

Saving rhetorical children: sexuality education discourses from conservative to post-modern

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Sexuality policy is currently changing at global, national and local levels. This move is affecting the sexuality education discourses in education policies around the world. However, the changes are not always translating into a direct re-thinking of approaches, and in some cases result in a push for more conservative policy. This paper provides a discourse exemplar for understanding the broad range of sexuality education discourses currently at work in education policies and policy movements internationally. It is intended for use in sexuality education policy research, conception and practice. The different constructions of 'the child' at the core of the various discourses are examined, including the ways in which the different discourses attempt to 'save' these children from perceived sexuality problems through education. The article posits that such rhetorical children should not 'stand in' for the needs of actual children in sexuality policy, without being explicitly acknowledged as constructs.

Sexuality education: murky and uncharted waters

The policy on sexuality and gender identity is markedly changing at both global and various national and localised levels. The United Nations' Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender condemns discrimination based on these characteristics. Marriage legislation in various countries, states and regions is being remodelled to include same-sex and even sex/gender-neutral structures (ILGA Europe 2009; Josephson 2005; Oswald 2002). With greater recognition of different rights and relationships, constructions of diverse sexualities within sexuality education policy are being debated around the globe (Blair and Monk 2009; Boston 1997; California Safe Schools Coalition 1996; Cloud 2005; Flood and Hamilton 2008; GLSEN 2004; Mills 1999; Russo 2006; Sauerteig and Davidson 2009; The Age Editorial 2009).

In Australian education this has manifested in a variety of policies at national, state and local levels – in varying degrees of support and opposition to such movements. Schools must now comply with the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* policy document (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2008). This policy requires all state governments and schooling sectors to provide an education service free from discrimination based on 'sexual orientation' (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2008, 7). In England and Wales, the 1993 Education Act made sex education a compulsory subject for all secondary school students; the 2000 Learning and Skills Act required schools to teach

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'the nature of marriage' and family values; and the 2003 Local Government Act guided schools to take steps to prevent homophobic bullying and adopt a far more liberal and inclusive approach to sexuality. The US states of California, Minnesota and New Jersey have protections for students' sexual orientation and gender identity, while Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin have protections for sexual orientation only; other states have requirements regarding abstinence education and other programmes. Around the globe there are a plethora of other national, state and independent education policies dealing with sexuality and gender identity.

There have been some minimal analyses of these sorts of policies internationally (Angelides 2008; Blair and Monk 2009; GLSEN 2004; Russo 2006; Sauerteig and Davidson 2009). However, these analyses do not go into much depth in consideration of the paradigms within which the sexuality education approaches promoted by the policies under analysis are framed, nor do they go into any detail about the specific discourses of sexuality education dominant in the policy and how they construct youth generally. A variety of researchers have decried this lack of discursive analysis (Carlson 1992; Earls, Fraser, and Sumpter 1992; Irvine 2002; Sears 1992).

Sexuality education movements, policies and programmes should be in Irvine's (2002) view treated as a discursive site, and their competing vocabularies examined. She argues that it matters how a social movement talks – words, phrases, narratives, and symbols comprise the expressive elements of discursive politics (Irvine 2002, 10). Similarly, Carlson calls for 'a discursive, ideological analysis of the sexuality curriculum' (1992, 55), and Sears argues that sexuality education in schools should be not only a terrain for personal and social enquiry but also a place to raise fundamental questions among competing sexual ideologies:

Conspicuously absent is critical conversation revolving around how we conceptualise sexual knowledge, what kind of sexual knowledge is of most worth, and who should have access to what type of sexual knowledge. (1992, 28)

Recognising whose interests are served by sexuality education approaches can lead to critically reflective community and the 'liberating models needed to create sexuality education in the interest of all' (Earls, Fraser, and Sumpter 1992, 324). It can also reveal the biased interests behind promoted approaches in a particular historio-cultural context, enlightening stakeholders on how rhetorical frames can organise their ambivalence, confusion, and anxieties into 'tidy sound bites designed for mass mobilisation', minimising opportunities for more nuanced argument (Irvine 2002, 8). The discursive composition of the new international sexuality education policies thus represents uncharted waters.

This paper provides a compass for the mapping of these waters. It offers a sexuality education discourse exemplar¹ that can be used in the analysis of such policy(ies) at international, national, local and even school-specific levels. This exemplar derives from a literature review prepared for a critical discourse analysis of the vast range of Australian policies dealing with same-sex-attracted and gender-diverse youth.² However, the approaches (and non-approaches) outlined are drawn from international research, and are not exclusively Australian. Indeed, some discourses had a minimal influence in Australia. While this exemplar could not possibly be definitive, the aim is to supply a collection of actual approaches that is as broad as possible in its consideration of official educational discourses, and to avoid common mistakes of over-simplification or amalgamation in conceptualising discourses. It is not the interest of this exemplar to include unofficial sexuality education discourses (what is learnt from 'real-world' sexual encounters, the media, etc.), as such discourses do not primarily inform education policy.³ The focus here, and the specific definition of 'sexuality education discourse', relates to authorised

approaches in official schooling of young people in sexuality. Here ‘sexuality’ includes anything obliquely related to constructions of sexed and gendered bodies, identities and behaviours; sexual feelings, desires and acts; sexual knowledge, skills and information. Thus, sexuality education is seen as a hyponym under which sub-types such as sex education (education mainly concerned with the act of intercourse or reproduction), relationship education (education mainly concerned with the creation of romantic or sexual relationships) and other types fall.

By using this particular definition of sexuality education, it becomes possible to identify any relevant discourses that more research with a stricter definition (such as that limiting it to education on sex mechanics) ignores. Diverse approaches to sexuality education reflect differing underlying premises, views of human nature and assumptions about pedagogical processes. Importantly, they construct the child differently. Most theorisation of sexuality policy sees it as informed by one of two child constructs: the ‘romantic child’ whose innocence must be protected, or the ‘knowing child’ whose innocence is not tainted by the information seen as necessary for development (Angelides 2008; Irvine 2002; Martin 2004). This article will argue that these two both represent conservative constructions of the child, illustrating only one orientation out of several possibilities.

This wider review of the literature uncovers at least 27 separate sexuality education approaches or discourses; and a greater range of rhetorical ‘children’. The discourse exemplar designed for the study (Table 1) differentiated these 27 sexuality education discourses in terms of their orientation to education. This exemplar builds on Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett’s model of education orientations (Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett 1983) as revised by Hoeppe and colleagues (Gilbert 2004; Hoeppe et al. 1996; Jones 2007, 2009), categorising values education discourses as conservative, liberal, critical or post-modern in orientation. This conceptual framing was chosen because education orientation seems to be the most essential and consistent defining feature throughout values education discourses, and draws together other key differentiating factors in a cohesive framework. The core features of conservative, liberal, critical and post-modern values education discourses in the exemplar are explained in Table 1.

Explaining the exemplar: sexuality education has an orientation, too!

Conservative

In modern education history the conservative orientation to education reigned prior to the 1960s, with schools and teachers taking an authoritative approach and inculcating students with the dominant values, beliefs and practices of the time, and students seen as passive recipients of this knowledge (Jones 2009). Education is understood as preparation for work (Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett 1983), and discourses stemming from this orientation focus on preparing the student to fit or follow the conventions of the social, civic, religious or local community. Precise sexuality education approaches vary, but all can be seen to transmit dominant sexualities. They can be based on religious or secular conceptions of sexuality, for example. However, sexuality frameworks are always predetermined by an exterior force – an authority – whether derived from the natural order of the universe, an omnipotent creator, or politically or culturally determined. The ‘sexuality problem’ educated against is the perceived threat(s) to this privileged sexuality ideal. Authority figures are institutions and individuals from the *status quo*; religious organisations, schools and academics, medical bodies and professionals, scientific institutions and psychiatrists, parents or mothers. Sex, gender and sexuality exist in a fixed bi-polar opposition (one is either a feminine heterosexual female or masculine heterosexual male). Diversity beyond

Table 1. Orientations to education.

Orientation		Liberal	Critical	Post-modern
Approximate time of origin	Conservative	Liberal	Critical	Post-modern
Belief about education	Pre-1960s Education should maintain the <i>status quo</i> . It should identify, describe and reinforce the prevailing values, beliefs and practices of society, and 'transmit' them to students.	1960s Education develops the individual potential of all students, rewarding achievement and encouraging competitive activity. It is based on developing knowledge and skills, especially inquiry and decision-making skills.	1970s Education can help create a 'better' society/reality by encouraging students to identify values and practices that are unjust or unsustainable, to propose alternatives, and to take appropriate action to begin bringing those alternatives to fruition.	1990s Education can demystify 'truth'/'reality' and problematise knowledge. Theories of the social are explored – such that the hegemonies (or discursive assumptions of a time or culture) are revealed, allowing new possibilities and conceptual play.
Goal of educators	To maintain social stability and protect the existing interests of various groups in society.	To promote individual excellence/happiness and social progress, and reward students according to their performance.	To bring about a more peaceful, just and sustainable world through students' actions.	To develop in students an oppositional position in relation to the dominant order/the possibility of any shared 'reality', self-reflexivity and awareness of partiality.
Role of students in shaping curriculum	Students leave unquestioned the dominant values and practices of society.	Students identify aspects of society in need of reform, but leave untouched questions of radical change to beliefs or practices.	Students ask probing questions about the most deep-seated values and assumptions in society. They instigate 'real-world' social action to redress inequities and combat prejudice.	Students can both de-construct and co-construct sexual 'truths' and systems, as all knowledge is seen as constructed and relational. Students are placed in an oppositional subject position through which they can interrogate constructions of 'reality' and intervene in their reconstitution.

Classroom pedagogic practice	Characterised by the undisputed authority of the teacher, the relative passivity of the students and the unproblematic transmission of authorised knowledge. Methods include lectures or sermons, stories, viewing of texts, enforcing of behavioural rules and pledges. Guest speakers are respected community/institutional leaders.	Characterised by the teacher's role as leader and facilitator, active inquiry by students, and an emphasis on understanding the reasons for social phenomena. Methods include class discussion, writing personal reflections, expression of feelings and opinions, debates, role-play, testing knowledge and practicing skills. Guest speakers are knowledgeable and skill experts, or offer a relatable affective tale that illustrates consequences of choices or aids learning.	Characterised by more democratic relations between teacher and students, high levels of collaboration, learning that involves ideological critique of mainstream notions from a marginalised perspective. Methods include critical analysis of popular culture texts and images, viewing and creation of alternative texts/posters/pamphlets, student activism, whole-school reforms. Guest speakers represent alternative community groups or a marginalised perspective.	Characterised by the teacher's role as de-constructor and facilitator, the approach favours the teaching of multiple theoretical perspectives and co-creation of knowledge. Methods include the teacher playing 'devil's advocate' and playing conceptual tricks on students/deconstructing them, student engagement in a range of theoretical and historio-cultural perspectives on an issue, class theorising, vocabulary invention and conceptual play, exploring multiple cultural activities and dress coding. Guest speakers offer insight into one of the theoretical or cultural perspectives being explored.
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Source: Adapted from Jones (2007, 2009).

this model is negated: rendered invisible, pathologised, demonised or declared a fallacy or a mistaken choice. Sexuality models vary, but legitimised sexual expression is always procreative and occurs within the context of an established heterosexual marriage. Pedagogical methods are authority-centred and do not allow student agency. They range from censorship and rules, to lectures/sermons and storytelling, through to use of hell houses and camps/clinics. Sexuality education discourses manifesting this orientation include: Storks and Fairies, None/Non-approach, Physical Hygiene, Sexual Morality, Birds and Bees, Biological Science, Abstinence Education and Christian/Ex-gay Redemption.

Liberal

Popularised in the 1960s, the liberal orientation involves teachers acting as facilitators in students' development of knowledge and skills; particularly relating to inquiry and decision-making (Jones 2007, 2009). This orientation looks at the 'whole' student, in preparation for 'life rather than work' (Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett 1983), and promotes sexuality skills and knowledge for personal choice/development. The 'sexuality problem' educated against is the individual's lack of the perceived requisite knowledge and skills essential in protecting their self-interests (bodily, medically, socially, emotionally or otherwise). Authority shifts more to the individual, who is informed and influenced by institutions and individuals within sexology, science, medicine, education and cultural/political theory; but nevertheless makes their own choices. Sex, gender and sexuality primarily exist in a fixed bi-polar opposition, but diversity beyond this model does exist. Such alternatives do not disrupt the model altogether, they are simply choices that show a more fluid understanding of the relations in the model (regarding sexual experimentation, gender roles and sexual desire). Sexed identity is seen as fixed, but behaviour and roles are more optional. Sexuality models vary, but legitimised sexual expression is always dependent on the individual's interest. What is 'best' for the individual may pertain to issues of pleasure, personal preference, safety, readiness, equality, engagement in relationships, or values. Ideals are understood as developmentally progressive with increasing choice available at different stages in an individual's maturity.

The various approaches share an emphasis on students' understanding the impact of sexuality on the self, in relation to their own personal agency and individual constructions of knowledge and valuing processes. The affective domain is engaged along with the cognitive domain; students can openly express diverse opinions and active curiosity. While some positions regarding sexuality are implicitly placed above others (such as the dominance of heterosexuality, or the idea of sex as potentially harmful), individual choice is crucial. This is because, in these approaches, sexuality is part of the process of self-actualisation; the aim is the weighing of values, possible outcomes and responsibilities so as to encourage the development of a consistent code of personal sexuality. Where social issues and structures are critiqued (such as marriage, abortion, same-sex relationship status, etc.) such consideration reflects an individualistic rather than a social process. Common features of schools include the establishment of more democratic settings, and teachers acting as facilitators. Pedagogical methods privilege democratic models, in which an authority outlines possibilities from which individuals choose. For example, information may come from teacher-led lectures, guest speakers, media texts or films/pamphlets, or consideration of personal experiences and opinions. Classroom methods include individual and group work, discussion, debates, demonstrations, role-plays, question and answer sessions and self-analysis. There is use of the instrumentalist pedagogy with testing of knowledge, skills and outcomes. Liberal sexuality education discourses include Sexual

Liberationist, Comprehensive Sex Education, Sexual Risk/Progressive, Sexual Readiness, Effective Relationships, Controversial Issues/Values Clarification and Liberal Feminist.

Critical

The critical orientation propounds facilitating integrated student action based on alternative principles. It came into education movements in the 1970s and is linked to the rise of a host of other reform pushes like feminism, gay liberation and post-colonialism, aiming to engage students more actively in social issues and action (Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett 1983, 129). This educational framing allows students to actively respond to society's privileging of particular sexualities and sexual identities; students identify and question values and practices that are unjust or inequitable, and undertake actions to lead to a more equitable society. The 'sexuality problem' education meets is social inequity and the perceived repression or marginalisation of non-dominant groups. Student-centred, action-based curriculums are favoured, with teachers and community members acting as facilitators of this action (Jones 2009). Traditional accounts of sexuality are not privileged; instead, they are either actively critiqued and supplemented or challenged by an alternative account focussed on a formerly marginalised group(s). Whole-school bodies, teachers and particular education action groups may model, train in or seek to embody and promote these equity concerns. Methodologies include greater opportunities for participation in real-world community processes and structures, and interaction with community members and organisations.

There can be an interest in the repressive qualities of power in the forms of sexism, heterosexism and homophobia, or in empowerment possibilities. The particular power dynamic explored varies amongst models, and may pertain to class, sex and gender, ability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. The aspect of so-called 'difference' may be understood as innate or as socially determined, but tends to form an integral part of identity and identity politics, and exists in perpetual relation to a traditional 'norm'. Sex, gender and sexuality primarily exist in a fixed bi-polar opposition, but particular aspects of diversity beyond this model are actively supported depending on the discourse. Such alternatives are seen as equal to the traditional model, and as requiring extra educational investment to ensure equitable treatment. Sexuality models re-think the body. It is not solely a source for procreation or traditional intercourse, or envisioned in spiritual or puritan terms. The body is political, and its desires, pleasures, activities and relations exist within a power dynamic. Having sex for different reasons and in different ways can affect social conditions and group positions in the power dynamic. The personal is political. Pedagogical methods may include viewing of alternative texts, lectures and guest speakers from marginalised groups, activism within and beyond the school (creation of posters, plays, speeches, etc.), through to camps and ceremonies. Discourses manifesting this orientation are State Socialist/Sexual Politics, Sexual Revolutionary Socialist/Radical Freudian, Radical Feminist, Anti-discrimination/Anti-harassment/Equity, Inclusive/Safe and Supportive, Gay Liberationist and Post-colonial.

Post-modern

The post-modern orientation is the most recent, and involves analysis of concepts of truth, authority and reality (Jones 2009). Various sex, gender and sexuality frameworks and positions are explored. Students can deconstruct and co-construct these, but must be self-reflexive. Multiple perspectives on issues and knowledge are taught, and a deconstructive approach is taken – such that the hegemony or discursive truths/assumptions of any given

time or culture are revealed. The ‘sexuality problem’ educated against is the perceived trap of hegemonic cultural truths, and their limiting effects on possible experience. Authorised accounts and positions are questioned.

Teachers may ‘play devil’s advocate’ in relation to the student, acting as a ‘deconstructor, not a mere supporter in the traditional sense of the word’ (Morton and Zavarzadeh 1991, 11). In doing so they hope to develop in the student an oppositional position in relation to the dominant order of the ‘real’, such that the partisan subject self-reflexively acknowledges their own partiality, in the spirit of what Morton and Zavarzadeh term ‘both incompleteness and committedness’ (1991, 12). In acknowledging their split or partial nature, the denaturalised student sees themselves as constituted by a set of incoherent subject positions produced by cultural discourses, and makes visible the arbitrariness of all seemingly natural meanings and cultural organisations (Jones 2009). Although a sense of essential or secure identity is erased, the space of culture is opened up for reorganisation and creative change. Teachers facilitate study, debate and individual and group exploration of frameworks, supporting diverse students and creating a sense of equality without basing this on an ideal ‘original’ model (that other models must relate to).

Pedagogical methods may include viewing of alternative texts, lectures and guest speakers from marginalised groups, activism within and beyond the school (creation of posters, plays, speeches, etc.), through to camps and ceremonies. The difficulty of intellectual challenge in these approaches can be a factor for consideration; however, they confront, rather than dismiss, the complex and multifarious nature of sexuality. They further allow opportunities for an interesting and evolved study of other approaches and knowledge types presented in the exemplar. They include Post-structuralist, Post-identity Feminist, Multicultural Education, Diversity Education and Queer Theory.

Taking the discussion of the four education orientations and organising the available sexuality education discourses along those lines, an exemplar has been created that is useful for understanding sexuality education policy, programming and practice (Table 2). This exemplar gives a brief description of each of the four orientations. It then lists and concisely describes the school-based approaches of the sexuality education discourses for each orientation. It also identifies the construction of the child mobilised in the rhetoric of each discourse.

Constructions of ‘the child’ by orientation

Edelman understands the political field as operating under the logic of ‘reproductive futurism’, in which the figure of the child stands in for the ‘telos of the social order’, and is the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust (Edelman 2004, 11). Regardless of the politics of the subject (conservative, liberal or otherwise), Edelman argues that a conservatism of the ego compels:

to endorse as the meaning of politics itself the reproductive futurism that perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child. (2004, 14)

Education is an important part of this politics. Sexuality education debates are particularly volatile not only because they involve children, but also because of the politicised ideals of ‘the child’ associated with them (Angelides 2008; Blair and Monk 2009; Edelman 2004; Irvine 2002; Martin 2004). Many researchers discuss the promotion of only one or two main child constructs (Angelides 2008; Blair and Monk 2009; Irvine 2002). However, the literature review conducted for this study yielded several more specific constructions. These constructions align with one or several discourses in the exemplar, but most

Table 2. Orientation-based sexuality education discourse exemplar.

Education orientation	Sexuality education discourse	Approach	Child construct
<i>Conservative</i> Transmitting dominant sexualities	Storks and Fairies	To protect children, sexual information is intentionally substituted with a pleasant fiction drawing on popular culture. A stork, fairy or mythical occurrence brings fully-formed babies to established loving and hopeful family homes that consist of a married female and male.	The Romantic Child
	None/Non-approach	Sexuality content – seen as the domain of parents/the church/an exterior authority and developmentally, socially or morally inappropriate for schools to disseminate – is withheld/censored in pedagogy, texts and the school environment.	The Romantic Child
	Physical Hygiene	Problematic bodily emissions related to sexual functioning must be managed/hidden. (Hetero) Sexual sublimation beyond marital sex is necessary to maintain hygiene; deviation leads to loss of masculine power and creativity, female hysteria, disease and degeneration.	The Romantic Child
	Sexual Morality	Religion/God is at the centre of a sexuality system based on asceticism, body/mind and flesh/spirit dichotomies. Marital procreative heterosexual sex only is affirmed, other expressions are condemned temptations of the body, to be controlled by the mind for the purity of the spirit.	The Knowing Child
	Birds and Bees	Sexual interaction is part of a naturalist world. Natural metaphors protect childhood purity but satisfy curiosity. Human sexuality mimics the contact of bees with flower pollen, cross-pollination and the fertilisation of bird's eggs. The mother animal and its care are emphasised.	The Knowing Child
	Biological Science	Focuses on scientific understandings of biological reproduction of the human species; embedded in broader study of bodily systems, human life-cycles, animal reproduction or genetics. Involves study of anatomy, physiology, 'correct' functioning and disease prevention.	The Knowing Child
	Abstinence Education	Students are told to abstain from sexual interaction until married. Prior sexual activity is presented as a cause of psychological and physical harm – depression, shame, guilt, sexual infections and loss of long-term committed relationships. Intercourse basics may be taught.	The Knowing Child
	Christian/Ex-gay Redemption	Masturbation, homosexuality and gender diversity are 'not part of God's plan'. They represent modern cultural distractions. Sexual orientation and gender behaviours can be controlled through effort. Youth are encouraged to be 'ex-gay' identified/heterosexual.	The Knowing Child

(continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Education orientation	Sexuality education discourse	Approach	Child construct
<i>Liberal</i>			
Teaching sexuality skills and knowledge for personal choice/development	Sexual Liberationist	Promotes sexual individual sexual rights, with the individual deciding what is right for their own behaviour. Ethics of reciprocity and consensuality. A broad range of sexual acts are 'normal'. Youth are encouraged to 'feel comfortable' with sexual concepts and vocabulary.	The Sexual Decision-maker
	Comprehensive Sex Education	Wide-ranging sexual education covering sexual anatomy and physiology, contraception, sexual communication, relationship development and maintenance, sexual victimisation, sexual values, sexual minority issues, sexual prejudice, and abstinence as a choice.	Developing Sexual Decision-maker
	Sexual Risk/Progressive	Sexual activity of any kind outside of marriage involves a list of emotional, social and physical risks including heartbreak, being ostracised, exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, etc. Youth are taught about perceived dangers, 'safe sex', condom use and contraceptive choices.	The Informed Decision-maker
	Sexual Readiness	Focuses on equipping students with decision-making skills regarding their sexual 'readiness'. Virginity is valued, and not to be exchanged lightly. Readiness involves individual, emotional, physical, relational, practical and other concerns. Sex before readiness is seen as damaging.	Developing Sexual Decision-maker
	Effective Relationships	Sexual and other relationships are seen in terms of effectiveness of communication, emotional exchange, support and other key features. Students are taught communication, negotiation, empathy and other relating skills.	The Informed Decision-maker
	Controversial Issues/Values Clarification	Schools are a neutral space for rational, objective study. Sexual issues (such as homosexual marriage) are controversial. The individual student must be encouraged to express and form their own opinion on them. Teacher should present evidence impartially, without advocacy.	Developing Sexual Decision-maker
	Liberal feminist	A woman is equal to a man and can choose her career/occupation. She should receive equitable working conditions and remuneration, and should have more choice about her roles within a relationship regarding child rearing and the sharing of domestic duties and dynamics.	The Gendered Decision-maker

<i>Critical</i>	Facilitating integrated student action based on alternative sexuality principles. Redressing marginalised sexualities	State Socialist/Sexual Politics	Freudian genital gratification in the context of 'politically correct' non-monogamous heterosexual relations is seen as a healthy way to channel energy, rather than purely into a life of work or for reproduction. Greater acceptance of working-class and adolescent sexualities.	The Sexual Citizen
		Sexual Revolutionary Socialist/Radical Freudian Radical Feminist	Focuses on how a revolutionary sexuality can be celebrated in a context of civilised and labour-free technological utopia. Polymorphous pre-genital exploration that celebrates the body in a post-labour utopia. Creative exploration, love and play are encouraged. A woman is different to a man and these differences should be valued. Feminine writing styles, knowledge, emotions, experiences and concepts of time may be explored. Child-rearing is valued as labour; however, a life that is autonomous from men is also a possible and legitimate lifestyle.	The Sexual Citizen
		Anti-discrimination/Anti-harassment/Equity	Human rights concepts, acts and legislation based on sexuality, sex, orientation, etc., must be understood and respected. Discrimination or harassment on the grounds of such personal traits is wrong. School codes, posters, class rules, and equal access policies may reflect this.	The Gendered Citizen
		Inclusive/Social Justice Safe and Supportive	School should be safe and supportive spaces that promote equity, social justice and inclusiveness for all students. Students of diverse sexualities, sexes, etc., should be supported and included in school events, activities, class resources, etc. This support is affirming, beyond 'acceptance'.	The Local Citizen
		Gay Liberationist	Focuses on combating direct and indirect homophobia by identifying and eliminating it. Emphasises the need to acknowledge, protect and support gay and lesbian people as a marginalised group within society. There is an effort to make gay and lesbian issues 'visible' in sexual and other frames.	The Sexual Citizen
		Post-colonial	Redresses the marginalisation of local and Indigenous cultural knowledge through provision of local teachings about sexualities and sexuality frameworks. Can incorporate oral histories, elders, parent-child nights and engaging in traditional activities/ceremonies.	The Ethnic Citizen
<i>Post-modern</i>		Post-structuralist	Teachers and students explore how 'reality' is constituted through language and representation. They de- and co-construct texts about sexuality and gender, and consider how sexual identity plays a central political role in emancipation. Teachers may play 'devil's advocate'.	The Social Construct

(continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Education orientation	Sexuality education discourse	Approach	Child construct
	Post-identity Feminist	Sex is political and serves as a source of both liberation and oppression. Its meaning and experience are shaped by social and cultural differences such as race, gender, social class, and orientation. Gender identity is shaped by cultural institutions, language, media, etc., and is not innate.	The Sexed Social Construct
	Multi-cultural/General Po-mo	Aims to ensure schooling equitably educates culturally diverse populations. Rejects the notion that (sexual) reality can be understood in a singular universal voice. Sexuality education should acknowledge the various heritages of the child, as well as mainstream/'general' sexuality efforts.	The Cultural Subject
	Diversity Education	Sexuality and gender are not limited to a two-sex bi-polarised model. A whole school approach is taken to becoming inclusive for people with diverse sexualities and gender identification, including students, staff and families. Variety is celebrated. Constructions of 'family' are reconsidered.	The Sexual Subject
	Queer	Aims to disrupt/destabilise the structures (sex, gender, orientation) that uphold the illusion of heteronormativity through revealing their performative nature. This can be achieved through deconstruction and (re)creation of texts, including the self or others as texts.	The Sexual Subject

importantly are a key point of differentiation in regards to the orientation of education evidenced in a discourse. The varying constructions of ‘the child’ within each orientation are explained below.

Conservative children: wide-eyed innocents

There are two main constructions of the child at work within the conservative orientation to education. Each is affected by and affects particular conservative sexuality education discourses. Both constructs are in need of adult protection, as the representative of the future line of the *status quo* and thus its current and continued power. However, the particular ways in which the discourse aims to protect children reveal which specific child is at its core/informing the discourses pedagogy. Also, while both are more refined versions of the ‘innocent hetero-normative child-at-risk’ (Angelides 2008), the pre-existence of any levels of innate (hetero, normative or otherwise) sexuality is a point of difference between them. While they arose at different historical points, each one still operates today.

The *Romantic Child* was the first to emerge in modern times:

what historian Anne Higonnet calls the Romantic child – our modern image of a naturally asexual, pure childhood [...] By definition, the Romantic child’s innocence depends on protection from sexuality – shielded from all information and knowledge. (Irvine 2002, 13)

Like an empty vessel, this child is devoid of sexuality (or other concepts) unless ‘filled’ with these by an outside force. This understanding of a child is evidenced in other conservative educational fields (such as mathematics or language) by the pedagogical methods of lecturing, rote memorisation of facts and teacher-centred learning. Adults (such as parents or teachers) and institutions (such as schools, churches, authorities) give (or do not give) the child information; the child is unable to seek, possess or create knowledge on its own. Therefore, by denying the child information on sexuality, adults and institutions can ensure this child will remain ‘pure’ of it. This process is further ensured through censorship of institutional texts (books, media, language), rules and regulations (regarding interaction of the sexes, behaviours, activities, language) and other influences (banning media avenues, specific groups and individuals, etc.). This child informs Non-approach/Anti-sex-ed, Storks and Fairies, and Physical Hygiene Discourses. Each of these is concerned with protecting the Romantic Child from sexuality information and ‘negative’ sexuality influences through the control of information and the use of censorship processes. Nonetheless their ideal treatment of the child and the information given varies. For example, Non-approach/Anti-sex-ed relies on direct censorship through a denial of information from all official sources, while Storks and Fairies favours censorship through information substitution. Martin argues that Hygiene Discourses promote the child as having a dirty, unhygienic, unpredictable body that should be a source of secrecy, shame and management through consumer products (Martin 2004). Thus, the child must be given information about their bodies, although not sexual interaction itself. This information is to aid a form of physical censorship of the sexual. These physical aspects include the body’s smells, emissions and acts such as masturbation.

The *Knowing Child*: Irvine argued that the Romantic Child is giving way to what Higonnet termed the late-twentieth-century emergence of ‘the Knowing Child’: ‘who although both pure and deserving of fierce protection is in possession of a sensual body and complicated emotions’ (Irvine 2002, 14). In this construction, the child has an awareness of sexuality. However, there is a refusal to equate innocence with ignorance; the child is aware of sexual issues and may have sexual desires, yet is still considered ‘pure’. This child

informs Sexual Morality, Physical Hygiene, Biological Science, Abstinence Education and Ex-gay/Christian Redemption Discourses. It is noteworthy that this specific group of discourses all feature what Moran (2000) calls the ‘beastial male’ and the ‘compromisable female’ dichotomy, which can also be substituted with the ‘beastial adult’ and ‘compromisable youth’ – particularly as applied to same-sex and various ‘othered’ sexualities. The child is at risk of corruption, misinformation or even attack by outside influences. The protective tactic here is to explicitly become the main influence and control (or even correct) the nuanced framing of the child’s exposure to sexuality. Furthermore, these discourses attempt to protect this child through direct behavioural guidance, albeit with different foci ranging from moral, physiological and sexual through to sexed/gendered behaviours.

Liberal children: choosy clientele

Within the liberal orientation to education, there are four main constructions of ‘the child’: the Informed Decision-maker, the Sexual Decision-maker, the Developing Sexual Decision-maker and the Gendered Decision-maker. These versions of the child are not so much in dire need of adult protection, although they do have a pre-established protector in the form of the parent or concerned community, who is here understood as a client to the educational institution (Blair and Monk 2009). This protection is financial and legal, with protectors understood as educational ‘consumers’ and accountability to parents expressed through the political rhetoric of ‘consumerism’ (Blair and Monk 2009, 48). The consumer may demand sexuality education provisions, or threaten withdrawal of the child or other action if provision is seen as unsatisfactory. In this sense, they have some power over the information given, and the child represents an extension of this consumer power and has the privilege of choice regarding acceptance or rejection of the tenants of the information provided.

The *Informed Decision-maker*, according to Blair and Monk (2009), is the primary construction within liberal discourses. They argue that policy confirms what researchers Wendy and Rex Stainton Rogers have surmised – in contemporary western countries, child sexuality is understood through two binary constructions: child + sex = abuse (signified in policy where the term ‘child’ is used in relation to sex, where abuse is discussed) and child + sex = adult (signified in policy where the term ‘young people’ is used in relation to the acknowledgment of sexual activity) (Blair and Monk 2009, 47). Where the possibility of abuse is discussed, the aim is to defer to the governance of alternate institutions and clients; but where the possibility of consenting sexual activity within lawful frames occurs, the child is treated as adult-like and prepared to make choices informed and guided by the school and other apparatuses. Particular knowledge is made available to the child to best inform their decision-making process according to varying paradigms of concern – Sexual Risk Discourse individualises broader social concerns about sexually transmissible diseases and even particular epidemics or strains, teen pregnancy and other wider issues; Effective Relationships Discourse individualises broader social concerns about dating patterns, cohabitation, marriage and divorce, family dynamics, and so forth.

The *Sexual Decision-maker* is mobilised in Sexual Liberationist Discourse. Here there is still an emphasis on guidance through the provision of information, but there is an allowance for the sexual nature of the individual and the likelihood that much of their learning will necessarily occur through experience and experimentation beyond what has or could traditionally have been covered in schooling. Here it the child has an internal guide along with whatever outside information is given that will mould their sexual identity and codes. Thus, information generally covers a variety of sexual acts and possibilities, and sexual freedoms and responsibilities.

The *Developing Sexual Decision-maker* is a form of the Sexual Decision-maker understood as undergoing a unique and individually-specific staged developmental pattern on the path to maturity. While this child has an individual physicality and sexuality, and needs particular information on risks and other issues, they are understood as having only a progressive ability to deal with such matters. There is 'age-appropriate' information that should accompany common and agreed conceptions of points in puberty/development. This understanding features in Comprehensive Sex Education, Sexual Readiness, and Controversial Issues/Values Clarification.

The *Gendered Decision-maker* is similar to the other models, except that gender is an important part of identity. This construction is important in Liberal Feminist movements in sexuality education that aim to highlight both the effect of gender on decision-making, and the ways in which gender should not limit possible choices.

Critical children: future citizens

The critical orientation includes several politicised constructions of 'the child' as future citizens: the Sexual Citizen, the Gendered Citizen, the Global Citizen, the Local Citizen and the Ethnic Citizen. These constructs envision youth both as members of society as it currently stands and as creators/inhabitants of future social conditions. This child has particular rights and privileges according to acts, legislations and policies. They can also engage in political activism to build on these rights and affect social change on a variety of levels.

The *Sexual Citizen* represents the future relation of people to the state or governing body through the medium of their sexuality (and related rights and privileges such as marriage, taxation and the labour market). State Socialist/Sexual Politics and Sexual Revolutionary Socialist/Radical Freudian Discourses conceive this child as potentially able to affect change through use of their sexuality on class systems, whilst Gay Liberationist Discourse conceives this child as potentially able to eradicate state and social homophobia and promote the right to and practice of alternative sexual lifestyles.

The *Gendered Citizen* of Radical Feminist Discourse is a child strongly affected by their sexed body and gendered identity. This child has potential to carve out political spaces for females and protect and enhance the role of women in society – which is seen as necessarily distinct from male roles (unlike in liberal feminism), but still ideally equitable.

The *Global Citizen* of Anti-Discrimination Discourse has particular rights attributed to them in international politics, particularly the 'human rights' outlined in the various charters recognised by the United Nations. This child must not be discriminated against and is similarly bound to observe and promote the rights of others not to be discriminated against.

The *Local Citizen* of Inclusive/Safe and Supportive Discourse similarly has particular rights, but these must be observed in a more site-specific community-oriented manner. Action affected by this child is also ideally pitched at a more local level, to create particular utopic spaces.

The *Ethnic Citizen* central to Post-colonial Discourse has particular ethnic and cultural heritages that must be catered to, to varying degrees. If the child is a member of a marginalised indigenous group they may have particular needs in order to be treated equitably.

Post-modern children: partial subjects

Within the post-modern orientation to education, there are four key constructions of 'the child'. These are understood as inhabiting varying subjectivity points: the Social Construct,

the Sexed Social Construct, the Cultural Subject, and the Sexual Subject. They include Post-structuralist, Post-identity Feminist, Multicultural Education, Diversity Education and Queer Theory.

The *Social Construct* of Post-structuralist Discourse is an overtly constructed child, whose identity is a communal creation without stable or unified meaning. The ‘identity’ of this child should ‘never be affirmed in an uncritical, unreflective manner’ (Carlson 2005, 637). This child is created in, of and for social phenomena. It is explicitly rhetorical and not seen as ‘real’, yet its use affects lived experience. It is constructed by such representational building blocks as words, images, clothing, cultural artefacts, concepts, beliefs and assumptions, texts, interactions and power dynamics, contexts and other meaningful aspects of the social realm. The word construct is used here as this child is mainly seen in terms of its creation within texts, and its components are often deconstructed for the purpose of further analysis.

The *Sexed Social Construct* of Post-identity Feminist Discourse is the latter construct with a sexed body that affects its positioning and assertion of identity in the social order. For example, the construction of female or male youth in a particular social text, interaction or cultural artefact may be explored, including their positioning in power dynamics in relation to sex, race and ethnicity, their role in terms of consumer culture or gender performance, and so forth. The word construct is again used here as this child is mainly used in analysis and deconstruction, or may be (re)constructed within the social fabric for particular ends.

The *Cultural Subject* of Multicultural Education is formed from multiple cultural understandings, including understandings within their own cultural heritage and within their current historio-cultural context. Subjectivity points of nationality, ethnic background, cultural background and appearance are negotiated in complex and changing ways. Different aspects of ‘identity’ may be inhabited and ‘lived out’ at different points or simultaneously. The individual child is de-centred in an anti-humanist fashion, and seen as a consequence of impersonal social systems (Leitch et al. 2001, 20). They neither originate nor control the conventions of their social existence, mental life or construction within language, and are ‘subject to’ these structures. But they do have an element of personal agency and can activate different subject positions (different versions of ‘I’ or the self in language and understanding) at different times and can move between/activate cultural understandings of self. Thus, the word subject is used here to suggest both a reliance on cultural systems and languages and the possibility of personal agency within them.

The *Sexual Subject* of Queer Theory and Diversity Education is similarly an overtly constructed child, whose ‘sexual identity’ is similarly fluid, fractured and problematic. However, in Diversity Education, understandings of how ‘real’ or essential identity is to the body fluctuate. In Queer Theory, identity can be asserted (e.g. as ‘Queer’) in sufficiently problematised ways to achieve political, deconstructive and co-creative ends (Carlson 2005, 637). It can also be understood as ‘performative’ (Butler 1990) – a complex interweaving of socially constructed, performed, agentic and experienced as ‘the real’. This child can inhabit and move between sexual identities and cultures, although it is also ‘subject to’ them to a certain extent. Because of the possibilities of personal agency within and between sexual systems, this child is understood as a ‘subject’ rather than just a construct.

Throwing out the rhetorical baby

The rhetorical ‘children’ listed above are sometimes viewed as ‘real’ and in need of being ‘saved’ through various approaches to sexuality education or non-education, according to

the discourse being mobilised. They are also sometimes viewed strategically as necessary points in the political field from which discourses can emerge, to form arguments and affect sexuality education policy. However, they stand in for a much broader range of 'actual' youth whose diverse needs are often overlooked. For example, Robinson (2002) found that constructions of childhood can limit provision of sexuality education, based on her study of 49 early childhood educators in Sydney, Australia and their perceptions, policies and practices operating around issues of diversity and difference. She found that the dominant discourses of childhood and sexuality which prevailed amongst the participants were what this paper would term 'conservative' in orientation. This correlated with a perception that gay and lesbian discrimination and equity issues are irrelevant to children:

Only a quarter of the participants in this research considered that it was important for children to understand sexuality, including their own sexual development. [...] there is a concept of keeping children 'innocent'. (Robinson 2002, 417–8)

Sexually diverse and marginalised youth are overlooked in many constructions of the child, particularly those of a conservative or liberal orientation.

Furthermore, the particular interests of 'real students' can also be disregarded. For example, the top five issues young people identified in a survey of senior school students' suggestions for sexuality education content counter traditional notions of 'appropriate' programme content (Allen 2007, 164). The most frequently requested item was 'how to make sexual activity enjoyable for both partners', which mobilises a discourse of desire and pleasure typically 'missing' from sexuality education. Other issues were dealing with relationship break-ups, and understanding the emotions in relationships. Related focus groups also identified a greater need for content on homosexuality and homophobia.

Education researchers, policy-makers, schools and staff need to watch they do not throw out the 'actual child' with the rhetorical bathwater when engaging in policy debates and sexuality education implementation. This paper joins other sexuality education researchers in highlighting the need to listen to children's voices in this field (Allen 2007; Halstead and Reiss 2003). The rhetorical child should not stand in for 'real' students in debates about sexuality education. Where they do, this partial understanding of students must be made explicit, if any serious inquiry with the usefulness of particular education discourses is to take place.

Notes

1. Here an 'exemplar' refers to an archetypal classification system, identifying conceptual paradigms at the core of the sexuality education discourses.
2. Same-sex-attracted youth have feelings of attraction towards people of the same sex, and may be considered 'bisexual', 'gay/lesbian', 'homosexual', 'queer' or a variety of other identities in different discourses where such feelings are recognised, although some consider themselves primarily 'heterosexual'. Gender-diverse youth may engage in or possess a variety of sexed body and gender expressions beyond female femininity and male masculinity, and may be considered 'transgender', 'transsexual', 'drag queen/king', 'tomboy/effeminate', 'intersex', 'queer' or a variety of other identities in different discourses, if such identities manifest at all.
3. To clarify: this article certainly supports Fairclough's notion of discourse as comprising text, interaction and context (1989, 25). It thus recognises the general influence of media and other social phenomena on policy documents, and how general sexuality discourses may be indirectly negated, reflected on, analysed or deconstructed within an official sexuality education approach. However, to retain the value of the discourse exemplar in analysis of education policy documents, programmes and practices, specific sexuality discourses that are not explicitly supported or negated in sexuality policy and do not comprise a recognised pedagogical approach are excluded.

For example, Pimpin' Hoochies Discourse is found in rap videos and sexual and even playground interactions, but is not a policy-supported discourse that comprises classroom methods. Similarly, Playboys and Bunnies Discourse saturates certain parts of the media (porn, magazines, television shows), clothing and various social phenomena. But the notion of female sexuality as essentially rabbit-like and available to elderly, pyjama-clad, millionaire polygamist males in exchange for financial support is not directly mobilised in policy documents, and does not align with a classroom approach. Additionally, a student may learn about sexuality through experiencing an actual sexual act with a student or even a staff member whilst on school grounds, but this is not an official academic method. Yet official discursive approaches found within the exemplar (such as Sexual Morality, Sexual Risk or Post-structuralist Discourses) *may* explore such contextual discourses through their various lenses, or be adopted in response to them.

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