which suggests that the most effective interventions being before the onset of sexual activity, use trained teachers, include content that is specific to reducing risk (help to resist pressure, negotiation skills etc) and involve interactive and participatory techniques.

### ***Age-appropriate***

SRE should be appropriate to the age and maturity of pupils. The relevant programmes of study for Science and PSHE education have been designed with the physical and emotional maturity of children and young people in mind and so provide a clear steer to schools about what material should be covered in each key stage. Decisions about when, precisely, within a key stage information should be provided are for individual schools, based on their understanding of the needs of its pupils and in consultation with parents.

Schools should be mindful of: the feedback from young people which suggests that SRE topics are often delivered too late; and the research evidence that talking to young people about sex and relationships does not encourage them to be sexually active. Schools should develop a scheme of work for SRE that is developmental and builds on learning year by year.

*“It has been important to ensure that SRE is not an add-on and is seen as a developmental process”* Primary School Teacher

### ***Sensitivity to faith and cultural perspectives***

*“The SRE we had respected that we had different ethical and spiritual views about sex and relationships”* Young person

Faith and cultural beliefs have an important role in shaping children and young people’s views and decisions about sex and relationships. It is right, therefore, that in helping children and young people to make positive and informed choices, faith and cultural perspectives are considered alongside the law and medical facts. Awareness of the local community and consultation with parents and pupils will help schools identify local cultures and issues that are relevant to SRE.

We encourage all schools – whether of a religious character or not – to include the perspectives of a range of different faiths as part of the context for discussions about sex and relationships. At the same time, however, SRE is about preparing children and young people for the responsibilities and

challenges of adult life and so all students should be provided with regular and sustained opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and values they will need in the future to make safe, healthy, responsible, and caring choices. Teaching young people about sex and relationships should not assume that they are, or will soon be, sexually active.

### ***Promote equality, inclusion & acceptance of diversity***

*“The teaching was fair and balanced, and unprejudiced”* Young person

SRE must be aware of and responsive to the diverse faith, cultural and family backgrounds of children and young people and also to the abilities, gender and sexual orientation of children and young people. SRE should promote awareness, respect and understanding for the wide range of practices and beliefs relating to sex and relationships within our society. Many people still face unacceptable prejudice and discrimination on the basis of their sexuality or what they look like, and intolerance towards difference needs to be challenged. SRE is an opportunity to explore the different views that children and young people hold in a safe and supportive learning environment and guided by a well trained teacher.

‘Personal identities’ and ‘Diversity’ are two of the key concepts within the national curriculum programme of study for PSHE education: personal well-being at Key Stages 3 and 4. SRE should support pupils to value differences between people, to challenge stereotypes and to understand the world around them.

*“ As a gay person, it was as if I didn’t exist”* Young person

### ***Promote strong and stable relationships***

SRE should provide sufficient focus on personal and social relationships. The building blocks for learning are relationships with family, friends and peers. Young people have reported that the relationships aspect of SRE is least well covered. Schools should consult with pupils to make sure their needs are met.

There is strong evidence that children and young people thrive best when they grow up in strong and stable families. SRE should help children and young people to understand the importance of marriage, and stable and loving relationships for family life as well as the challenges and responsibilities of parenthood and the importance of delaying parenthood until they are ready - emotionally, educationally and economically – to provide the care and support their children will need.

While we recognise the importance of strong and stable relationships, we also recognise that there are a number of reasons why there is disruption in family structures due to, for example, bereavement or separation. SRE should help young people to build the resilience they need to cope with change and loss.

Teaching about relationships should reflect and draw on the faith and cultural background of pupils, their families and communities. Faith and cultural perspectives can provide a rich resource for exploring what constitutes strong relationships and the spiritual and moral dimensions of relationships.

Evidence shows that for some young people first sex is not mutual and that their relationships involve pressure and violence. Learning about relationships should be informed by a clear understanding of rights and responsibilities in relationships. The difference between arranged and forced marriage, and signs that might indicate that a relationship is becoming exploitative, violent and bullying should be explored with all young people.

*“I think that whatever religion you are or school you attend you should be equipped with the facts of life and stress the importance of relationships, emotions, as well as the physical”* Young person.

### ***Rights & Responsibilities***

SRE should provide children and young people with a clear sense of rights and responsibilities in relation to sex and relationships. This should include explanation of the law as it applies to relevant issues including: consent, health services and equalities. For example SRE should:

- inform children and young people about their right to say no, what consent really means and the nature of abuse and exploitation. It should also teach about the responsibility not to put others under pressure to engage in sexual activity.



- provide children and young people with information about their right to confidential advice and support on sex and relationships. It should also cover responsibilities to protect the sexual health of oneself and others
- clarify rights relating to equalities and also explain responsibility not to discriminate or cause others distress based on their sexual orientation, gender, belief or their personal choices relating to sex and relationships

SRE should also support young people with the skills needed to fulfil their rights and responsibilities, including assertiveness, negotiation and accessing help and advice.

### **3.2 School policy for SRE**

Governing Bodies have a statutory responsibility to ensure that schools have an SRE policy in place. The policy should therefore be seen in this context. It is an important statutory document for schools, which is developed to support teachers in providing information about how to deliver good quality SRE. The policy should be reviewed to ensure that the needs of children and young people are being met.

Schools organise their curriculum policies in a variety of ways but are encouraged to locate their SRE policy within a wider PSHE education policy to make the relationship between the subjects clear. Cross-reference to the school assessment, confidentiality, safeguarding and behaviour management policies also helps to illustrate how SRE provision is part of a whole-school approach to pupils' development and well-being.

As a minimum the SRE policy should cover:

- How the school will meet the requirements for SRE as set out in the National Curriculum within the relevant programmes of learning (see sections 2.3 and 3.6)
- The aims of SRE and how they are consistent with the values and ethos of the school (see sections 2.1 and 2.2)
- Who will teach SRE and how they will be supported through training and CPD (see sections 3.3, 3.4 and 5.2)

- How parents/carers and pupils are consulted in developing and reviewing policy (see section 2.6)
- How teachers, including support staff are consulted and advised about the policy (see section 3.4)
- (Where relevant) how faith groups and diocesan boards of education have been consulted, advised and involved in developing the policy (3.10)
- Any external input to school SRE e.g. school nurses, advisory support from the local authority or direct classroom input from relevant agencies (see sections 3.4 and 3.9)
- How parents are informed of their right of withdrawal from SRE and how the school supports them in fulfilling their responsibility to provide SRE at home (see section 2.6.1)
- How SRE is made relevant to boys as well as girls, and addresses diverse needs including culture, faith, disability and orientation (see section 3.1 and 3.7)
- How the needs of children and young people with SEN can be met (see sections 2.3 and 3.7).
- How SRE is assessed (see section 3.8)
- How SRE is evaluated (see section 3.9)
- How to deal with disclosure and make referrals (see sections 4.2 and 4.3)
- How to manage a visitor to SRE programmes (see sections 3.4 and 3.9.)
- How to ensure that pupils are aware of where they can go for additional help, support and advice (see sections 3.1 and 3.10.1)
- When the policy will be reviewed and the mechanism for doing so.

In addition schools may find it useful to include:

- A list of teaching materials and resources used in SRE and how these have been selected (see section 5.1)
- How SRE will be linked to other areas of the curriculum e.g. English, science, drama, citizenship – perhaps through cross-curricular projects (see sections 2.3 and 3.6)
- How progression is ensured between EYFS - primary and primary - secondary (see sections 2.3 and 2.6.1)

- How the needs of all pupils will be met, for example through additional support for pupils with SEN and perhaps through targeted small group SRE for pupils at secondary level (see sections 2.3, 3.7 and 4.2)
- How SRE provision is inclusive of all pupils and consistent with the equalities duties (see section 3.7)

In many schools, the process of reviewing the SRE policy provides a useful focus for consultation and subject improvement.

#### Case-study: making the SRE policy available for parents

Craylands Primary school in Kent have produced a summary of the SRE policy which is available as an A5 leaflet in the entrance hall at the school. Parents can pick this up alongside other policy summaries on PSHE education, literacy, complaints etc. The leaflet highlights information that is relevant for parents:

*"At Craylands we are aware that the primary role in SRE lies with you as parent/carers. To support you we will:*

- *let you know about the school's SRE policy and practice;*
- *encourage you to be involved in reviewing the school policy, and making modifications to it as necessary;*
- *inform you about the best practice with regard to SRE, so that the teaching in school supports the key messages that parent/carers give to children at home.*
- *build a stock of resource books that you may borrow to help you answer your child's questions.*

*We believe that, through this mutual exchange of knowledge and information, children will benefit from being given consistent messages about their changing bodies and their increasing responsibilities."*

**Case-study:** Reviewing the SRE policy in the context of the school's beliefs



The PSHE education and SRE policies have been recently reviewed and rewritten at Trinity St Mary's Church of England primary school in Wandsworth. Care has been taken to set the teaching of SRE in the context of the school's beliefs as a church school. For example, whilst the SRE programme emphasises the importance of families, it embraces all types of family structures. The School Council played an active role in writing the SRE policy, which has been approved by the Governors. Question boxes for pupils also ensure that the programme meets their needs.

**Case-study: Aims of SRE set out in a primary school SRE policy**

- *Empower pupils to make informed choices about their education and future adult life*
- *Ensure that pupils are prepared for the physical development of their bodies as they grow into adults;*
- *Develop their confidence in talking, listening and thinking about feelings and relationships, and respect the differences between people;*
- *Develop a respect for their own bodies and the importance of sexual activity as part of a committed, long-term, and loving relationship;*
- *Ensure an understanding of the importance of family life;*
- *Discuss moral questions;*
- *Discuss relationship issues;*
- *Ensure pupils know how they can protect themselves and where to ask for help and support;*
- *Develop an awareness of sex abuse/exploitation, and what they should do if they are worried about any sexual matters.*

### **3.3 Teachers of SRE and delivery models**

*"We owe it to young people to help them explore openly through discussion and good teaching what their own core beliefs are, where their ideas and*

*beliefs come from and helping them to explore and challenge for themselves".*  
Teacher of SRE

The quality of SRE depends very much on the quality of the teaching. SRE requires subject-specific knowledge and competence in teaching about the topics of sex and relationships – personal and emotional topics that not all adults feel comfortable talking about.

Teachers need to work with and promote the values framework for the school. It is confusing for pupils and not appropriate for teachers to promote their own personal views.

**At primary level**, where class-teachers tend to teach all subjects for their class, schools need to ensure that all teachers are supported in delivering SRE through training and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). For more details on CPD see section 5.2. Although less subject knowledge is required at primary school all teachers need to be comfortable with the subject and contribute to a consistent approach to SRE that runs through the school.

Primary teachers who have accessed the national PSHE CPD programme or other local training opportunities are a particularly valuable resource and need to be supported in sharing their expertise and cascading information to other teachers.

**Case-study: Leadership and coordination to support full staff team - primary**

Craylands is a new primary school in Kent, which has been open for six years. Right from the start the Head-teacher gave SRE a high priority. A senior teacher in the school has been appointed as the PSHE Coordinator. An inset session was provided for all staff and facilitated by the SRE Advisor from the local authority. Teachers, teaching assistants and office staff attended inset ensuring that everyone had a shared understanding of the aims of SRE and their role in supporting pupils.

The Head-teacher is pro-active in supporting staff to access CPD on SRE – either through attending local authority training or inviting a facilitator to train a group of staff. Teachers and support staff are also pro-active in supporting each other to deliver SRE and reflect on outcomes and experiences.

**At secondary level** teachers tend to specialise in subjects so there is a structure to build a team of specialised SRE and PSHE education teachers. Teachers with a background in biology, English, drama, religious education, PE, philosophy, psychology and social sciences may be particularly well suited to teaching SRE.

It is important that teachers who teach SRE want to teach it and have adequate training and support to enable them to continually improve their sexual health knowledge and skills of delivery. Schools should encourage a diverse range of teachers to train as specialists including female and male teachers.

Teachers in special schools and PRUs may be addressing SRE across several subject areas, so all teachers need to be prepared to reinforce learning.

Class tutors often develop trusting relationships with young people and are ideally placed to support pupils in accessing expert help, for example with personal and relationship worries. **However, class tutors should not be expected to deliver SRE if they have not received specific training, or to provide SRE in short tutorial times.**

The introduction of a personal tutor for every pupil that stays with them throughout secondary school will further support the relationship between tutor and pupil. The SRE coordinator should keep class tutors informed about the curriculum so that they are prepared to support pupils one-to-one and are able to refer pupils for expert help.



### **Case study: specialised PSHE education team at secondary school**

Holmfirth High School in Kirklees has invested in the development of a team of specialist teachers of PSHE education. The five teachers are drawn from backgrounds in the humanities and religious education and were already skilled in facilitating classroom discussion and helping pupils to understand, develop and challenge their own values. To develop subject specific knowledge and skills all four teachers in the team have completed the PSHE CPD programme. Some lessons are team-taught with a health professional, who is employed by the school and also runs a health facility on-site.

With leadership from the PSHE education Coordinator and support from the Head-teacher and governors, the time allocated for PSHE education has increased to 1 hour per week. Pupils in the school regard PSHE education as an important subject and are invited to feedback on the quality of SRE lessons through a 'Student Voice' group. The curriculum outline is available on-line for parents to look at and there are no cases of parents choosing to withdraw their children from SRE.

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### **Case-study: Flexible teaching model to suit the needs of young people with severe learning disabilities**

At Oaklands special school in Hounslow for young people with severe learning disabilities SRE is seen as part of the core curriculum. Many pupils at Key stages 3 and 4 have a one hour PSHE lesson at the same time every week. Each teacher works with his or her own class for this lesson, supported by the PSHE education coordinator who can team teach or lead sessions alongside the regular staff. Because the whole school can be working on SRE at the same time, the groups can be changed if appropriate. In this way more verbal pupils can work together or single sex groups can be set up.

### **3. 4 Coordinating and staffing**

#### **3.4.1 SRE Coordination role**

Every school should have a lead teacher with responsibility for coordinating SRE – often as part of a wider responsibility for PSHE education or Healthy Schools. This role should be formally acknowledged in the teachers' job description. Senior management responsibility should also be formalised. The coordinator has a key role in developing the quality of SRE teaching by:

- developing a specialised and trained PSHE education/SRE team (at secondary level)
- organising basic training for personal tutors (at secondary level)
- organising induction for trainee teachers
- supporting specialised teachers to cascade knowledge (especially at primary level)
- enabling teachers to access ongoing CPD opportunities
- team-teaching and observing colleagues to support their development
- encouraging collaboration across all curriculum areas to ensure their contribution to SRE
- liaising with local support agencies and specialists
- organising visits to services and visits from those services to the classroom
- consulting parents on, and publicising the SRE programmes and the SRE policy
- consulting teachers and support staff on reviewing and developing the school's SRE policy
- ensuring that external contributors are fully aware of the school's values and ethos and respect this in their work with pupils and staff
- ensuring that practice is monitored and learning assessed

Further information about the school SRE Coordinator role is referenced throughout this section and especially in relation to the subject evaluation and development cycle (3.9).

#### **3.4.2. Non-teaching staff**

The role of teachers in leading classroom learning is often complemented by input from teaching assistants, learning mentors and other support-staff. Because support-staff often get to know some pupils well they are well placed

to provide additional support to individuals and small groups and to help personalise learning.

Teaching assistants can be invaluable when using a group work or interactive approach in the classroom, supporting small groups, or being prepared to model a role play with a teacher. Individual pupils may need additional support with some aspects of the SRE curriculum, for example a student with Asperger's syndrome who is academically able but struggling with making relationships.

Support staff may find they are asked to teach a whole session of SRE with an individual they support and some staff may develop a particular interest in SRE. It is important that relevant support staff are offered training, either through the national PSHE CPD programme or other local SRE training. Trained support staff may run small group SRE sessions outside of full class teaching. This approach can enable pupils who were struggling to participate in the main group to engage more fully and for their individual needs to be met. Further information about targeted SRE provision are covered in section 4.3. **Non-teaching staff have an invaluable role in supporting delivery of SRE but should not be used as a substitute for teachers.**

Professionals working with a school such as school nurses, youth workers, Connexions personal advisors and sexual health professionals have particular areas of expertise that complement the SRE curriculum either through classroom input or targeted SRE work with small groups of pupils. For example, SRE is a good opportunity for school nurses to meet students to talk about how they can access individual confidential advice and support when needed.

Any non-teaching professionals should have accessed training on SRE, for example through the PSHE CPD programme, which is open to school nurses.

#### **Case-study: empowering teachers to deliver SRE**

Over a number of years The Hayes primary school has built up the confidence of teachers to deliver SRE. Formerly SRE was delivered in Year 6 by the school nurse and was focused on puberty. More recently teachers have delivered sessions themselves and SRE is being planned into the curriculum for all years, closely linked to the National Healthy Schools programme and Primary SEAL.

The Head teacher at the school says: 'Our present position on delivering SRE has been agreed in consultation with Parents, Governors, children, authority officers and staff. It is on this firm foundation that we are now delivering a



relevant and exciting programme of SRE'.

### **3.5 Designing the curriculum/schemes of work**

Schools have the flexibility to decide how to organise SRE teaching within their curriculum design and timetabling. Some schools and local authorities have chosen their own subject names for SRE such as 'relationships and sexuality education' or wider subject headings such as 'life skills education' or 'social education'. The coordinator for SRE, together with colleagues then needs to prepare schemes of work for SRE that show how the requirements for SRE within PSHE education and in the National Curriculum are covered.

A well-structured curriculum design and schemes of work for SRE ensures that:

- There are some units of work focused on SRE for each year
- Earlier learning is built on and there is progression year-on-year
- Topics are introduced in a logical order
- Development of personal and social skills, values and attitudes are included as well as knowledge and understanding
- There is discrete time for SRE and adequate allocation for PSHE education in the timetable
- Links with other curriculum subjects can be anticipated and used to enrich learning
- Learning outcomes are documented
- Opportunities for assessment of learning are built in
- Links are made with health services in the schools and in the wider community

## **Case-studies – providing context for SRE through developmental learning and creative themes - primary**

### **1. Using creative themes**

Creative themes are used to enrich learning at Kingsholm Church of England Primary School in Gloucestershire. One such theme is 'fit for life' which is science-focused and runs for a whole term with one week focused on SRE. During this week pupils make a fact-book about the facts of life. The creative theme gives children a context for learning; as well as learning about growing up and reproduction there is also work on exercise and why it is good for you, the function of lungs and the liver. All the SRE at the school is taught by teachers, with learning mentors providing additional support for children with emotional and friendship difficulties. In addition to theme work there is discrete time for PSHE education of one hour per week.

### **2. Integrating SRE topics within the key concepts of PSHE**

HIV is covered as part of learning about stereotyping in Year 6 within the new Scheme of Work for primary school SRE in Croydon. First there is a general lesson on stereotyping. The second lesson looks at 'what is HIV' – using a 'draw and write' activity. The lesson progresses to look at HIV stigma and challenging stereotypes. This learning focuses on stereotyping and how to look beyond stereotypes and HIV provides important content to illustrate this.

### **3. Spiral curriculum for primary SRE**

The PSHE Advisory Service in Kent has developed a spiral curriculum for SRE as part of PSHE education. The curriculum is designed around the six SEAL themes: 'new beginnings', 'getting on and falling out', 'good to be me', 'relationships', 'changes' and 'going for goals'. There is some learning linked to each theme built into the curriculum for years 1 –6, ensuring fluid progression.

### **4. Cross-curricular links with English at Key Stage 4**

The PSHE Service in Cambridgeshire has developed a unit of work for SRE that can be taught within the English Programme at Key Stage 4. The work is based on Nick Hornby's novel for teenagers, 'Slam'. As well as exploring the key characters in the story discussion broadens out to explore pressures on young people to have sex and the influence of the media. Learning outcomes include:

- Be able to identify a variety of coping strategies and developed greater confidence in using their own personal strategies
- Be able to suggest a number of reasons to explain people's

response to unplanned pregnancy

- Be able to explain what makes advice helpful
- Have identified their hopes for the future
- Be able to explain how relationships go through different stages and some of the factors which can place pressure on a relationship
- Be able to empathise with different people in a situation

### **3.6 Content**

SRE is not currently a separate National Curriculum subject in its own right, although the Government has included provisions within the Children, Schools and Families Bill to make PSHE education a statutory subject within the National Curriculum (see para 1.6 above). Currently, its content is included in: the statutory programmes of study for Science (key stages 1-4); the non-statutory framework for PSHE education and Citizenship (key stages 1&2); and the non-statutory programmes of study for personal well-being (key stages 3&4). Setting SRE within a framework for PSHE education helps children and young people develop a rich understanding of five key concepts,



which underpin the personal well-being strand of PSHE education at Key Stages 3 and 4

(<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/pshe/index.aspx?return=/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/index.aspx>.)  
Schools may wish to brigade SRE content under the five key concepts, as follows:

- Personal identities
- Healthy lifestyles
- Risk
- Relationships
- Diversity

As already noted, these messages can be reinforced through links to other subjects across the curriculum.

It is important that SRE is clearly visible and identified within PSHE education or the primary areas of learning. Schools need to identify the discrete elements of SRE within their PSHE education curriculum. The relevant content from these statutory and non-statutory programmes of study are set out in the table below, along with suggestions on the issues and questions schools could explore within SRE in each key stage.

The list of questions is not exhaustive but are designed to provide a framework in which pupils can develop their knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding about SRE and appreciate the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, relating this to their own and others' actions. It is important that children and young people are involved in assessing, reviewing and shaping SRE provision. This is key to ensuring a curriculum that is relevant and inclusive to all.

*"I had a very good teacher who let the class prioritise what we felt we needed to learn about"* Young person

Key Stage 1 – Sex and Relationships Education in the Curriculum		
PSHE: Non-statutory Framework (NC, 1999)	Science: Statutory Programme of study: (NC, 1999)	Questions to help pupils to explore SRE within the national curriculum
<p>Pupils should be taught:</p> <p>Developing a healthy, safer lifestyle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About the process of growing from young to old and how people's needs change</li> <li>The names of the main parts of the body</li> <li>Rules for, and ways of, keeping safe...and about people who can help them to stay safe</li> </ul> <p>Developing good relationships and respecting the differences between people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To recognise how their behaviour affects other people</li> </ul>	<p>Pupils should be taught:</p> <p>Life processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That animals, including humans, move, feed, grow, use their senses and reproduce</li> </ul> <p>Humans and other animals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To recognize and compare the main external parts of the bodies of humans and other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the differences between girls and boys' bodies?</li> <li>What are the correct words for the external parts of our bodies ?</li> <li>Where do babies come from?</li> <li>How much have I changed since I was a baby?</li> <li>How do I feel about these changes?</li> <li>What do I understand about keeping secrets?</li> <li>Who can I tell if I have a secret or worry?</li> <li>What is the difference between good touch and bad</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To listen to other people, and play and work cooperatively</li> <li>• To identify and respect the differences and similarities between people</li> <li>• That families and friends should care for each other</li> <li>• That there are different types of teasing and bullying, that bullying is wrong, and how to get help to deal with bullying</li> </ul>	<p>animals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That humans and other animals can produce offspring and that these offspring grow into adults</li> </ul>	<p>touch?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can I be a good friend?</li> <li>• How do I like to be treated by people I know including friends and family?</li> <li>• How am I different and similar to other people?</li> </ul>
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<b>Key Stage 2 – Sex and Relationships Education in the Curriculum</b>		
PSHE: Non-statutory Framework (NC, 1999)	Science: Statutory Programme of study: (NC, 1999)	Questions to help pupils to explore SRE within the national curriculum
<p>Pupils should be taught:</p> <p>Developing confidence and responsibility and making the most of their abilities</p>	<p>Pupils should be taught:</p> <p>Life processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That the life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do I feel about physical and emotional changes at puberty?</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To recognise as they approach puberty, how people's emotions change at that time and how to deal with their feelings towards themselves, their family and others in a positive way</li> </ul>	<p>processes common to humans and other animals include nutrition, movement, growth and reproduction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What skills do I need to cope with my feelings such as mood swings?</li> <li>• How do boys and girls' bodies change during puberty?</li> <li>• What is the normal variation in our bodies – before and after puberty?</li> </ul>
<p>Developing a healthy, safer lifestyle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About how the body changes as they approach puberty</li> <li>• To recognise the different risks in different situations and then decide how to behave responsibly, including...judging what kind of physical contact is acceptable and unacceptable</li> <li>• That pressure to behave in an unacceptable or risky way can come from a variety of sources, including people they know, and how to ask for help and use basic techniques for resisting pressure to do wrong</li> </ul>	<p>Humans and other animals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About the main stages of the human lifecycle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does puberty vary for each individual, including differences in age puberty starts and how puberty can be affected by disability or a medical condition?</li> <li>• How is puberty part of my sexual development (including production of eggs/sperm)?</li> <li>• How does the sperm and egg meet during sexual intercourse and can conception be prevented?</li> </ul>
<p>Developing good relationships and respecting the differences between people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That their actions affect themselves and others, to care about other people's feelings and to try to</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do I understand about the different ways in which people are able to show love between parents/carers and children and between friends?</li> </ul>

<p>see things from their point of view</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be aware of different types of relationship, including marriage and those between friends and families, and to develop the skills to be effective in relationships</li> <li>• To recognise and challenge stereotypes</li> <li>• That differences and similarities between people arise from a number of factors, including cultural, ethnic, racial and religious diversity, gender and disability</li> <li>• Where individuals, families and groups can get help and support</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some of the ways that people behave in a loving and happy relationship?</li> <li>• What kinds of abuse could happen in relationships, including hurting feelings and violence?</li> <li>• Are there different expectations about how girls and boys behave in relationships and what other choices do they have?</li> <li>• What is sexist bullying and homophobic bullying and what skills do I need to do something about it?</li> <li>• Who can I talk to if I am unhappy or worried?</li> </ul>
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<b>Key Stage 3 – Sex and Relationships Education in the Curriculum</b>		
PSHE: Non-statutory Programme of study: Personal Wellbeing (QCA 2007)	Science: Statutory Programme of study: (QCA 2007)	Questions to help pupils to explore SRE within the national curriculum
The range and content that teachers should draw on when	Range and content should include:	

<p>teaching the key concepts and processes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• examples of diverse values encountered in society and the clarification of personal values (a)</li> <li>• physical and emotional change and puberty (c)</li> <li>• sexual activity, human reproduction, contraception, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections and HIV and how high-risk behaviours affect the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities (d)</li> <li>• the features of positive and stable relationships, how to deal with a breakdown in a relationship and the effects of loss and bereavement (i)</li> <li>• different types of</li> </ul>	<p>Organisms, behaviour and health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The human reproductive cycle includes adolescence, fertilisation and foetal development</li> <li>• Conception, growth, development, behaviour and health can be affected by diet, drugs and disease</li> </ul> <p>The curriculum should provide opportunities for pupils to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how knowledge and understanding of science informs personal and collective decisions, including those on substance abuse and sexual health</li> </ul> <p>Explanatory notes:</p> <p><b>Sexual health:</b> includes issues related to contraception, pregnancy and disease</p> <p><b>Diet, drugs and disease:</b> This includes...the effect of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is normal physical development during adolescence and what is a positive body image?</li> <li>• What is sexual attraction and sexual orientation and how does it vary between people?</li> <li>• How do friends, culture, faith and family influence beliefs and attitudes to sex and relationships?</li> <li>• How may our relationships with peers and family change during adolescence?</li> <li>• How do I feel about these changing relationships?</li> <li>• What skills do I need to cope with this?</li> <li>• What messages about our bodies, sex and relationships does the media present and how is this different to reality?</li> <li>• How does this make me feel?</li> <li>• What is my attitude to positive body image, how does this vary for men/women/disabled people, and how are my views affected by peers, family, community and the media?</li> <li>• What affects our self-esteem – and how</li> </ul>
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<p>relationships, including those within families and between older and young people, boys and girls, and people of the same sex, including civil partnerships (j)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the nature and importance of marriage and of stable relationships for family life and bringing up children (k)</li> </ul>	<p>drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and cannabis on mental and physical health. It also includes the effects of bacteria and viruses, such as those associated with sexually transmitted infections.</p>	<p>does self-esteem affect our emotional health and relationships with others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What factors makes a loving and happy relationship?</li> <li>What factors can make relationships unhappy?</li> <li>What is equality in relationships and what are the characteristics of unequal relationships?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the similarities, differences and diversity among people of different race, culture, ability, disability, gender, age and sexual orientation and the impact of prejudice, bullying, discrimination and racism on individuals and communities (m)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the value of stable relationships and how are people affected by separation and loss?</li> <li>What are the different ways of expressing sexual intimacy, and what are the associated risks of STIs and pregnancy?</li> <li>What is the law on consent to sexual activity?</li> <li>What do I understand about consent in relationships?</li> <li>What skills and attitudes do I need to develop in relationship to it?</li> <li>How do I assess risk in sex and relationships?</li> <li>What are some of the influences on our choices about sex and relationships and</li> </ul>

		<p>how can I deal with peer pressure?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do males/females behave differently in relationships and what other choices do they have?</li> <li>• How does alcohol and drugs affect sexual behaviour?</li> <li>• What are sexually transmitted infections, how are they transmitted, treated, tested and prevented (including condoms)?</li> <li>• What is the role of hormones in the menstrual cycle and how does fertility change with age?</li> <li>• How do women get pregnant and what sexual activities can / cannot lead to conception?</li> <li>• What choices does a woman have if she gets pregnant, including keeping the baby, abortion and adoption?</li> <li>• What are the different types of contraception including emergency contraception and how are these used?</li> <li>• How can I talk to my parents or a trusted adult if I need help and advice?</li> <li>• What can I expect from contraception and sexual health</li> </ul>
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		services and where and when are these services available?
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<b>Key Stage 4 – Sex and Relationships Education in the Curriculum</b>		
PSHE: Non-statutory Programme of study: Personal Wellbeing (QCA 2007)	Science: Statutory Programme of study: (QCA 2007)	Questions to help pupils to explore SRE within the national curriculum
<p>The range and content that teachers should draw on when teaching the key concepts and processes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the effect of diverse and conflicting values on individuals, families and communities and ways of responding to them (a)</li> <li>how the media portrays young people, body image and health issues (b)</li> <li>the benefits and risks of health and lifestyle choices, including choices relating to sexual activity and substance use and misuse, and the short and long-term consequences for the health and mental and emotional wellbeing of individuals, families and</li> </ul>	<p>Pupils should be taught:</p> <p>Organisms and health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human health is affected by a range of environmental and inherited factors, by the use of misuse of drugs and medical treatments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can conflict arise in relationships with my peers, family and others and how can I deal with it?</li> <li>What are my relationships values?</li> <li>How can good communication lead to more understanding and fulfilling relationships?</li> <li>What are some of the sources of power in relationships including financial, emotional, age and gender and what are the options in relationships where power is unequal?</li> <li>How skills do I need to resist pressure to do things I don't want to do - from peers and in a</li> </ul>



<p>communities (d)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where and how to obtain health information, how to recognise and follow health and safety procedures, ways of reducing risk and minimising harm in risky situations, how to find sources of emergency help and how to use basic and emergency first aid (e)</li> <li>• characteristics of positive relationships, and awareness of exploitation in relationships and of statutory and voluntary organisations that support relationships in crisis (f)</li> <li>• parenting skills and qualities and their central importance to family life (h)</li> <li>• the impact of separation, divorce and bereavement on families and the need to adapt to changing circumstances (i)</li> <li>• the diversity of ethnic and cultural groups, the power of prejudice, bullying, discrimination and racism, and the need to take the initiative in challenging this and other offensive behaviours and in giving support to</li> </ul>		<p>sexual relationship?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can I do to retain control in risky situations?</li> <li>• How can I cope with strong feelings such as anger, sadness, desire and love?</li> <li>• What are the features of different methods of contraception and what protection do they offer in terms of STIs and pregnancy?</li> <li>• Is responsibility for contraception and protection shared in relationships and how can responsibility be negotiated?</li> <li>• How do alcohol and drugs affect sexual decision-making and what strategies can reduce the risks?</li> <li>• What are the responsibilities of being a parent and what skills do I need?</li> <li>• How can I contribute to challenging bullying, homophobia, sexism and discrimination?</li> <li>• What are some of the social and personal impacts of having an STI, for example HIV, and how can social stigma be challenged?</li> </ul>
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victims of abuse. (j)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is my attitude to the way in which the media present sex and relationships and how is reality distorted, for example in pornography?</li> <li>• What sexual and reproductive rights do I have as a young person (including rights relating to information, healthcare, confidentiality and the law)?</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can I talk to my parents or a trusted adult if I need help or advice?</li> <li>• What is the full range of services, help and information available to me including local contraception and sexual health services, counselling, pharmacists, GPs, drop-in services for young people, telephone help-lines and internet sites?</li> <li>• Am I confident enough to access help and support?</li> </ul>

**\*It should be noted that the elements of SRE included in the Science curriculum have been statutory since 1996 and parents do not have a right to withdraw their children from this.**

### **3.7 Teaching methods**

This section looks at some practical techniques that are particularly useful for teaching SRE.

Schools have an important role in helping children and young people develop the vocabulary and confidence to talk, listen to others and think critically about sex and relationships. There are a number of teaching strategies that can help this, including:

- establishing and maintaining ground rules to create a safe learning environment.
- responding to / being conscious of pupils' existing knowledge and experience
- using 'distancing' techniques;
- using interactive learning methods that support participation and encourage reflection

#### ***Ground rules***

SRE in school must offer a safe learning environment, which supports the participation of all pupils. Establishing ground rules will help both pupils and teachers to have a clear understanding of personal boundaries. Ground rules can be developed as part of the school's sex and relationships education policy or individually with each class or year group. It is essential to include a rule that no personal questions are asked of or comments made about pupils or staff. This helps to prevent unintended disclosures about personal experience. The classroom is not a confidential environment; the teacher is unable to maintain this if a safeguarding disclosure is made. But teachers should ensure that pupils are aware of where they can go if they need to discuss a personal matter.



### **Case-study: example of class ground rules for SRE**

- we will treat each other with respect
- we will listen to each other
- we will not laugh or make fun of each others questions
- we will not talk about personal issues and not ask personal questions or make personal comments
- we will use proper words for body parts and sexual activity

Making ground rules is a useful way of setting the scene for SRE as it acknowledges the personal nature of the topic and helps overcome the anxiety that some people may feel. The teacher should consistently maintain the ground rules and can refer back to the ground rules during the lesson if needed.

### ***Existing knowledge***

Pupils' existing knowledge needs to be the starting point for all SRE work. They learn both negative and positive information from current slang, story-lines in TV soaps and films, and the real-lives of their peers, families and communities which must be acknowledged, validated and in some cases corrected sensitively. For example:

- scenarios, cartoons and role-plays can be 'written' by children and young people enabling them to bring their experience and ideas to bear on the story-line and dialogue
- values continuums enable pupils to share their views, listen to the views of their peers and modify their views and help them develop a strong sense of their own values.

Children and young people can be wary of differences in knowledge levels between themselves and their peers. Research has shown that girls can sometimes be reluctant to appear knowledgeable about sex and relationships whereas boys are sometimes anxious about gaps in their knowledge being exposed. Care should be taken that teaching methods do not unnecessarily expose or make judgements about knowledge levels.

Techniques such as question boxes make it possible for pupils to ask questions they may not be prepared to voice in class because of fears of asking a 'silly question'. Looking at the collection of questions submitted by the class will help assess learner needs and inform planning for future lessons. Be careful that other pupils do not recognise handwriting.

Young people have also said that the best SRE is made relevant to real-life. Despite distorted and inaccurate messages of sex and relationships and gender roles, the media can also offer children and young people access to useful information. SRE in school provides a safe environment to explore the difference between fictional and factual information and to challenge stereotypes. With guidance, pupils can learn to use the media as a tool to support learning and find out about relevant agencies and health services that can help them with specific concerns now and in the future.

**Sample lesson activity: Messages from the media**

Put class into 6 single gender groups (if possible). Give a piece of flipchart to each group with one of the following headings:- Magazines, TV dramas/soap operas

Give each category to a group of boys and a group of girls. Ask groups to discuss the following points:-

How are men portrayed? What are they expected to look like? Act like?

How are women portrayed? What are they expected to look like? Act like?

How realistic are these portrayals?

What pressures do these put on young people re looks/behaviour?

Discuss points as a whole class highlighting different responses from the gendered groups.

**From the 'Love Life' resource produced by the East Sussex Schools Healthy Schools Team for Key Stage 4**

***Distancing techniques***

Providing anonymous question boxes ("Ask-it" Baskets) are a useful method to de-personalise discussion. Scenarios, stories, cartoons, puppets and role-plays are also useful 'distancing' techniques as they focus on the lives and choices of fictional characters. Pupils can be asked to take an 'agony aunt/uncle' role and advice characters on what to do. Using a range of distancing techniques helps to support participation and to maintain a safe learning environment.

Teachers also need to be aware of the power of drama and that some pupils may interpret fiction literally. Containment techniques such as an acting circle marked by a line or rope and time spent coming out of role can help ensure pupils have understood what is fictional and what is not.

### ***Participatory techniques***

Teaching methods that are effective in building on pupils' existing knowledge, developing skills and ensuring participation through 'distancing' techniques are also likely to be interactive. Research has shown that SRE that uses active learning and focuses on developing skills and exploring attitudes has more impact on the behaviour of young people than knowledge focused learning (Trivedi et al, 2007, ref 12 in review report). Children and young people also say that active learning is more enjoyable. A range of techniques can promote positive interaction between teachers, pupils and the wider community, for example:

- using open questioning which facilitates discussion for instance *"can you tell us more about your belief that all young people are having sex"*. Closed questions shut down conversation for instance *"are you saying that you believe all young people are having sex"*. Equally judgemental questions can feel frightening and intimidating for instance *"why are all the young people you know having sex"*
- using pair work and small group work followed by sharing feedback
- mixing up pairs and groups so that pupils become comfortable communicating with a wider range of peers
- activities that require movement around the classroom
- setting homework tasks that encourage pupils to talk to their parents, carers and relatives
- inviting a visitor and preparing questions in advance that pupils use to interview them

*"plays and humour made SRE more enjoyable rather than a lecture"* Young person



Active learning also needs time for personal reflection but is most effective when pupils are working in pairs or groups. In addition, young people benefit most from structured activities that provide opportunity for a full process of reflection as follows:

- drawing on previous knowledge to develop more understanding;
- practising their social and personal skills;
- considering their beliefs and attitudes about different topics;
- reflecting on their new learning; and
- planning and shaping future action [from 2000 guidance].

Trying out a range of methods and reflecting in consultation with learners on what worked well and what did not helps teachers to develop a repertoire of effective techniques that meet the needs of their pupils. Reflection can also contribute to assessment.

Reflecting is crucial for learning as it encourages pupils to consolidate what they have learned and to form new understanding, skills and attitudes. It also helps teachers to monitor what is being learnt and to reflect on their own practice. Teachers can help pupils reflect on their learning by asking questions like these:

- What did you like and learn from the discussion today?
- What did you learn from the others, especially those who had a different experience or belief from your own?
- What do you think you will be able to do as a result of this discussion?
- What else do you think you need to think or learn about? [from 2000 guidance].

Reflection can be difficult for pupils with SEN and simplifying questions for them would be helpful. Pupils' responses could be given as part of an interview, or with a learning support assistant writing down their feedback if literacy is an issue.

Teachers who are unfamiliar with interactive teaching methods will benefit from accessing further training or working with a colleague who can demonstrate these methods in action.

### ***Meeting individual pupil needs***

The SRE curriculum needs to have flexibility to address the specific needs of the pupils in any group e.g. with a group of pupils with physical disabilities, questions may be asked about body image given the lack of positive images of young people with disabilities in the media, and how people can have sex comfortably if one or both partners have complex physical disabilities.

All SRE materials should be inclusive and show positive images of children and young people and encourage safe, rewarding, responsible relationships. Appropriate teaching materials need to be selected to respond to the needs of the group. Materials for pupils with learning difficulties may need to be clear and more explicit than those generally in use with mainstream pupils. They may for instance need to show step by step the process of changing a sanitary pad, or a cartoon DVD about hygiene, showing intimate body parts.

#### **Case-study: KS4 lesson activity about body image**

A year 10 SRE lesson on 'body image' at 'B' Grammar School in Kent includes an activity looking at popular images of women and men and is run in single sex groups. The worksheet on women includes images of women who have been successful in modelling, entertainment, politics and the arts including Pamela Anderson, Cherie Blair, Maya Angelou and a sculpture of the physically disabled artist Alison Lapper. The worksheet on men includes 'Marlboro Man' adverts from the US, Will Smith, Benjamin Zephaniah, Stephen Hawking, and current TV and music stars to explore issues with being male.

Pupils are asked:

- Who are these women / men
- Why are they famous
- Discuss and list descriptive words to express your responses to these images of women / men

The activity provides opportunities to respond to images in the media, to identify positive role models, explore gender roles, understand stereotyping and value difference. Bringing the groups of boys and girls back together for a final session would complement this work, enabling girls and boys to share their discussions about body image with each other in a supportive environment.

Within a class pupils will have differing levels of ability and maturity. Teachers should respond to children's questions at their level. Probing for further ideas

from a pupil can help the teacher establish their level of existing knowledge and understanding.

*“The repetition every year, with a little bit more added. This made sure we really understood”*

Young person

Sometimes individual pupils will ask questions and raise issues that are much more advanced than their peers. In this case the teacher can defer the question so that it can be answered in a small group or one to one. If the question raises cause for concern about safeguarding the teacher should discuss this with the school child protection officer in confidence to agree next steps.

Classroom support from teaching assistants and learning mentors helps ensure that the needs of individual children and young people can be met. Further information is provided in Section 4.2 about targeted small group work and one to one support for pupils with additional needs.

### **3.8 Assessment methods**

The elements of SRE that form part of the science curriculum at Key Stages 1 to 4 must be assessed in accordance with the requirements of the National Curriculum. The learning from the other elements of SRE should be assessed as part of the overall PSHE education provision.

Assessment of Learning (AfL) in SRE is an important tool for keeping track of pupil progress and checking that learning objectives have been met. Assessment of SRE, as part of PSHE education, should be organised in a similar format to other subjects. More details on Assessment for Learning (AfL) can be found at: <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/4334.aspx> and about assessment in general and on Assessing Pupils Progress (APP) at: <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/13581.aspx>

Assessment has previously been identified by Ofsted as a weakness in SRE (Ofsted, 2007, Time for Change). This can be addressed by building in assessment opportunities when planning the SRE curriculum. Information about assessment should be included in the SRE policy and cross-referenced in any school policies about assessment.



Assessment should be made against clear learning outcomes which should be communicated to learners and end of key stage statements (see [http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/pshe/End-of-key-stage-statements/Copy\\_of\\_index.aspx?return=/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/pshe/personal-wellbeing/keystage3/index.aspx%3Freturn%3D/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/pshe/personal-wellbeing/index.aspx%253Freturn%253D/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/pshe/index.aspx](http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/pshe/End-of-key-stage-statements/Copy_of_index.aspx?return=/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/pshe/personal-wellbeing/keystage3/index.aspx%3Freturn%3D/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/pshe/personal-wellbeing/index.aspx%253Freturn%253D/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/pshe/index.aspx)). There is no statutory requirement for SRE or PSHE education to be assessed through attainment targets.

In SRE, assessment must measure progress in knowledge and understanding, skills and attitudinal development. The three 'key processes' that are central to PSHE education provide a framework to ensure that assessment covers the full scope of learning, these are:

- Critical reflection
- Decision-making and managing risk
- Developing relationships and working with others

(QCDA, Programmes of study for PSHE: Personal wellbeing)

Teachers need to be confident to use appropriate techniques for assessing SRE. It is generally easier to measure progress in knowledge, for example through tests and quizzes. More creative techniques are appropriate to measure progress in skills, for example:

- personal reflection diaries and 'draw and write' activities
- photographs and recordings of an event, talk, presentation or performance
- observations of group work, role play and discussions
- repeating a values continuum or a prioritisation activity after a period of time and noting changes
- pupils doing their own research and presenting it to the class

Assessment methods need to respond to the age and ability of learners. Pupils with limited language may require tailored methods to assess their learning, for example visual prompts.

The QCDA encourages teachers to identify a range of people who can be 'assessment partners' so that assessment can be carried out by pupils themselves, peer-to-peer and by teachers and other adults.

It is essential that the learning outcomes are explained so that pupils are involved in the assessment process so that they know what they are aiming for and are motivated. At the beginning of each lesson teachers can share learning goals with the group. Giving pupils a role in giving feedback to each other has the added benefit of developing pupils' inter-personal skills. All assessment partners need to be aware that feedback is about identifying strengths and weaknesses and not about judging the personality or worth of an individual.

Progress in SRE can be recorded using materials such as progress files and portfolios. This record then provides the basis for feedback on progress, which should be given to pupils and their parents or carers. As with other subjects, schools will decide how to report back to parents and carers, for example through annual statements and parents evenings. Schools may also consider end of year assessment tests. There are also accreditation systems such as ASDAN awards.

Sharing and celebrating achievement in SRE also has an important role in enabling pupils to communicate with their peers and other adults about their learning. Opportunities to take part in assemblies, create displays and perform dramas help children and young people to be able to talk, listen and reflect critically on sex and relationships.

### **3.9 Subject evaluation and development cycle**

Every school should be providing SRE of a quality that meets the needs of all children and young people. We know that the quality of provision in some schools remains inadequate. But in many schools investment in teacher training and more open dialogue with children, young people and their parents and carers is creating real improvements.

Although the starting point in each school will vary, evaluation of SRE provision needs to be an ongoing process. Over time, the needs of children and young people and the dynamics of their communities will change. New staff will also be involved in teaching and coordinating.

Internal evaluation will be a key function of the SRE Coordinator and should be supported by a senior manager. Internal evaluation should include:

- Teaching observations and discussions with teachers delivering SRE
- The views of staff in a pastoral role and working one to one with pupils including health professionals such as school nurses and learning

mentors. (Pupils may have sought one to one help prompted by an SRE lesson and such staff can help to establish if SRE is meeting pupils' needs). Relevant information can be fed back anonymously to protect confidentiality to enable further development of policy and curriculum meets need

- Consultation with children and young people including through focus groups, surveys and the school council
- Feedback from parents and carers
- Feedback from the local authority who may be able to provide a 'benchmark' through comparison with provision in other local schools

Findings from evaluation can be documented as part of annual curriculum reports, in the school Self Evaluation Form and School Improvement Plan and as part of evidence for the Healthy School Programme. Sharing feedback from evaluation findings and actions being taken forward with people who have been consulted is an important part of the process.

### 3.9.1 Involving children and young people in subject improvement

The views of children and young people are key to assessing if SRE is meeting their needs. The views of pupils are now a central part of Ofsted's schools inspection framework. For schools to meet the criteria for the National Healthy Schools Programme they must be able to demonstrate what has changed as a result of listening to the views of children and young people.

Methods for involving children and young people in subject evaluation have much in common with effective teaching methods for SRE. Evaluation with whole classes can be combined with more in-depth evaluation with smaller groups – which can reveal differences in pupils' satisfaction with SRE. Surveys have shown that young people identifying as LGBT and with physical disabilities rate their SRE as worse than average (SEF, 2008).

A curriculum resource pack is available to enable schools to deliver the Tellus survey as part of PSHE education and Citizenship lessons to develop children and young people's sense of empowerment. The post survey sessions encourage pupils to analyse their own schools data to identify the issues that affect their school, themselves and their peers. It encourages them to look at the positive findings as well as exploring the options they have to try and influence others and bring about change. More information about Tellus can be found at Tellus4 portal **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** which has been designed to support all aspects of the Tellus survey.



Evaluation in the classroom can use a range of techniques, appropriate to the age and maturity of pupils, including:

- Discussion through circle time
- Draw and write activities
- 'Diamond 9' style activities to help pupils prioritise what they think they should be learning
- Questionnaires
- Anonymous comment boxes

Visual prompts may help pupils with learning difficulties to indicate their needs and wants. For example, they can sort pictures on topic cards into priority piles.

Structures such as the school council, year group representatives and peer education groups provide opportunities for more in-depth evaluation outside the classroom. However, to ensure that SRE is meeting the needs of all children and young people it is important to consult with a wide range of pupils including those who have not volunteered for leadership roles within the school. Approaches that have been successful include:

- Focus group interviews in single sex groups or friendship pairs/groups
- Workshops with randomly selected small groups of pupils led by external facilitators or non-teaching staff

It is important that pupils are assured of the confidentiality of their responses and that a safe environment is created for evaluation. Parental consent should also be sought for more targeted in-depth consultation.

The Sex Education Forum has produced a toolkit: 'Are you getting it right' for consulting young people on SRE at Key Stages 3 and 4, which is available at: <http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources.aspx>)

### **Case-study: Review of SRE at Key Stage 4**

Young people's views were central to a review into SRE provision at key stage 4 in East Sussex. Focus group interviews were held with over 100 Year 11 students from 15 schools -12 in East Sussex and 3 from Brighton and Hove. Students were asked about what had been covered in SRE, the key messages they took away, the methods of teaching, and what else they would have liked to learn.

The majority of students wanted their SRE lessons to be delivered by well-trained, confident teachers and enriched by visitors from relevant agencies. Students welcomed positive key messages through their SRE lessons, especially on the positive side of sexual relationships, being ready for sex and resisting pressure.

Information from teachers was combined with findings from young people and showed differences between schools in terms of levels of staff training and the quality of evaluation and assessment. Each participating school agreed an action plan with steps to improve the delivery of SRE in line with the findings from their students and staff.

As a result East Sussex developed a resource for Key Stage 4 called 'Love Life' which responds to the identified needs of students and includes lesson plans on positive themes such as 'qualities of a good relationship' and 'positive sexual relationships' as well as looking at sexual and gender based stereotyping, pressure, risk taking, pregnancy and parenting. Both local authorities continue to provide support for schools to further improve the quality of SRE teaching at Key Stage 4.

### **3.9.2 External evaluation**

Under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, schools are required to be inspected at prescribed intervals. Amongst other things, inspectors must report on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils at the school, and the contribution made by the school to the well-being of those pupils.

This will include taking account of different groups of pupils':

- understanding of sexual health risks and the factors which may lead to mental or emotional difficulties, such as peer pressure and work/life balance, and:

- responses to personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and other aspects of the curriculum.

School level indicators are being developed to help assess how well a school is contributing to its pupils' wellbeing from September 2009. In the context of this guidance the indicators will help investigate how well schools give good guidance on sexual health. In the interim schools participating in Tellus will be able to use their Tellus data to assess their pupils' views on how they might be doing to promote their wellbeing and share this information with Ofsted when being inspected.

The new school Report Card, to be introduced from 2011, will provide the DCSF with key statements on the outcomes we expect from schools, and the balance of priorities between them, ensuring more intelligent accountability across schools' full range of responsibilities. It will report on outcomes across the breadth of school performance; pupils attainment, progress, and wellbeing; a school's success in reducing the impact of disadvantage; and parents' and pupils' views of the school and the support they are receiving.

### **3.10 Wider community engagement with SRE to meet the localised needs of children and young people**

The knowledge, values and experience held in the communities in which children and young people live their lives are a rich resource that can contribute to SRE. Building partnerships with community organisations and professionals working across the community will also support community cohesion. Parents and carers are part of the local community, as well as faith and cultural leaders, voluntary and community organisations, health services and other specialised professionals.

Knowledge of the local community and needs assessment carried out with pupils will identify particular local issues relevant to SRE, such as high incidence of HIV, teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. In communities with cases of forced marriage and female genital mutilation schools will want to work with parents, carers and the community so that the legal and social dimensions of these practices can be addressed effectively in SRE.

Equally, there may be positive assets such as specialised voluntary sector organisations and cultural groups within the community who can offer expertise. Such agencies can contribute to SRE by training local teachers so that they can develop a curriculum that better meets local needs. They may



also offer to work directly with pupils. Visitor input can enrich SRE when well managed and integrated within the curriculum.

Children and young people have said that discussing the faith and values perspectives of their families and communities openly and positively is important to them and they want this to be part of SRE. A skilled teacher will be able to plan activities that are relevant to real-life and draw on the cultural life of the local community. Local authorities should ensure that SRE training provided locally for teachers and governors reflects issues that are of concern to the local community.

### **Case-study: Meeting the needs of children and young people in a multi-faith setting**

The Change for Children team in the London Borough of Waltham Forest worked in partnership with the Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE) and local faith group members to produce a local values framework for SRE. A working party was formed which reflected the rich diversity of the community, including Buddhist, Church of England, Free Church, Hindu, Humanist, Islamic, Jewish, Methodist, Roman Catholic and Sikh representatives. Meetings involved full and frank dialogue, and wider consultation with faith groups continued until the framework took shape. The values framework was accepted by the SACRE and recommended for use in schools.

A vibrant and successful launch in the borough's assembly halls in November 2008, was attended by councillors, governors, head teachers, teachers, the Youth Service, health service and FE partners. Videos were shown including pupils from mainstream and special schools talking about their involvement in SRE, and working party members reading the values framework statements. They included powerful speeches by Muslim and Free Church SACRE members as well as local headteachers from the primary and secondary sector. All promoted the value of schools using the framework.

Waltham Forest was praised by Ofsted in their Joint Area Review Report for their 'Excellent

#### **3.10.1 Local services**

A key element to SRE is teaching children and young people how to assess risk, keep safe and how to get further information and help. A school's own ethos and religious beliefs will be a consideration when engaging with the increasing range of services that are based on the school-site but SRE should include details of how, when and where to use these services. This could take the form of a class or small group visit to look round the on-site facilities and meet staff such as school nurses and counsellors. Alternatively, service staff can contribute to the SRE lesson. Children and young people are often

nervous about seeking help and will benefit from creative approaches such as role-modelling a conversation with service staff.

Information about local services outside the school should also be included in SRE. As young people approach adult-hood they will be accessing health services independently for the first time. SRE supports young people to develop 'health literacy' so that they are aware of services such as pharmacies, doctors, NHS walk-in clinics, dedicated young people's services and GUM clinics. Visitors can play a valuable role as the 'face' of the service, helping to de-mystify what is actually involved in using health services. Partnerships with local service providers, agreed with the school, also help to keep teachers knowledge up-to-date.

#### **Case-study: mock visits to local services**

The Camden and Islington Sexual Health Education Team (SHET) have been running school visits to sexual health services for several years. Details are agreed with the school and typically involve a member of the school staff accompanying two students from each class across one year group (usually Year 10) on a visit a local sexual health service at a time when it is closed to the public. They are given a guided tour of the service including:

- Meeting a member of the clinic staff
- Doing a mock registration and learning about confidentiality
- Discovering what to expect from a consultation through role-play
- Looking at the range of contraception available
- Finding out how pregnancy tests and STI tests are done

When the students get back to school they make a short presentation to their class including photos of the clinic. This is supported by a visiting facilitator from the SHET team.

### **3.10.2 The role of visitors**

Working with visitors from the local community offers children and young people an opportunity to interact with a wider range of people and develop important personal and social skills. Teachers can help pupils prepare for the visit by planning questions they want to ask the visitor. Pupils may then take an active role in interviewing the visitor.

Some visitors may add value by sharing real-life experiences. This can be very compelling and can help pupils understand different viewpoints. Visitors and teachers should work together to establish boundaries about personal questions and to ensure that the visitor is adequately trained to handle classroom delivery. Visitors can also add value to SRE because of their expertise; such as a health professional, or a particular style of learning; such as creative arts and theatre in education.

All visitors to the classroom should work within the school's SRE policy. Schools should ensure that the contribution of visitors fits within the scheme of work for SRE and enhances learning. Responsibility for SRE lies with the school, and the input from a visitor should never be a substitute for a planned and coordinated school SRE curriculum.

Visitors with particular expertise can also support schools through teacher training, supporting the SRE coordinator with curriculum design and engaging parents.

Schools should liaise with Local Authorities and their local Healthy Schools Programme leads on the range of individuals and agencies who can support SRE programmes. Many have devised quality standards and protocols for the use of external contributors and provide training to those supporting schools to ensure quality and consistency. Schools are strongly encouraged to seek out this advice and support.

### **3.10.3 Peer education**

Peer education offers small groups of young people an opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills. Peer education programmes usually involve a formal process of training and support offered within school or by local agencies. It can also take place more informally, for example through students sharing a drama or presentation with their peers by visiting other classes, in assembly or as part of a public event.

For children and young people, the perceived views and experience of their peers can be a very powerful influence in their lives. Peer education can be used to promote positive communication between young people and help with strategies to resist negative peer pressure. Peer educators should always be given support and should complement, not replace the role of trained, specialised teachers of SRE.



## **1. Peer education cascades learning through drama**

Pupils in year 12 at Valley Park Community School in Kent developed a piece of theatre in education representing issues about teenage pregnancy to be delivered to YR 8 pupils in their cluster of schools. Each Yr 8 group was asked to present their own play representing the same issues. This work was undertaken under the leadership of the Year 12 actors. All were finally seen at the local Hazlitt Theatre where parents and pupils could see their work on stage.

The students began the project by focusing on sex and relationships education and the impact that it can have on young people's choices. Students developed this idea on how the choices young people make about sex and relationships can impact on their lives and spiral in many different directions. The students decided very early on when developing the drama that their key aim was that their message to students would be memorable.

A Year 12 student commented that "My experience of sex education is that it should be interesting and most importantly memorable. When it comes to students actually having to make real decisions about these issues in the real world their SRE experiences need to pop in to their heads and influence their choices".

## **2. Young parents help peers learn from real-life experience**

Families Matter is a charitable organisation supporting young parents and linked to YMCA Training. They have filmed a DVD locally, which portrays the reality of being a young parent in Croydon. Trained peer educators are invited to contribute to the targeted SRE programme run with small groups of young people in school and other settings. After watching the DVD pupils are invited to ask the young parents questions about their experiences. The peer educators have been trained on how to handle questions that are too personal.

## **3.11 The role of governors**

Governors have a vital role in schools in setting strategic direction, agreeing and monitoring policies, monitoring the overall running of the school and managing the budget. Governors also have a key role in ensuring that SRE is of a high quality and meets the needs of children, young people and the

communities the school serves. It is the responsibility of the school governors to ensure that the SRE policy is up-to-date and fit for purpose. Governors may also find it helpful to review the resources that are being used by the school to support its SRE programme.

Some governing bodies may choose to give one governor lead responsibility for SRE but aspects of SRE will be shared across the governing body when decisions are being made. To help guide the school in delivering SRE governors can ask questions such as:

- How does the school communicate with parents about SRE?
- How many pupils are withdrawn from SRE by their parents, why are they withdrawn and what kind of dialogue has the school had with parents?
- What can we as a school do to minimise withdrawal?
- How is the school supporting parents who have withdrawn to fulfil their responsibility in giving their child SRE at home?
- Are children and young people regularly consulted about SRE and have their views been taken into account?
- Is SRE meeting the needs of all pupils, for example girls as well as boys, LGBT young people and looked after children?
- Is there adequate time for SRE in the curriculum?
- What training have teachers had, is this adequate?
- How is SRE assessed?

Governors can be supported in their role by the provision of training on SRE by the local authority and also by having opportunities to network with each other, for example at annual governor conferences.

### **3.12 The role of senior management**

The Head-teacher and senior managers in a school have a key influence in shaping the school ethos. Effective leadership can create a culture of openness – which makes it easier for parents, teachers and pupils to communicate about SRE.

School-level leadership will be demonstrated through:

- Assigning the role of SRE coordinator with adequate status and support

- Investing in training and CPD for teachers
- Including information about SRE in school communications, e.g newsletter and web-site
- Encouraging learning from SRE to be shared outside the classroom, through assemblies and displays
- Exchanging good practice by inviting visitors and promoting networking between schools
- Having an open door to parents, staff and pupils who want to discuss SRE provision
- Recognising the contribution that SRE makes to attainment and pupil well-being

“My role as Head has primarily been to communicate the vision for improving SRE in the school and to be really clear about the benefits to all and also that I really believe in it. Initially the important thing was making time for the PSHE education Coordinator to talk to me and to have time out of lessons to reflect and work with other staff. I have also been open and honest with parents and governors and allowed them to ask questions. Staff can see that I am committed and enthusiastic about the new materials concerning SRE and they are now all on board with me”.

Head teacher, Trinity St Mary’s Church of England Primary School, Wandsworth.

### **3.13 Leadership within the local authority**

The local authority is in a key position to provide coordinated support for schools with SRE. Some local authorities have a dedicated SRE or PSHE advisor, who may be based in the Healthy Schools Team, or health promotion team within the Primary Care Trust. Support and advice can also be sought from dioceses (Church of England and Roman Catholic) and the appropriate local religious authorities.

Local priorities and targets are likely to determine the level of resource. Reducing teenage conception rates has been chosen as a priority in the Local Area Agreement in more than two-thirds of local authorities. And SRE, as part of PSHE education is a key part of meeting targets for all schools to be Healthy Schools.



The benefits of having a dedicated local resource are that all schools can access specialised support and be linked into practice sharing networks. An area-wide SRE advisor may offer a menu of support options for schools. This may include:

- Establishing a bench-mark for the quality of SRE provision and providing targeted support to improve standards
- Tailored support for schools, for example attending a governors or parents meeting and helping a school to review their SRE policy
- Helping a school to shift to a new delivery model, for example supporting a new team of specialised teachers
- Promoting coordinated progression between early years foundation stage, primary and secondary SRE and through to SRE in post-16 provision
- Providing centralised training for teachers, governors and other relevant professionals
- Creating networking opportunities for teachers and school SRE Coordinators
- Supporting SRE Coordinators to carry out internal evaluation, for example through providing training in how to do SRE lesson observation
- Advising schools on media activity
- Supporting schools with identifying appropriate agencies to contribute to SRE and funding streams
- Holding a library of teaching materials centrally which schools can borrow and try
- Providing national and local data to help design SRE programmes that are relevant
- Involving schools in the development and running of an teenage pregnancy and sexual health campaigns
- Supporting parents through their parenting strategy to take on their role in SRE for their children.

An SRE Advisor is also well-placed to carry out more strategic work with stakeholders, for example:

- Carrying out needs assessment and consultation activities with young people across the locality and sharing findings with key partners in the Council, LA, PCT and with the wider public

- Helping to raise the profile of SRE through central mechanisms such as the Children's Trust
- Raising awareness with the public about what SRE involves
- Responding to specific needs relating to culture and faith that may be important to several schools in the area, for example by working with local faith and cultural leaders and developing lesson plans and teaching materials that address local need
- Making links with relevant local strategies and work themes, for example parenting strategies, teenage pregnancy strategy and youth participation

#### **Case-study; Advisory support from the local authority**

In Barnsley, the post of SRE Consultant is funded by the Primary Care Trust, but with line management from the directorate for children and families within the local authority. The Consultant explains that the support a school needs will change over time; for example the first time a school holds a consultation session with parents they may benefit from support in planning and delivering the session. If a new SRE Coordinator comes into post extra support is offered and the consultant can come in to model a lesson or team-teach.

**In Hounslow**, the SRE Advisor has built up a relationship with schools in the borough over several years. The advisor has supported some secondary schools to shift from a form-tutor led delivery model to specialised teams. The advisor carries out whole-school reviews of SRE every three years, which sets a benchmark for improvement. One secondary school in the borough has moved from a 'satisfactory' to 'outstanding' grade for SRE.

**In Croydon**, advice on SRE is part of the remit of the Healthy Schools Advisor. Over a period of 3 years the Advisor has worked with schools to develop a scheme of work for primary SRE that runs from reception to Year 6. All schools were invited to pilot the first draft over the course of a year and feedback. The second draft was reviewed by teachers who had undergone the PSHE CPD programme. The scheme of work includes optional activities that schools can link into other curriculum areas if they wish. The scheme was launched at the Croydon Healthy Schools Network meeting. Several Heads have fed-back that they gained confidence to adopt the scheme of work because other schools in the area were doing so. The advisor will provide ongoing training and support in use of the scheme.

## **Section 4. SRE WITHIN A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH**

### **4.1 The whole school approach**

A school's approach to SRE is most effective when:

- it is addressed by the whole school community - staff, parents/carers, pupils, governors and the wider community
- it is consistent with the school's values and ethos, developed by all members of the school community
- SRE is part of a well-planned programme of PSHE education delivered in a supportive environment, where pupils feel able to engage in open discussion and feel confident about asking for help if necessary
- pupils' needs and views are taken into account when developing programmes and policies
- staff have access to high quality training and expert support
- it is supported by consistent messages from the family and community.

Approximately 7 million children and young people attend a Healthy school or a school that is working towards National Healthy School Status. Healthy schools are required to provide minimum evidence to meet criteria for SRE, as part of the wider PSHE education core themes. Schools maintain this universal provision for health and wellbeing as a pre-requisite for moving on to a Healthy Schools Enhancement Model, enabling them to further meet the needs of both their universal and targeted population. Further information and best practice guidance can be found at ([www.healthyschools.gov.uk](http://www.healthyschools.gov.uk)).

### ***Addressing sexual, sexist and transphobic bullying through a whole school approach to SRE***

Section 89 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 specifically requires all head teachers to determine a school behaviour policy, which must include measures to be taken with a view to 'encouraging good behaviour and respect for others on the part of pupils and, in particular, preventing all forms of bullying among pupils.



When thinking about a whole school approach to sex and relationships education, it is important to consider the issue of sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying. Sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying occurs when a pupil (or group), usually repeatedly, harms another pupil or intentionally makes them unhappy **because of their sex or because they may not be perceived to conform to normative gender roles**. These types of bullying are commonly underpinned by sexist or transphobic attitudes. By working to prevent this type of bullying from taking place, schools can safeguard the welfare of their pupils, while at the same time playing their part to create a society in which people have positive attitudes to difference and treat each other with respect.

For more detailed guidance on tackling sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying in schools, please see “*Safe to Learn: Guidance for schools on preventing and responding to sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying*” available at: <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00668-2007&>

The use of mobile phones, email, instant messaging or websites to transmit rumours or circulate inappropriate or explicit images to a wide audience has been found to be a particular concern in these forms of bullying. DCSF guidance “*Safe to Learn: Cyberbullying*” provides comprehensive advice on how to deal with these issues, and can be found at: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/cyberbullying/>

## 4.2 One to one support for children and young people

For some pupils SRE lessons will raise questions of a very personal nature, this is why having one-to-one support available is critical.

Learning mentors and teaching assistants have a key role in the classroom to provide support for individuals and small groups of pupils. Effective teaching methods; including use of ground rules, distancing techniques and active learning will help pupils to engage, but some pupils may exhibit challenging or un-characteristic behaviour and really benefit from more personalised support.

In mainstream schools, pupils may be referred to special educational needs departments and the co-ordinator, or ‘SENCO’. These teachers need to be given support and training to deal with SRE issues.

SRE will sometimes raise questions that pupils want to raise in private after the lesson, either with a teacher or more specialised staff such as a counsellor or health professional. A key function for SRE is to inform children and young people about sources of help and advice and the level of

confidentiality that they can expect. Ideally, specialist support will be available in school, making it possible for questions and concerns to be addressed quickly. When providing one-to-one support teachers should bear in mind their own protection and safeguarding needs.

Children and young people may have personal questions, for example to do with normal physical development, friendships, relationships and sexual health. In exceptional cases SRE may prompt children and young people to disclose abuse. SRE has an important role in safeguarding; empowering children and young people to seek help with problems early.

Particularly at secondary level schools will be aware of pupils at risk of teenage pregnancy and poor sexual health outcomes. Evidence has shown the very strong link between low attainment, not enjoying school and an increased likelihood of teenage conception. These pupils may be identified through attendance data, referral by learning mentors and pastoral staff or through accessing an on-site health facility. For these young people there are many possible benefits of taking part in a targeted SRE programme in a small group outside of the main class. The benefits include:

- A safer learning environment where trust can be built with a small number of peers and the facilitator
- More informal and personalised teaching style
- Easier to participate – other pupils may have hindered participation in the class group
- Programme content that is responsive to the particular needs of the group
- An opportunity to make a fresh start as the facilitator may not be a class teacher and therefore not carry the 'baggage' of knowing the history of the young person

Targeted SRE programmes are often delivered by a trained learning mentor, health professional or youth worker. Participation should be on a voluntary basis and parents also need to be informed. Careful promotion of the programme is essential to ensure that it is understood to be a positive opportunity. Success in the programme can be celebrated through accreditation such as ASDAN awards. Sharing creative outputs such as drama, poetry and art-work more widely with the school community can boost pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Targeted programmes are often carried out during timetabled PSHE education time. When pupils re-join the main group they may be more able to engage, but also benefit from ongoing support.



Programmes designed for use with small groups in mainstream schools are often ideal for use in alternative education provision and vice versa.

### **Case-studies:**

#### **1. Targeted SRE with young men in Gloucestershire**

A programme for young men called *'Know yer balls and kick some too'* has been developed by the local authority Lead for SRE in partnership with NHS Gloucestershire and Cheltenham Town Football Club. The programme uses a 'social marketing' base of practice to engage with the young men by making use of a culture familiar to them; that does not directly challenge their masculinity, but enables them to consider issues in an environment and medium familiar to them – football. The programme works mostly with Year 11 boys, several of whom are on college placements. Each of the five sessions includes 20 minutes in the class, followed by football coaching that integrates and reinforces learning. Topics covered include positive mental attitude and self-esteem, alcohol, testicular cancer awareness and condom use. By targeting young men at risk of exclusion and low attainment the programme aims to reduce health inequalities. Attendance on the programme has been high and coaches have now been trained to deliver the SRE sessions with minimal input from the SRE Lead.

#### **2. SRE Project for pupils with special educational needs in a mainstream school**

All integrated pupils with special needs participate in SRE within the school PSHE education programme along with their peers. Some pupils with SEN have a teaching assistant to support them in their mainstream classes and they will try to ensure the content of the regular session is differentiated for their pupil.

An additional 'SRE project' takes place every autumn term for ten weeks. Before the project begins, the heads of department for science, special needs, RE and pastoral support meet to discuss the programme and the pupils from years 8-10 who may benefit. The lead is the SENCO (special educational needs co-ordinator) who contacts the pupils and their families to invite them to participate in the project.

Pupils come out of their regular timetabled lessons for the programme and attend an hour's lesson in a small group of up to 10 pupils. The SENCO and PSHE education staff team teach the programme using group work, drama activities and role play and use a mixture of mainstream materials such as DVD stories and resources designed for pupils with special needs. The staff use the final session to evaluate the course with the pupils who give their verbal and written feedback on the work and on their own learning. Certificates of achievement are given to acknowledge participation and



success. One pupil gave the following feedback that “I liked being part of a group, meeting new people and being able to talk”.

The additional SRE project gives an opportunity for pupils to build on what they may have learned, missed or part understood in the mainstream lesson. The change for individual pupils can be significant:

“One young man struggled with understanding how young people made friends and felt sad and left out. The course helped him develop confidence and he has started to spend break time with a couple of pupils who like him. He contributes more willingly now to class discussions in other lessons” (Staff member)

### **3. Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programme ‘TP3’ in Croydon**

A flexible 8 session programme has been developed in Croydon to target pupil referral units and secondary schools which fall into high teenage pregnancy wards. Young people targeted for referral to the programme include pupils with low attendance/attainment, looked after children and young offenders/young people in trouble with the police, refugees and asylum seekers.

Staff delivering the programme includes school nurses who have done the PSHE CPD programme, and youth workers and learning mentors who have attended the local public health training programme. The programme runs in parallel with the school SRE / PSHE education programme. Feedback from young people and schools has been very positive with noticeable improvements in attendance and pupils better able to engage with SRE in the full-class following the programme.

### **4.3 Confidentiality and Information Sharing**

Generally most one-to-one conversations between school staff and pupils can be kept confidential unless the staff member is concerned and believes that there is a safeguarding issue. A good confidentiality policy will give clear guidance on when a staff member should have a safeguarding concern and how and to whom they should report to. The policy also provides a clear process for supporting young people who make disclosures to staff. This will involve making all possible effort to encourage young people to talk to their parents or carers and referring young people for specialist support.

All schools are advised to have a confidentiality policy. The confidentiality policy can cover all school activities including lessons, pastoral support, extra-

curricular activities and use of services such as school nursing and health services. It should include all members of the school community; pupils, teachers, support staff, and senior management, and should reflect the legal rights of parents. For schools with a religious character the policy must also reflect the rights of such schools and the need to work within the values and ethos of the school.

Consulting with parents, young people and governors when developing a confidentiality policy will help to promote understanding about how the policy protects pupils and staff. Once a new policy is agreed it is important to explain it to pupils and their parents and to provide training for staff.

To support good practice in information sharing, the Government has published guidance that offers clarity on when and how information can be shared legally and professionally. This guidance is for practitioners in all sector and services who have to make case-by-case decisions about sharing personal information, whether they are working with children, young people, adults and families. The guidance also outlines how organisations can support practitioners and ensure that improvements in information sharing practice at the front line are sustainable. The “*Information Sharing: Guidance for practitioners and managers*” and supporting materials, including training on information sharing, is available at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/ecm/informationsharing](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/ecm/informationsharing)

In some local authorities ‘template’ policies have been developed that can be adapted by schools. A template policy can be developed by a group of experts with input from the local safeguarding children’s boards, contraceptive and sexual health services and SRE advisors.

**Case-study: Developing a template confidentiality policy for secondary schools in Sheffield**

All secondary schools in Sheffield have been offered support in developing their confidentiality policy through the Outreach Service attached to Sheffield Contraception and Sexual Health Service. A template was developed through consultation with young people, parents, governors, teachers and health professionals.

The template has been ratified by the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Service, the Primary Care Trust; including School Nursing and Healthy Schools and the Sheffield Children and Young People’s Directorate; which brings together education and social services for children and young people. This endorsement has taken the pressure off individual schools and enabled governors and the senior management team to get expert help with their

policy. The Project Team Manager for young people's community-based sexual health services, based in the Contraception and Sexual Health (CASH) service which is part of the Primary Care Trust, then worked through the following step-by-step process to introduce the policy to individual schools:

- Template for whole-school confidentiality policy given to school
- Presentation and discussion with Senior Management Team and Governors
- Edits and amendments discussed
- Policy formally accepted by Governors
- Policy presented to whole staff team and case-studies discussed
- All staff sign up to policy
- Policy becomes part of staff induction
- Summary of policy sent to all parents
- Parents open evening held
- Summary of policy included in induction pack for all new parents
- Appropriate summary given to, and verbally explained to all pupils

The template has now been adopted city-wide, coordinated by the Outreach Service, with head-teachers who have used the policy sharing learning with their peers. Communications with parents about the policy provide an opportunity to invite parents to get involved in the 'Parent to Parent'; a Sheffield-wide peer education project which skills up parents to talk to their children about sex and relationships.



## 5. Resources for teaching and training

### 5.1 Selecting teaching materials for SRE

A wide range of teaching materials for SRE have been produced nationally and locally, by voluntary sector agencies, commercial companies, local authorities and religious bodies such as diocesan education authorities.

Well trained and competent teachers are able to design their own curriculum, select and adapt teaching materials that can be used to enhance learning and design their own activities and resources.

#### Checklist for selecting teaching materials / resources

- Is the resource consistent with the values set out in the school SRE policy?
- Does the resource portray positive images of a range of children and young people?
- Does the resource show positive role models for girls and boys / women and men – and avoid stereotypes relating to gender and sexual orientation?
- Is the resource inclusive on the basis of home and family circumstance, gender, sexuality, race, faith, culture and disability?
- Is it appropriate for the age, ability and maturity of the children and young people?
- Does use of the resource fit into a planned and developmental programme of SRE?
- Have resources been evaluated by children and young people and feedback acted upon?
- Have parents and carers been consulted about resources?
- Is it factually correct and up-to-date?
- Is the resource contemporary in terms of the realities of children and young people's lives?
- Does it encourage active and participatory learning?
- Is there a range of types of resource being used across the SRE programme including a variety of formats such as video, audio, visual, games, and models?
- Are teachers confident about using the resource?
- Will the resource be used in its entirety or will it be more appropriate to adapt it

### **Case-study:** Selecting appropriate resources in a faith context

'Laying the Foundations' is used as the main primary school SRE resource in Nottingham. The Asian SRE Advisor (part of the Healthy Schools Team) has led a process of mapping the values in Laying the Foundations against the values in Islam. The Advisor has written a commentary on each of the lesson plans in the resource describing how the values in SRE support Islamic values. A local Imam, a local Muslim Councillor and the Muslim Council of Britain have all endorsed the work and have provided written statements of support, which have been included in the document, which will be sent to primary schools.

Reflection on the use of teaching materials and resources is an ongoing process within SRE, and feedback from teachers should be collated by the SRE Coordinator. New materials can then be developed and trialled and feedback from children and young people incorporated. Networking locally will also help schools to find new resources and the local authority may have a resource library so that schools can 'try before they buy'.

The Sex Education Forum has produced lists of SRE teaching materials for primary, secondary and special schools which can be downloaded from [www.ncb.org.uk/sef](http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef)

Resources should offer some flexibility to be adapted to meet the needs of the particular children and young people. There are also some resources that have been designed to respond to a faith perspective or a specific need, such as children and young people with learning disabilities. For example, the resource 'All that I am' is designed for use in Catholic Primary Schools and has been produced by the Diocesan Department of Religious Education in Birmingham. It can be found at: <http://all-that-i-am.co.uk/>.

## **5.2 Teacher Training and Skills**

Teachers are the single most important resource for SRE. SRE is most effective when taught by teachers who have the necessary subject knowledge and the skills to employ appropriate teaching methods. The importance of teachers of SRE being well informed, competent and comfortable discussing the topics has been highlighted through consultations with young people (SEF, 2008).

### **5.2.1 Initial teacher training (ITT)**

Initial teacher training equips teachers with a set of skills that can apply to all subjects, including curriculum planning, classroom management and pedagogy. The standards for initial teacher training require newly qualified teachers to be familiar with the programme of study for citizenship and the framework for PSHE education, and relevant to the age range they teach. In addition, the standards also prepare teachers for their pastoral responsibilities. The DCSF and the TDA are exploring how to create a route through ITT to become a specialist PSHE teacher

### **5.2.2 In-school induction**

It is essential that all school staff have a good understanding of the school's SRE policy and other related policies. This understanding should include first steps in identifying and responding to pupils' needs. Schools should consider how best to prepare all staff as part of their induction.

### **5.2.3 Continuing professional development (CPD)**

Training is available at a national level through the PSHE CPD programme, which is accredited at HE levels 1, 2, 3 and 4. Local training programmes are offered in many areas and may be run by the local authority, primary care trust and voluntary sector agencies and National agencies.

All those involved in teaching SRE need opportunities to develop skills, knowledge and confidence in addressing issues with pupils through CPD, and it is crucial that senior managers support teachers' access to CPD. Activities could include:

- team teaching or teachers observing other skilled staff with ongoing support from a coach/mentor
- participating in collaborative enquiry and action research supported by teaching networks
- training courses with support to apply learning to the classroom.



It is important that when any form of CPD is undertaken staff are supported in disseminating the lessons learnt within the school. They should also be encouraged to evaluate its impact on teaching and learning.

Help in identifying professional development needs and information on resources to support teachers' development can be found on [www.pshe-cpd.com](http://www.pshe-cpd.com). The website also includes details of the national professional development programme for teachers of PSHE education. This sets standards for the effective teaching of the generic skills of PSHE education and certifies those whose practice meets these standards.

*"SRE is only as good as the staff who deliver it. Now that a number of staff have completed the CPD programme we have a much more structured curriculum and ensure coverage of all aspects of SRE within PSHE".*  
Secondary school SRE teacher.

## **APPENDIX 1: A CHECKLIST FOR PLANNING, TEACHING AND REVIEWING EFFECTIVE SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION**

### ***A: SRE within a whole school approach;***

- 1** Is there a designated senior member of staff (or team) responsible for SRE in school with an agreed description of their role and responsibilities in relation to SRE?
- 2** Is there a school SRE policy covering how SRE will be taught and reviewed to ensure that the needs of the children and young people are being met?
- 3** Has the policy been developed or reviewed in consultation with the whole school community, including staff, governors, parents/carers, pupils and outside agencies?
- 4** Has the policy been disseminated among staff, pupils and parents/carers and included in induction arrangements for new staff, pupils and prospective parents?
- 5** Is the approach to SRE consistent with the ethos and values framework of the school developed by the whole school community, while maintaining the need for, and entitlement to, a comprehensive SRE programme?
- 6** Is the policy and the school's approach to SRE set in the context of the National Healthy School Standard (which advocates a whole school approach)?
- 7** Are all aspects of the policy in harmony with Every Child Matters and the school's duty to promote the wellbeing of its pupils?
- 8** Have pupils been fully involved in assessing need, reviewing policy and practice, planning, developing and implementing SRE?
- 9** Are parents/carers informed and consulted about their child's SRE?
- 10** Do parents/carers have access to reliable, up-to-date information and support about SRE?

**12** Does liaison with local schools take place to ensure consistency and continuity of the approach to SRE across phases, and particularly at transition from primary to secondary schools?

**13** Is there a designated governor to monitor SRE?

### ***B Content of the SRE programme***

**1** Have relevant and achievable aims for SRE been stated in the SRE policy which are consistent with the moral and values framework of the school?

**2** Have specific teaching objectives and learning outcomes been set for each year group/class, reflecting a balance between exploring attitudes and values, and developing personal and social skills, knowledge and understanding?

**3** Are pupils carefully consulted to help determine their current level of knowledge, their feelings and beliefs, their questions, and gaps or inaccuracies in their understanding or myths needing to be rectified, before the programme is planned?

**4** Does the content include statutory elements of the National Curriculum Science Order and take account of the PSHE education and citizenship Programmes of Study and statutory requirements for citizenship at Key Stages 3 & 4?

**5** Are links with other curriculum subjects and PSHE education components, for example drug education and anti bullying, routinely made?

**6** Does the content take account of faith and cultural perspectives and the religious character of the school while maintaining children and young people's need for and entitlement to a comprehensive SRE programme?

**7** Does liaison with the Local Authority, the PCT and the Healthy Schools Coordinator ensure that local priorities are reflected in the SRE programme?

**8** Does the SRE programme include details on how to get further information and help?

**9** Has adequate time been allocated on the timetable for SRE lessons?



### **C Methods and resources**

- 1** Do teachers understand the importance of establishing ground rules and creating a safe and supportive learning environment?
- 2** Are pupils made aware of the aims and intended learning outcomes of each lesson/activity?
- 3.** Does the content of lessons show positive images of children and young people and encourage safe, rewarding, responsible relationships
- 4** Have a variety of teaching approaches been established to engage pupils actively in their own learning, for example, drama, theatre-in-education, debate and discussion, and suitable external contributors?
- 5** Are school nurses and other health professionals actively involved in developing and providing SRE?
- 6** Are good quality, appropriate teaching resources available, which have been chosen according to key criteria? (See section 5)
- 7** Have suitable external agencies and individuals who can contribute to the SRE programme been identified? Has a need for their contribution been established? Has their contribution been planned and a clear role been negotiated with them? Can they assist the school to reach its stated learning outcomes?
- 8** Are external contributors aware of the school's aims of SRE, the school SRE policy and the confidentiality policy, to ensure consistency with the school's approach?
- 9** Have plans been made for teachers to devise preparation and follow-up work?
- 10** Are plans in place to regularly review and evaluate the SRE programme?

### ***D The needs of all pupils***

- 1 Is the content of lessons culturally sensitive?
- 2 Have the needs of all pupils with special educational needs been taken into account?
3. Is there specialist and one-to one support for pupils who need it?
- 4 Are staff and pupils aware of the policy regarding confidentiality and disclosure?
- 5 Do all pupils have access in school to information on local and national helplines and support services?

### ***E Staff support and training***

- 1 Does SRE have senior management team support?
- 2 Has induction training on SRE been provided for all staff?
- 3 Do those teaching SRE have access to support and continuing professional development activities to enable them to feel confident in their role? Are they encouraged to identify their training needs and priorities?
- 4 Do teachers have knowledge of the local situation and the roles of local multi-agency support team?
- 5 Are teachers aware of the schools confidentiality policy and safeguarding processes, and know how to deal with disclosures and referrals?