‘You need to have some guts to teach’: Teacher preparation and characteristics for the teaching of sexuality and HIV/AIDS education in South African schools

Dennis A. Francis\textsuperscript{a}\textsuperscript{*}, Renée DePalma\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}PhD, is a Professor in School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, Email: dennisafrancis@gmail.com
\textsuperscript{b}PhD, is an Associate Professor in Facultade de Ciencias da Educación at the University of A Coruña, A Coruña, Spain

Abstract

Using in-depth interviews, we asked sexuality educators in South Africa about their own professional preparation and what they believed were necessary educator characteristics for teaching Sexuality Education. Our findings show that our teachers taught Sexuality Education without any appropriate qualification or preparation, but because they had a lighter teaching load and had room to take on more teaching hours. Nevertheless, they all mention that ‘not anybody can teach Sexuality Education’. Drawing on Shulman’s taxonomy of knowledge and Freire’s concept of critical consciousness, we attempt to make meaning of the teachers’ responses and their relevance for the teaching of Sexuality Education.

Keywords: sexuality education, critical consciousness, content pedagogical knowledge, South Africa

1. Introduction

Concerns about high HIV prevalence and other sexually transmitted diseases among 15–24-year olds (Khoza 2004; Shisana et al. 2009; UNAIDS 2012), the dropping age of sexual debut (Bhana 2009; Hartnell 2005; Jewkes, Levin, Mbananga & Bradshaw 2002; Manzini 2001; Richter 1996; Shisana et al. 2009), an increase in incidence of sexual violence in South Africa (Abrahams, Jewkes, Martin, Mathews, Vetten & Lombard 2009; Jewkes et al. 2002) and the persistent high rates of teenage pregnancies and disease. The high HIV prevalence rate, the dropping age of sexual debut, high rates of teenage pregnancies, and an increase in sexual violence are all linked to structural factors such as poverty (Campbell & MacPhail 2002), migration (Lurie, Harrison, Wilkinson & Karim 1997; Zuma, Gouws, Williams & Lurie 2003) and gender inequalities (Campbell & MacPhail 2002; DePalma & Francis 2014c; Moletsane, Morrell, Unterhalter & Epstein 2002; Morrell 2003).

Globally, many people view sexuality and HIV education programmes as a partial solution to these problems (Kirby, Laris & Rorelli 2007). Virtually all young people attend school before engaging in sexual intercourse, and this makes schools well-placed intervention sites in the context of HIV and AIDS (Badcock 2002; Francis 2010; Kirby 2008). Giami, Ohrlichs, Quilliam, Wellings, Pacey & Wylie (2006:486) add that schools, as a site for sex education whilst in some contexts may be less than
ideal, are the best available option. In South Africa, schools have become important intervention sites in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Francis 2010, 2011). In 1997, the Department of Education introduced Life Orientation (LO) as part of curriculum 2005. The subject LO is taught in all public schools in South Africa and is compulsory for all learners (Department of Basic Education 2011:8). LO draws on the core content of subjects previously known as Guidance, Family Guidance, Vocational Guidance, Religious/Bible Education, Civic Education, Health Education and Physical Education (Department of Basic Education 2008:8). According to the National Curriculum Statement Grades 10–12, the learning area LO concerns itself with the ‘personal, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, motor, and physical growth and development of the learners, and the way in which these dimensions are interrelated and expressed in life’ (Department of Education 2002:9). Primarily, LO intends to teach learners knowledge, skills and values to make informed decisions in their lives. This intention is reinforced in the National Curriculum Statement and Assessment Policy Statement: Further Education and Training Phase Grades 10–12 – Life Orientation, which emphasises the importance of the ‘application of skills and values in real-life situations’ (Department of Education 2011:8).

Despite the good intentions of the Ministry of Education in integrating sexuality and HIV/AIDS education in the school curriculum, questions have been raised about the preparation of teachers to deliver Sexuality Education (Rugalama & Khanye 2002). Many researchers (Baxen 2008; Francis 2011; Helleve, Flisher, Onya, Mükoma & Klepp 2011; Rooth 2005) have pointed out that, in the majority of South African schools, LO teachers lack uniformity of training and come from a diverse range of fields that do not always adequately equip them to deliver Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education confidently and effectively. LO teachers have diverse professional preparation backgrounds, including Guidance, Religious Education, Physical Education, Home Economics, languages and the social sciences (Francis 2011, 2012b; Rooth 2005).

Many of the teachers are assigned the responsibility to teach LO when they are short of a full teaching load, or, in some instances, they may volunteer for the job (Baxen 2008; Francis 2012a; Francis & DePalma 2013). Teacher confidence in this area depends on his/her level of knowledge on the topics, attendance at workshops, personal comfort with the topic, clarity regarding the messages being communicated, a belief in what was being taught and support from colleagues (Ahmed, Flisher, Mathews, Mukoma & Jansen 2009; Baxen 2008, 2010; DePalma & Francis 2014a, 2014b; Francis 2013; Francis & DePalma 2013). These are strongly related to teachers’ content and pedagogical knowledge and experience, which are low due to LO being a new learning area.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws on two interrelated constructs: Shulman’s (1987) taxonomy of knowledge and Freire’s notion of critical consciousness. In combination, these perspectives promote an approach to understanding what teachers need to know and do in the Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education classroom. Shulman (1987:8) has been instrumental in producing scholarship that describes the ‘blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners’ and presented for teaching. He organises knowledge for teaching by emphasising deep content knowledge, curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. This organisation highlights the important role of content knowledge, and positions content knowledge in the broader landscape of professional knowledge for teachers. In other words, Shulman (1987:8) emphasises the criticality of pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of subject matter that is uniquely tied to the demands of teaching; ‘pedagogical content knowledge is the category most likely to distinguish the understanding of the content specialist from that of the pedagogue’. Simply, Shulman’s thesis describes pedagogical content knowledge as knowledge about making content accessible. In this instance, three points are worth making with reference to Sexuality Education.

To address this third point, we turn to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s notion of critical consciousness. Freire links teaching and learning to broader societal issues and encouraging critical reflection rather than the simple dissemination of information implied by Shulman’s scheme. Freire (1972) argues that crucial to developing consciousness is the need to question a prior knowledge or understandings of the social context. The process of critical consciousness, through an analysis of power relationships and its underlying values, has the potential to shift people’s self-perception so that they perceive themselves as agents rather than passive recipients and recognise their capacity to transform their reality (Freire 1970).

In terms of our own focus, this would involve some kind of engagement in the ways that poverty and gender inequality contribute to early sexual debut or high rates of teenage pregnancies. Therefore, the preparation of teachers with strong pedagogical content knowledge and the development of a critical consciousness would be considered key characteristics for successful teaching in Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education. Freire’s work (1970, 1972) complements Shulman’s thesis on pedagogical content knowledge through ‘conscientization’, where learners come to realise the societal realities that shape their lives and their capacity to transform those realities. The role of the sexuality and HIV/AIDS teacher is a critical one. She needs to have a solid grasp of the content and pedagogical knowledge and a critical stance to bring about social change. Hence, there is a need for research to explore the preparation of sexuality and HIV/AIDS educators and what teachers understand as necessary educator characteristics for the teaching of Sexuality Education.
Our article is designed as follows. We begin with a discussion of a selective literature on the characteristics for the teaching of Sexuality Education. We then describe the methodological approach, followed by the findings and an analysis of the data. The article concludes with some implications for in- and pre-service teacher education.

3. What qualities do sexuality and HIV/AIDS educators need?
In their article Can any teacher teach sexuality and HIV/AIDS? Helleve et al. (2011) found that teachers considered characteristics such as personality, life experience, being comfortable with their own sexuality and their ability to maintain discipline in the classroom important when teaching sexuality and HIV/AIDS education. Participants also expressed that in the teaching of LO, they took on roles such as that of being a friend, parent, counsellor or social worker for the students.

Similarly, in a study exploring what qualities Australian sexuality teachers value, Milton, Berne, Peppard, Patton, Hunt & Wight (2001) found that, in addition to being trained in the content and methodologies of Sexuality Education, teachers report a range of interrelated qualities that they value, including being non-judgemental, being trustworthy, being open and honest, being a good listener, having a sense of humour, establishing relationships/having rapport with the students, being comfortable with their own sexuality, respecting students’ rights to choices/decisions and being flexible.

In Kontula’s (2010) study in Finland, the level of students’ sexual knowledge was promoted positively by teachers who were natural and tolerant towards sexuality, found sexual issues easy to talk about and told students something of their own personal life. In sum, teacher knowledge, comfort and tolerance appear to be the key characteristics that encourage the kind of sex education that helps students to understand and adapt the education to their own lives.

In Allen’s (2009:42–43) study that explored who young people thought make the best sexuality educators and why, ‘being knowledgeable’ was the most commonly cited, closely followed by being ‘able to relate to young people’ and reference to characteristics linked with an educator’s ‘professionalism’. An educator being ‘knowledgeable’ referred to teachers who ‘are experienced and have knowledge of the topic at hand’, whereas a teacher’s professionalism was understood as ‘because they are trained’. Training appeared to be valued, because it increased the likelihood that educators would be knowledgeable. Allen (2009) goes on to explain that teaching Sexuality Education necessitates more than a comprehensive grasp of curriculum content and the ability to communicate this to students. Aligned with remarks about the qualities of being ‘knowledgeable’ were references to the value of educators who were experienced in dealing with sexuality issues. These remarks tended to relate to personal rather than teaching experience, although this was also mentioned. In the study, students regarded personal experience as lending integrity to the teaching of Sexuality Education. Such responses by students reveal the value participants placed on experience: personal stories can add meaning to seemingly intangible concepts such as HIV/AIDS or unexpected pregnancy.

Many of the characteristics identified in the literature review, including teachers being good listeners, being able to relate to youth, being open and honest, having a sense of humour and being knowledgeable and professional, are qualities all teachers should possess, regardless of the subject area they are teaching. Characteristics such as acting as a friend, or parent, and having personal experience and personal stories may be specific to what students and teachers in the sexuality and relationship education subject area regard as more necessary. It is interesting to note that the literature reveals that teachers and young people value content and pedagogical knowledge as critical characteristics, neither of which was mentioned by the teachers in the South African study conducted by Helleve et al. (2011). This may be due to the lack of formal training of South African teachers in the LO learning area, many of whom were respondents in the study. The studies cited above are also silent on teachers’ lived experience as the impetus for developing a critical consciousness directed at social change (Baxen 2008). The literature raises further questions: Does being knowledgeable include being prepared on sexuality pedagogical content and being able to draw upon personal experience, as Allen’s study suggests? In other words, does teaching Sexuality Education necessitate more than a comprehensive grasp of curriculum and pedagogical content knowledge and the ability to communicate this to students? (Allen 2009; Baxen 2010; Kehily 2002).

4. Research design
Our qualitative study is based on the view that ‘reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds’ (Merriam 1998:6). This article draws on a larger research project that examined how teachers teach Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education. The site for the study was the Free State province, the third largest of nine provinces in South Africa and home to 5.3% of the South African population (Census 2012).

4.1. Sample
The 25 teachers who participated in this study were teaching Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education, within LO, to Grades 10 and 11, for at least a year (see Table 1: Participant profiles, for a description of the teachers in terms of age, race, gender and professional training and experience). The schools where the teachers taught represented different contexts in terms of poverty quintiles, and a variety of urban and rural, state and private schools. Only one of the 25 teachers had any formal preparation for teaching LO, an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in LO, a two-year part-time certificate course aimed at improving the ‘theoretical understanding and professional practice of educators in Life Orientation’. Nevertheless, this one teacher, Matela, mentioned that the certificate course included credits in ‘personal well-being, responsible citizenship, recreation and physical well-being and career choices’, but did not include a ‘module on sexuality and HIV/AIDS education’. Therefore, none of the teachers in our sample had received any formal training specifically related to sexuality education. This teacher was the only one out of 25 participants who had been assigned directly to teach LO. As is evident in Table 1, the other 24 teachers in our study had
taught diverse subject areas such as Maths, English, Geography, Consumer Science or Biblical Studies before being assigned to teach LO.

4.2. Data collection

Data collection consisted of 25 open-ended in-depth interviews with LO teachers, which were collected during the 2012 school year. For this article, we focus on teacher’s professional preparation to teach and what they believed were necessary educator characteristics for teaching Sexuality Education. We asked the following important questions, among many others:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What did you study at university?
3. When you left university, what did you teach?

Table 1. Participant profiles.

| No. | Participant | Age | Race | Gender | Degree qualification | Years teaching | Years teaching LO | Subjects taught before LO |
|-----|-------------|-----|------|--------|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1   | Michael    | 45  | African | M     | BA UED               | 20            | 6                 | History, English          |
| 2   | Lorene     | 47  | White  | F     | BA UED Hons (Educational Psychology) | 25            | 18                | Life science              |
| 3   | Bernadette | 51  | White  | F     | BCom PGCE           | 29            | 5                 | Business education, economics |
| 4   | Annette    | 38  | White  | F     | BA Hons (Psychology) PGCE | 16            | 9                 | Afrikaans, English        |
| 5   | Willem     | 27  | White  | M     | BSC PGCE            | 3             | 2                 | Maths                     |
| 6   | Elzabe     | 28  | White  | F     | BA PGCE             | 6             | 2                 | Maths                     |
| 7   | Joseph     | 43  | African | M     | BA HED              | 15            | 3                 | Sotho, English            |
| 8   | Matela     | 43  | African | F     | BA UED ACE (LO)     | 12            | 9                 | LO                        |
| 9   | Lindiwe    | 28  | African | F     | NDip Sports Management, PGCE | 4             | 3                 | Physical education        |
| 10  | Sandra     | 40  | Coloured | F    | BA HDE Hons (Education Psychology) | 13            | 13                | Afrikaans                 |
| 11  | Kabelo     | 54  | African | M     | BA HDE Hons (Educational Psychology) ACE | 26            | 9                 | English, Life Science     |
| 12  | Thlohlholo | 43  | African | F     | Dip Education UED FDE (Guidance) | 19            | 12                | Geography, English        |
| 13  | Gerda      | 35  | White  | F     | BA HDE              | 7             | 7                 | Home Economics, Life Science |
| 14  | Fuzile     | 39  | African | F     | BA PGCE Honours Guidance | 13            | 9                 | Tshwana                   |
| 15  | Pienkie    | 57  | White  | F     | BSC Consumer Science UED | 33            | 33/1               | Consumer Science          |
| 16  | Dirk       | 57  | White  | M     | BA UED              | 33            | 6                 | Geography                 |
| 17  | Esne       | 55  | White  | F     | BA PGCE             | 20            | 14                | History, Geography, Afrikaans |
| 18  | Minette    | 39  | White  | F     | BA HDE              | 12            | 6                 | English, Social Science   |
| 19  | Annelize   | 42  | White  | F     | BA HDE              | 21            | 10                | Consumer studies, ESL, Geography Physical Education |
| 20  | Cyril      | 48  | African | M     | BA HDE              | 19            | 5                 | Guidance, Accountancy, HSS |
| 21  | Charlene   | 26  | Coloured | F    | BA HDE              | 3             | 3                 | History Afrikaans         |
| 22  | Truda      | 43  | Coloured | F    | B Nursing PGCE      | 1             | 1                 | Life Science              |
| 23  | Tapello    | 54  | African | M     | Dip Education UED   | 30            | 16                | Guidance, Biblical Studies |
| 24  | Lukas      | 29  | African | M     | B. ED               | 3             | 2                 | Economic Science          |
| 25  | Ledimo     | 36  | African | M     | B A PGCE            | 7             | 5                 | English Economics         |
4.3. Ethics
The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, University of the Free State. Participation was voluntary. Consent was obtained from all participants and confidentiality and anonymity were stressed and maintained throughout the study; we refer to teachers only by their initials to help assure anonymity. Participants were provided with a transcript of their interview and invited to provide feedback; none did.

4.4. Analysis
The purpose of the analysis is to offer an understanding about teachers’ professional preparation to teach and what they believe are the necessary educator characteristics for teaching Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education. We conducted thematic analysis rather than frequency counts. Data collection and analysis often take place simultaneously (Merriam 1998). For us, data analysis occurred in different stages. Firstly, collecting data and analysis (Merriam 1998) and, secondly, classification and coding (Coffey & Atkinson 1996). During this second stage, each transcript was coded based upon what the teachers said or elaborated on in response to their preparation and the characteristics they thought were critical for the sexuality educator. All interviews were then coded for within- and cross-case themes (see Merriam 1998). Teachers’ spoken comments as they appear here have been lightly edited to assure comprehension and to conform to written grammar and style norms.

5. Findings
The findings are discussed under three headings, namely pedagogical content knowledge, not anybody can teach Sexuality Education and critical consciousness.

5.1. Pedagogical content knowledge – ‘it’s all about the preparation’
The findings of our study show that only one of the 25 teachers received formal education in teaching Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education. Interviews were conducted in the classroom, school office, or at the university meeting room or office and lasted between 50 and 90 minutes.

Our interviews allowed us to gain insight into our teachers’ preparation, thoughts, experiences, and motivations on the teaching of Sexuality Education. Interviews were conducted in the classroom, school office, or at the university meeting room or office and lasted between 50 and 90 minutes.

‘Teachers’ lack of and need for sexuality content knowledge resonated throughout the data, as Elzabe and Esne articulate:

Elzabe: Complete lesson plans saying what the content is . . .
Probably the fact that I don’t have all the resources available; that I don’t understand all the concepts completely; that I have a background that is very conservative. Clear knowledge . . . a book, a very good textbook would be very useful

Esne: I think the content is very important. You need to tell them ‘This is actually what is going to happen to your body’

Likewise, Gerda emphasises the critical need for teacher training and content knowledge with a clear framework for teaching.

Researcher: What would make teaching it easier?

Gerda: I think more information in the textbooks, or . . . maybe training. Like I say, I’m studying now and none of my subjects, out of the five, deals with sexuality at all. And I think more information, better training . . . And we do not have anything like that at this stage.

Researcher: So not having a guideline makes it difficult?

Gerda: Most definitely.

Throughout the data set, teachers articulated a crucial need for a curriculum, something to provide them with a real foundation for teaching. Without an explicit curriculum framework, there are uncertain teaching contexts, as both Gerda and Lindiwe describe:

Gerda: I was teaching a Life Orientation class on STDs. And it happened to be at the time of my IQMS2 and the deputy principal came into my classroom to do an evaluation. And after being in the lesson for a few minutes, on STDs, he said that he was feeling uncomfortable and he left the classroom. And afterwards he just told me that, because of his religion, he was uncomfortable with talking about STDs. So he wasn’t going to evaluate me on that lesson and rather came back and evaluated me once I had finished that section of the syllabus. Can you believe that?

Lindiwe: For example, with these class visits that we get from our HODs,2 when that day I’ve been busy with the syllabus that I’m doing: Sex and sexuality. But then that specific day that she comes, or he comes, I’m going to stop automatically and then carry on with something, you know, that we were not busy with. If the management have an overview of the syllabus, they’re also not going to be embarrassed, or not going to be amazed: She’s teaching kids these things because the kids need to know it and it is in the syllabus! So I think they need that overview of the lessons as much as we as LO teachers.

Both of these teachers argue that content knowledge specifically relevant to sexuality and HIV/AIDS education is lacking not only for themselves as LO teachers, but also for their supervisors, who without this knowledge cannot support them in their
teaching. Where is the policy or curriculum framework that both Gerda and Lindiwe might use to defend and justify their content and practice? There is no curriculum framework to guide or justify teaching about sexuality.

To compensate for the lack of content and pedagogical knowledge, many of the teachers mentioned creating an environment in which the learners determine the curriculum. Thus, the issues are raised spontaneously and impulsively, as can be noted in Bernadette’s warning above that teachers must be ‘prepared for traps that might come and remarks’. Teachers such as Michael and Annette seem to offset the lack of a concrete teaching framework and practices with tactics such as ‘letting the ideas come from the learners’, or ‘I threw it back at the learner’ employing open discussions or drawing on their personal narratives.

Shulman (1987) argues that all teaching is grounded on a content knowledge base that influences and supports pedagogical choices. Considering that all of the 25 teachers taught Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education without any appropriate content preparation, but because they had a lighter teaching load and could take on more teaching hours, without training teachers are simply not prepared with the necessary content or pedagogical knowledge, as outlined by Shulman. We question whether Mathematics or Geography teachers would so easily be assigned to teach Biology? As Elzabe describes it, LO is viewed as a ‘wishy-washy’ subject area with no real content.

5.2. Not anybody can teach sexuality and HIV/AIDS education

We asked our teachers whether anyone could teach Sexuality Education. It is interesting to note that they all mentioned that ‘not anybody can teach Sexuality Education’, despite having come from other teaching subjects and without formal preparation:

Lorene: No, definitely not. From experience, our previous principals tried to get other teachers with other expertise into the subject. The proof is, after the first year when they teach, when they taught life orientation they never want to do that subject again. They realize they are not competent to do that. That’s proof.

Teachers tended to argue, like Lorene, that teachers had to have certain competencies in order to teach LO, but they also tended to express these in terms of personal characteristics and mindsets rather than in terms of training and specific content knowledge:

Thloholohe: I don’t think anybody can teach that. It’s quite a very . . . It’s actually sensitive, especially when it comes to this particular topic. Yes. So you need to be open to the learners, because some teachers will not open up to their learners. They don’t tell everything, you see? They will try to avoid some of the topics, you see? So you need to be open, talk about it to the learners, and also give learners a chance to talk, because they have a lot of information sometimes maybe more than you have.

Notwithstanding how the 25 teachers perceived themselves, the schools did not notice anything special about these teachers and, in fact, viewed them as the ‘anybody’ who can teach LO, as Lorene notes, ‘it’s sad especially because the principals still have this idea anybody can teach life orientation’. Teachers draw on a number of strategies to position themselves as different from the ‘anybody’, as Thloholohe does, ‘You need some guts to teach.’ We discuss three of these strategies.

Firstly, teachers draw on bits of information from their previous teaching subjects such as Afrikaans, Business Education, Consumer Science and Psychology to make connections to and justify their competence to teach Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education. However, these are not substantial, as they have no real foundation. For example, Esne mentions that she uses her psychology training to help her learn to accommodate issues that conflict with her conservative values. Pienkie draws on her knowledge of consumer studies: ‘I put my Life Orientation skills, as I know it from life, in my Consumer Studies. I make time for that.’ Other teachers such as Kabelo use Psychology as a way to validate their competence, ‘I have a degree in psychology, so I know what I’m talking about’. However, these and other similar claims were never substantiated with evidence, however anecdotal, that this previous experience actually provided an intellectual framework for LO.

Secondly, the teachers construct themselves as ‘confidants’ or ‘counsellors’ and conceptualise Sexuality Education more as therapy than about learning, as Charlene describes:

Most of the subjects have a lack of teaching children experience about life. And then, in Life Orientation, you . . . talk about life problems and the children are more open to you. And you help them more. In most cases the children tend to open up and then, the subjects where they struggle, they come to you, they talk about it. You go to the teachers, you ask the teachers, ‘Listen, isn’t there anything else you can do to help this child?’ Also you’re the psychologist type of thing. And the children learn to respect you.

Teachers believe that they are special because of the kind of relationship they are able to construct with the learners. In many ways, we thought that this is a positive aspect, as teachers have decided to care and be open and honest with the learners. They want to make it work; as teachers Elzabe and Charlene claim, ‘I have a passion.’

Thirdly, several of the participants draw on their identities as parents and seemed to view their own parenting experiences as a kind of training for teaching about sexuality, as Thloholohe describes:

They were amazed and they actually asked me, ‘Mam, how do you know that? How do you know that boys experience one, two, three?’ Because I’m not a boy. So they’re wondering. And I tell them, ‘I have children who are boys.’ So that lesson really opened their eyes, because they realized that we know everything that is happening to them . . . . The boys would laugh when we talked about the wet dreams. They would laugh and ask, ‘How do you know?’
Critical consciousness

Freire’s (1972) notion of critical consciousness lies in his insistence that schooling can be used for change and that through education, students come to understand social systems of oppression and equip themselves to act to change those situations. Across the interviews, majority of the teachers characterised the LO teacher as someone who works for social change by questioning the status quo rather than accepting it as given. For instance, Michael talks about the LO teacher being a change agent in transforming society: ‘The LO teacher must be a change agent and he must change the learners to change their lives by asking questions. That is what I was saying to my colleagues, that if we need to ask the hard questions and everyone was playing his role, all the problems would be solved.’ Similarly, Cyril talks about the LO teacher challenging oppression, sexism specifically: ‘There are still those, and I can believe that they are like that, because they are brought up in a home with a patriarchal pattern. The father is in charge . . . A boy is a boy. A girl is a girl. These things are wrong and it must change.’ However, lack of confidence and as Michael puts it ‘if all teachers were trained properly’ detracts from their goal of changing society. In developing special relationships with the students, several teachers spoke confidently about telling their learners or creating classroom guidelines that stressed, as Joseph describes, ‘whatever is discussed in the class stays right there’ or, as Lindive puts it, ‘what goes on in the classroom stays in the classroom’. There is an interesting emphasis on boundaries of who is in and who is out, or what information stays in and what can go out. We can understand these boundaries broadly in that our teachers, without a comprehensive knowledge of the content, fear crossing a line, saying the wrong thing or giving out information that they should not do. For example, one of the teachers, Elzabe, mentioned, ‘I’m not a biology teacher and so I don’t know the ins and outs about stuff like that.’ When we asked whether parents reacted to the Sexuality Education lessons, Elzabe continued, ‘Maybe I am telling them too much. Maybe we’re not supposed to talk about that. I am scared about what parents might say, what this teacher is teaching them about at school,’ and another teacher, in response to the same question, stated with relief, ‘No news is good news’ in fear of a negative parent response. However, by creating such boundaries, how do the discussions on Sexuality Education go beyond the classroom to foster a critical awareness and consciousness of the self and others (sexual partners, friends, siblings and parents) with a commitment to address issues such as safe sex, same-sex relationships, and so on? How will the learner’s self-awareness shift so that they perceive themselves as agents rather than passive recipients (Freire 1970). Equally important, by setting up such boundaries to containing sexuality teaching and learning to the classroom, teachers limit their possibilities for any involvement in any kind of community of practice.

6. Discussion

A successful sexuality and HIV/AIDS education programme has to begin with an understanding of the necessary educator characteristics as a prelude to identifying where the levers of change may lie. As agents, teachers are crucial to the success of Sexuality Education, as they have the potential to make significant contributions to the lives of learners through developing a critical consciousness – the raising of awareness and enabling them to recognise their capacity to transform their social realities. Knowing what makes an effective Sexuality Education teacher is important for developing opportunities for continued learning and professional development. In our discussion, we take on three key points that speak directly to our research questions.

Firstly, Shulman (1987:104) posits that teachers need to first comprehend the content knowledge before they can transform this content into a pedagogically reasoned ‘plan or set of strategies to present a lesson’. The LO teachers lacked uniformity of training. They came from a diverse range of fields, which did not always adequately equip them to deliver Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education confidently and effectively. The teachers in our sample lacked Sexuality Education content knowledge, and reflect a common situation identified by Francis (2010, 2012a) and Baxen (2008) where teachers with varied qualifications and backgrounds were co-opted into teaching LO. Drawing on Shulman’s taxonomy of knowledge, there is a critical need to review pre- and in-service LO teacher education and to examine more specifically how teachers are prepared with sexuality pedagogical and content knowledge.

The expectation that LO teachers, within South Africa, will have sufficient pre- or in-service training in Sexuality Education is perhaps unrealistic. The sexuality and HIV/AIDS teacher’s willingness and ability to draw on his/her personal narratives is useful, needed and does add value to the teaching and learning of Sexuality Education. This personal knowledge can be positively utilised and developed through alternate routes of certification or continuing education programmes. In doing this, we understand that not everyone will have certain kinds of life experiences (not everyone will have been a parent, for example), but the idea is to help teachers understand how to draw upon whatever kinds of personal and social experiences they have, as everyone will have family and social relationships of some kind. Such programmes can develop teachers’ self-reflexivity where they acknowledge their own socialisation, understand themselves as sexual beings and review their values and beliefs, and how this relates to what and how they teach in the Sexuality Education classroom. Freire (1970) referred to this as praxis, or the blend of reflection and social action that causes a group to move from reflection to action and back to reflection.

Secondly, in identifying essential characteristics, our teachers mentioned being open, having life experience, being passionate about the subject, being a good listener, having good content and pedagogical knowledge, having sense of humour and
maintaining trusting relationships with learners. In fact, the characteristics mentioned are no different from those mentioned in the literature earlier. For us, what is useful and worth building on is the roles the teachers so willingly took on despite coming from a range of subject areas, often completely unrelated to Sexuality Education. Our participants spoke about being a ‘friend’, ‘parent’, ‘counsellor’ or ‘social worker’ to the learner. In addition, they draw upon their own life experiences to compensate for actual professional training and development. We would like to labour this point still further, as it has a key implication for research on teacher characteristics in that it extends the all-important question of whether pedagogical content knowledge is sufficient for teaching Sexuality Education. We suggest that, for sexuality educators, a particular blend of content and pedagogical content involves an ability to draw on one’s own personal and social experience in ways that engage students.

Furthermore, in light of the characteristics our teachers named, it may be useful to adopt a self-evaluation process for potential teachers considered or ‘chosen’ to teach Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education. Our findings show that characteristics such as openness, trustworthiness and personal experience are necessary characteristics for teaching Sexuality Education. In all of this we are not suggesting that teachers need to ‘disclose’ personal information in the classroom as part of their teaching (in fact, several teachers were particularly reticent to do that), but that these experiences can inform teacher practice without forming part of the explicitly taught curriculum. A self-evaluation process for potential teachers would be useful to establish whether they are able to contribute this aspect to their teaching.

Finally, we view sexuality and HIV education programmes as a powerful tool for addressing the high HIV prevalence and other sexually transmitted diseases, the dropping age of sexual debut, high teenage pregnancy rates and increase in the incidence of sexual violence in South Africa. We also view these concerns as inextricably linked to structural factors such as poverty, migration and gender inequalities. In all of this, we cannot underestimate the critical role played by Sexuality Education teachers. Our research with sexuality education teachers in South Africa has identified tacit heteronormativity (DePalma & Francis 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) as a consequence of structural sexism. We believe that Sexuality Education that pays attention to how gender relations, for example, are reproduced individually, institutionally and societally will create an awareness of power relationships, their underlying values and how these affect sexual health. In terms of teaching and learning, this would involve establishing dialogic space to analyse ways in which sexism contributes to early sexual debut, sexual violence and high rates of teenage pregnancies. This process of critical consciousness will enable teachers to create a teaching and learning space where learners can change their self-awareness so that they view themselves as agents transforming their sexual health (Freire 1970).

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the teachers for their participation. This research was supported by a National Research Foundation (NRF) grant (Education Research in South Africa [ERGR] grant number 90366). The findings and opinions expressed in our research do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of the NRF.

Notes
1. A performance measurement tool to evaluate individual educators for salary or grade progression.
2. Head of departments.

References

Abrahams, N., Jewkes, R., Martin, L., Mathews, S., Vetten, L. & Lombard, C. (2009). Mortality of Women from Intimate Partner Violence in South Africa: A National Epidemiological Study. Violence and Victims, 24(4), 546–556.
Ahmed, N., Fisher, A., Mathews, C., Mokwana, W. & Jansen, S. (2009). HIV Education in South African Schools: The Dilemma and Conflicts of Educators. Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 37(2), 48–54.
Allen, L. (2009). It’s Not Who They Are It’s What They Are Like: Re-Conceptualising Sexuality Education’s Best Educator Debate. Sex Education, 9(1), 33–49.
Badcock, P. (2002). Education. In Impacts and Interventions, Durban, University of Natal Press.
Baxen, J. (2008). Teacher Identity and the Challenge of Teaching about, and Within, the Context of HIV/AIDS. In: M. Dunne (Ed.), Gender, Sexuality and Development, pp. 171–183, Rotterdam, Sense Publishers.
Baxen, J. (2010). Performative Praxis: Teacher Identity and Teaching in the Context of HIV/AIDS, Bern, Peter Lang.
Bhana, D. (2009). ‘They Have Got All the Knowledge’: HIV Education, Gender and Sexuality in South African Primary Schools. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 30(2), 165–177.
Campbell, C. & MacPhail, C. (2002). Peer Education, Gender and the Development of Critical Consciousness: Participatory HIV Prevention by South African Youth. Social Science and Medicine, 55(2), 331–345.
Censuses (2012). Census 2011 Methodology and Highlights of Key Results (No. 03-01-42), Pretoria, Statistics South Africa.
Colley, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996). Making Sense of Qualitative Data. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.
DePalma, R. & Francis, D. (2013). Letting Our Commitments Rest on the Shelf: Teaching about Sexual Diversity in South African Schools. In: D. Francis (Ed.), Sexuality, Society and Pedagogy, pp. 47 – 57. Bloemfontein, SUN Media.
DePalma, R. & Francis, D. (2014a). Silence, Nostalgia, Violence, Poverty . . . ? What Does ‘Culture’ Mean for South African Sexuality Educators? Culture, Health & Sexuality, 16(5), 547–561. http://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2014.891050.
DePalma, R. & Francis, D. (2014b). South African Life Orientation Teachers: (Not) Teaching About Sexuality Diversity. Journal of Homosexuality, 61(12), 1667 – 1711. http://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.951256.
DePalma, R. & Francis, D. (2014c). The Gendered Nature of South African Teachers’ Discourse on Sex Education. Health Education Research, 29(4), 624 – 632. http://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyt117.
Department of Education (2002). Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools), Pretoria, Government Press.
Department of Education (2008). National Curriculum Statement Grades 10 – 12, Pretoria, Department of Education.
Department of Education (2011). Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Life Orientation Further Education and Training Phase Grades 10 – 12, Pretoria, Department of Basic Education.
Department of Health (2004). The 2003 South African Demographic and Health Survey, Pretoria, Department of Health.
Francis, D. (2010). Sexuality Education in South Africa: Three Essential Questions. International Journal of Educational Development, 30(3), 314 – 319. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2009.12.003.
Francis, D. (2011). Wedged Within a Triad of Contradictory Values: Sexuality Education in South Africa. African Journal of Psychology, 21(2), 319 – 328.
Francis, D. (2012a). ‘I Teach It Because I Have to’?: Teacher Narratives on the Teaching of Sexual Diversity in South African Schools. In: B. Ensrud (Ed.), Sexuality Education in South African Schools: The Dilemma and Conflicts of Educators. Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 37(2), 48–54.
Francis, D. & DePalma, R. (2013). Teacher Perspectives on Abstinence and Safe Sex Education in South Africa. Sex Education, 13(1), 81 – 94. http://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2013.833091.
Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed, New York, Herder and Herder.
Freire, P. (1972). Education for critical consciousness, New York, Continuum.
Giami, A., Ohlrichs, Y., Quilliam, S., Wellings, K., Pacey, S. & Wylie, K. R. (2006). Sex education in schools is insufficient to support adolescents in the 21st century. Sexual & Relationship Therapy, 21(4), 485–490.

Hartnell, C. (2005). HIV/AIDS in South Africa: A Review of Sexual Behaviour among Adolescents. Adolescence, 50(147), 171–182.

Helleve, A., Fliser, A. J., Onya, H., Mikioma, W. & Klepp, K.-I. (2011). Can any Teacher Teach Sexuality and HIV/AIDS? Perspectives of South African Life Orientation Teachers. Sex Education, 11(1), 13–26. http://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2011.538143.

Jewkes, R., Levin, J., Mbananga, N. & Bradshaw, D. (2002). Rape of Girls in South Africa. Lancet, 359(9303), 319–320.

Jewkes, R., Morrell, R. & Christofides, N. (2009). Empowering Teenagers to Prevent Pregnancy: Lessons from South Africa. Culture, Health & Sexuality, 11(7), 675–688. http://doi.org/10.1080/13691050902846452.

Kehdy, M. I. (2002). Sexing the Subject: Teachers, Pedagogies and Sex Education. Sex Education, 2(3), 215–231.

Khoza, L. B. (2004). Adolescents’ Knowledge, Beliefs and Experiences Regarding Sexual Practices. Health SA Gesondheid, 9(3), 34–41.

Kirby, D. (2008). The Impact of Abstinence and Comprehensive Sex and STD/HIV Education Programs on Adolescent Sexual Behavior. Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 5(3), 18–27.

Kirby, D., Laris, B. & Rorelli, L. (2007). Sex and HIV Education Programs: Their Impact on Sexual Behaviors of Young People Throughout the World. Journal of Adolescent Health, 40(3), 206–217.

Kontula, O. (2010). The Evolution of Sex Education and Students’ Sexual Knowledge in Finland in the 2000s. Sex Education, 10(4), 373–386.

Lurie, M., Harrison, A., Wilkinson, D. & Karin, S. (1997). Circular Migration and Sexual Networking in Rural KwaZulu/Natal: Implications for the Spread of HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases. Health Transition Review, 3(7), 17–27.

Manzini, Z. (2001). Sexual Initiation and Childbearing among Adolescent Girls in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Reproductive Health Matters, 9(17), 44–52.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). Qualitative research and case study application in education, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Milton, J., Berne, L., Peppard, J., Patton, W., Hunt, L. & Wight, S. (2001). Teaching Sexuality Education in High School: What Qualities Do Australian Teachers Value. Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning, 1(2), 175–186.

Moletsane, R., Morrell, R., Unterhalter, E. & Epstein, D. (2002). What Kind of Future Can We Make: Education, Youth and HIV/AIDS (Special Issue). Agenda, 17(53), 3–5.

Morrell, R. (2003). Silence, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS in South African Schools. The Australian Educational Researcher, 30(1), 41–62.

Panday, S., Makiwane, M., Rancho, C. & Letsoalo, T. (2009). Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa – With a Specific Focus on School-Going Learners, Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council.

Richter, L. (1996). A Survey of Reproductive Health Issues among Urban Black Youth in South Africa, Pretoria, Society for Family Health.

Rooth, E. (2005). An investigation of the status and practice of Life Orientation in South African schools in two provinces, Cape Town, University of Western Cape.

Rugalem, G. & Khanye, V. (2002). Mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in the Education Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa: Some Preliminary Insights. Perspectives in Education, 20(2), 20–36.

Shisana, O., Rekle, T., Zuma, K., Ahmed, S., Pilay-Van-Wyk, V., Mbelle, N., et al. (2009). South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Survey 2008: A Turning Tide Among Teenagers?, Cape Town, HSRC Press.

Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the New Reform. Harvard Educational Review, 57(1), 1–23.

UNAIDS (2012). UNAIDS World AIDS Day Report 2012, Geneva, UNAIDS.

Zuma, K., Gouws, E., Williams, B. & Lurie, M. (2003). Risk factors for HIV Infection among Women in Carletonville, South Africa: Migration, Demography and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. International Journal of STD & AIDS, 14(12), 814–817.