

Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume 11 No. 2 October 2022

pp. 92-105

ersc.nmmu.ac.za

ISSN: 2221-4070

Reflecting on Sexuality Education in Teacher Education: Using a Life History Methodology of a Same-Sex Desiring Male Foundation Phase Teacher¹

Obakeng Kagola

ORCID No.: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9841-8696>



Nelson Mandela University

obakeng.kagola@mandela.ac.za

Robin Notshulwana

ORCID No.: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8357-7037>



Kiddie Academy Educational Child Care

robin120407@gmail.com

Abstract

Foundation Phase (FP) classrooms are not immune to incidents directly related to sexuality. Sexuality education, which is part of the FP life skills curriculum, is an essential part of the holistic development of FP learners. Studies about FP sexuality education report that FP teachers' formal approach to sexuality education is often restrictive. In this article, we use life history methodology to explore a single case study of a same-sex desiring male FP teacher in the Eastern Cape, South Africa to make meaning of how incidental moments that relate to sexuality education are addressed. Applying a feminist post-structural lens, we discuss how the participant and the participant's colleagues implicitly perpetuate heteronormative discourses in their pedagogical approaches to the teaching of sexuality education. The topic of sexuality features in one South African university's FP teacher education curriculum with the intention of raising pre-service teacher awareness about FP sexuality education. This research allowed us to reflect on the redesign of this fourth-year FP life skills module and to reimagine the learning experiences offered to FP pre-service teachers.

Keywords: feminist post-structural theory, male FP teacher, life history, pedagogy, same-sex desiring, sexuality education

Copyright: © 2022 Obakeng Kagola and Robin Notshulwana

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

¹ Ethical clearance number: H18-EDU-ERE-015

Please reference as: Kagola, O. and Notshulwana, R. (2022). Reflecting on Sexuality Education in Teacher Education: Using a Life History Methodology of a Same-Sex Desiring Male Foundation Phase Teacher. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 11 (2), 92-105.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2022/v11i2a6>

Introduction and Background

In the South African context, and globally, teachers must be prepared to engage and truthfully answer questions from learners regarding sexuality. This is to enable learners to normalise sexuality. Sexuality is a social construct, widely referred to in relation to individual practices and cultural norms (Weeks, 2011). It has been problematised in literature and has, consequently, been interpreted in different ways (Bhana & Mayeza, 2016). We prefer the following definition due to its inclusion of multiple aspects of a person's being:

"Sexuality" may thus be understood as a core dimension of being human which includes: the understanding of, and relationship to, the human body; emotional attachment and love; sex; gender; gender identity; sexual orientation; sexual intimacy; pleasure and reproduction. Sexuality is complex and includes biological, social, psychological, spiritual, religious, political, legal, historic, ethical and cultural dimensions that evolve over a lifespan. (WHO quoted in UNESCO, 2018, p. 17)

Considering the above definition, we understand that sexuality begins in infancy (Sauerteig, 2012). As early as six weeks of age, infants discover their hands and form attachments with their carer; these are the foundations of body and social awareness. After infancy, children show signs of making meaning of sex and gender (Paechter, 2003). Moreover, through social interactions young children experience, gender, part of one's sexuality, and "certain concepts become reified as symbolic artefacts and practices," creating localised understandings of femininity and masculinity (Paechter, 2003, p. 76). Therefore, understanding gender from a perspective of femininity and masculinity is also related to how views about our bodies and emotions are shared, and who to show love to or not, to name some examples (Paechter & Clark, 2007).

The experiences children have prior to entering school develop their identity, with sexuality forming part of their identity (Paechter, 2003). Exposure to certain worldviews can influence how children make meaning of their identity, for example, learning what femininity and masculinity look like through dress or action. These experiences continue to occur inside and outside the schooling environment. Children use their identities to make meaning of their world and to make decisions (Heyman & Legare, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to understand their own conceptions of sexuality and to engage critically with how these conceptions present themselves, implicitly and explicitly, in their teaching practices (Bhana, 2016). In so doing, Foundation Phase (FP) teachers are more likely to engage critically with planned and incidental moments of sexuality education.

The topics, body awareness, all about me, friendship, rights and responsibilities, and feelings, form part of the Grades 2 and 3 life skills curricula (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011), which are taught during direct instruction or through incidental moments. These topics provide opportunities to engage children about aspects of sexuality. Incidental moments related to aspects of sexuality education can occur in a school setting and should be considered opportune times to teach aspects of sexuality given that they are brought up by the learners—thus being more meaningful to the learner. Many teachers may avoid opportunities to teach about sexuality with the view that they are protecting learners (Carrera et al., 2012). Breuner and Mattson (2016) posited that teachers and parents should use windows of opportunity to educate children about sexuality. This could allow learners to identify and report inappropriate sexual advances and abuse at an early stage, and support the development

of healthy relationships overall. Venketsamy and Kinear (2020) postulated that children only formally learn about sexuality in their teenage years, which is too late because they may have already acquired preconceived ideas about aspects of sexuality such as diverse gender identities. Children are active citizens who are aware of their bodies and feelings. Therefore, there is a need for more diverse pedagogical approaches to teaching about sexuality in the FP in order to disrupt the rigidity found in sexuality education. Teachers need to be fully equipped to teach learners about sexuality in the early years and to incorporate comprehensive sexuality education in the life skills curriculum (Robinson et al., 2017). Bhana (2016, p. 27) found, however, that many FP teachers construct FP learners as being “biological, passive and unprotesting . . . without agency . . . without sexuality.” These narrow and dangerous assumptions perpetuate a discourse that fails to teach a comprehensive view of sexuality and can cause more harm, taking away the basic educational rights of learners because they limit their opportunities and experiences and perpetuate current systems that are regulatory and oppressive (Carrera et al., 2012).

In South Africa, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS; DBE, 2011) is a document that guides teachers on what to teach. This document is designed flexibly to allow teachers the space to contextualise the curriculum and meet the needs of their learners. In the CAPS subject of life skills, learning about sexuality is encapsulated under the learning area of personal and social well-being (DBE, 2011). However, Kirby (2011) has identified challenges in implementing and incorporating comprehensive sexuality education in the life skills curriculum and teaching about it. Kirby (2011) and Venketsamy and Kinear (2020) found that the majority of teachers in FP deliver comprehensive sexuality education content in conventional and rigid ways and promote heteronormativity. Teachers are custodians of the curriculum and can facilitate critical engagement with learners around sexuality (Bhana, 2016). If they are unaware of how their own practices can perpetuate heteronormative narratives or hinder a healthy understanding of their learners’ sexuality, then the status quo—which reproduces heteronormativity and renders children sexually innocent—will be maintained (Bhana, 2016; Francis, 2021).

Male FP Teachers Delivering Comprehensive Sexuality Education

FP teacher identity has always been constructed in gendered terms, with women dominating the space (Msiza, 2020). Men’s involvement in FP teaching has created space for diversity and the construction of an inclusive environment for all identities to exist. However, because of how FP teaching has been positioned within femininity, men who enter FP teaching tend to distance themselves from any other forms of masculinity that might relegate them to subordinate forms or activities regarded as soft or gay (Msiza, 2021). Therefore, male FP teachers enact hegemonic forms of masculinities, depriving learners of the opportunity to see a diverse environment in which all identities exist without fear of being marginalised. Further, Bhana (2016) and Msiza (2021) posited that men teaching in FP tend to dissociate themselves from activities and conversations about sexuality because of the social constructions of men as violent and sexual abusers of children. Men teaching in this educational phase, instead, maintain hegemonic forms of masculinities that will place them on the higher levels of the hierarchy of masculinities in school and society (Msiza, 2021).

This positioning of male FP teachers as heteronormative and distanced from care relegates other male teachers who do not conform to heteronormativity to subordination. Msibi (2019) argued that schools are sites that reproduce heterosexism, leading to same-sex desiring teachers keeping their identities private—thereby denying the learners and other teachers experiences of authentic relationships with an individual who is non-heteronormative. Msibi (2019) argued that there are multiple ways of being gay or lesbian depending on the contextual realities of the individual and on identity markers such as race and socioeconomic status, for example.

We have used different language to identify Thando (pseudonym); we have deliberately used the term “same-sex desiring” to move away from the imported terminology of the West (see Msibi, 2019). Moreover, there is a lack in studies of how same-sex desiring males teaching in FP experience teaching sexuality. In this paper, we focus on how a same-sex desiring male FP teacher polices and regulates himself during or when the topic of sexuality in his classroom is presented incidentally; we do so with intention to reflect on and influence change to a new teacher education module, namely, Life Skills for Foundation Phase. This research supports the development of a unit on sexuality taught at a university in the Eastern Cape, especially designed for FP teachers to try and shift their understanding of sexuality from an intellectual project to embodied knowledge.

This life history, single case study was conducted in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The Eastern Cape is a rural province that is highly patriarchal and conventional in its practices (Mfecane, 2018; Scott, 2021). The Eastern Cape has also received significant publicity for its high rate of brutal deaths of men who are regarded as being within subordinate forms of masculinities such as being a same-sex desiring man (Tsewu, 2021).

Children’s Sexual Innocence as a Discourse in FP

The hegemonic teaching discourse that positions children as sexually innocent (which is embedded in essentialist and developmental theories) continues to be prevalent in FP teaching (Bhana, 2016). Teachers continue to believe in childhood sexual innocence and, consequently, identify children as passive recipients of knowledge (Bhana, 2016). Bhana et al. (2019) argued that historical and sociocultural perceptions of children frame most teachers’ teaching about sexuality. The socially constructed discourse of children as sexually innocent leads to the belief that children in FP are not mature enough and, therefore, can easily be overwhelmed by the content provided in the comprehensive sexuality education curriculum (Bhana, 2016). Venketsamy and Kinear (2020) postulated that parents and teachers of young children take for granted that learners make meaning based on what they see, hear, and experience in their everyday childhood regarding societal norms and sexuality. This means that children are aware of sexuality, even if parents and teachers invalidate it. This leaves young children alone to make meaning of sexuality, which can lead to them being misinformed and making unhealthy decisions about their sexual health and well-being.

Queering the Foundation Phase

The positioning of FP as suitable work for women is underpinned by the assumption that FP teaching is care work and that women are better carers than men (Msiza, 2020). Kagola and Khau (2020), in their study on school governing bodies, found that gender played a significant role in the division of labour, particularly in the employment of FP teachers. Bhana (2016) posited that the maintenance of a gendered division of labour in FP functions as a mechanism to disassociate men from working in this educational phase. Bhana (2016) and Msibi (2019) postulated that it is crucial for learners to experience a diverse teacher component, starting in the early years.

Although there has been a slight increase in men entering the FP, it is necessary to remember that schools are spaces in which patriarchal hegemonic forms of masculinities are reproduced and sustained (Msibi, 2019). Msiza (2021) highlighted that male FP teachers in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa disassociated themselves from any activity in their work that rendered them “gay” or “soft.” This suggests that if regarded as gay in a feminised space such as FP, a teacher would be relegated to subordinate forms of masculinities, not seen as man enough, placed under surveillance, or even physically harmed. Moosa and Bhana (2017) posited that, in the South African context, teachers, especially those in FP teaching, need to be cognisant of the ways they position themselves in and around their classroom. This is because FP teachers play an integral part in developing children

into responsible citizens who will uphold democratic values such as gender equality and social justice practices.

Using a Feminist Post-Structural Lens

This paper draws on feminist post-structural theory to study a same-sex desiring male FP teacher's life history to explore how he, if at all, would facilitate sexuality education in and around his FP classroom during incidental moments. Davies (2003, p. 42) observed that “feminist post-structural analysis reveals ways in which dominant discourses can trap us in conventional meanings and modes of being.” Further, feminist post-structuralism creates paths for us to understand our gendered selves in relation to others and the world around us, and the dominant discourses in a particular context (Notshulwana & de Lange, 2019).

Weedon (1987) suggested that dominant discourses found in historical and cultural practices play an integral part in one's individual subjectivity, forming a set of beliefs and practices that regulate a particular gender order. This occurs through language, which influences knowledge and meaning-making and is located in discourse (Blaise, 2005). Davies and Gannon (2011) related discourse to discursive practices. McLaren (2009, p. 72) stipulated that discursive practices “refer to the rules that govern what can be said and what must remain unsaid, who can speak with authority and who must listen.” Discursive practices “have the power to hold normative order in place [as well as] the power to open up the not-yet-known” (Davies & Gannon, 2011, p. 313). Fardon and Schoeman (2010) suggested that, in social settings, people's subjectivities differ and are shaped towards a particular discourse that is popular or, in some instances out of the necessity of safety, allow individuals to position themselves in different ways. The concept of subjectivity within feminist post-structural theory has enabled us to explore the multiple ways in which Thando positions himself, or is positioned by others, in the schooling context when faced with topics of sexuality.

By critically analysing or learning how a person comes to know something about themselves, our subjectivity provides us with possibilities to recognise the subtlety of human beings and the contradictions that emanate from being gendered people (Blaise, 2005). People have the ability to be agentic, analytical, and to understand the complexities that exist in their different contexts. Agency is often considered something an individual has or does not have (Priestley et al., 2012). However, Davies and Gannon (2011) suggested that agency is the ability to have awareness and to seize and take action—thus, being agentic.

People are embedded in systems that mould how they think, act, and make meaning of their lived experiences (Davies & Gannon, 2011). Schools, being nested in the larger society, often take up and reproduce traditional ideologies about sexuality (Bhana, 2016). It is therefore imperative that teacher education programmes look critically at their life skills curriculum to ensure that the pre-service teacher subjectivity mentioned above is factored into the learning, especially with regard to sexuality education. Feminist post-structuralism helped us to understand how Thando situated himself within his school environment and classroom as a same-sex desiring male FP teacher and how he facilitated, if at all, sexuality education during incidental moments—so we could reflect on a new teaching module (Life Skills for Foundation Phase) through considering his lived experiences.

A Single Case Study for Thando's Life History

This paper forms part of a bigger study on the phenomenon of male FP teachers in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa (Kagola, 2019). In this paper, we draw strongly on data from the in-depth conversation we had with one pre-service male teacher who attended the feedback session of a master's study conducted by the first author (see Kagola, 2019). Immediately after the feedback

session, Thando, a male Grade 3 FP teacher, approached the first author with interest and requested a meeting to learn more and to share his experiences. They spent some three hours conversing about their experiences. Thando is a self-identifying same-sex desiring man who works at a primary school in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, in the Sarah Baartman District—an urban-rural context.

We used a single case study life history methodology to structure the in-depth conversation with Thando on how and if he facilitated learning when incidental moments about sexuality presented themselves in his classroom. According to Dhunpath (2000) and Plummer (2001), a single case study life history methodology refers to research exploring an individual or single contextual account of a person's life in their own words. We located the study within the transformative paradigm. Mertens (2010) posited that this paradigm works towards advocating for social justice practices and changing the mindset of either the participants or the researcher on the particular phenomenon being studied. This view was suitable for our study because we aimed to shift the researchers' understanding of how to facilitate learning about sexuality in a life skills module in order to better prepare pre-service teachers for real-world experiences of teaching sexuality. Ethical protocols were followed in this conversation. Thando gave his consent to be recorded and he was assured that his name and that of his primary school would not be disclosed. During the interview, Thando switched between isiXhosa and English or combined the two languages. The data from the conversation were transcribed and, where necessary, translated from isiXhosa to English. We employed Spencer et al.'s (2003) thematic analysis to systematically analyse the data from the conversation with Thando. The systematic analysis included three steps. The first step was management of the data generated through conversations with Thando. The second step comprised repeatedly reading the data and classifying the data into codes. The final step was to categorise the data into themes. It is important to note this methodology generated a large, rich amount of data, making it difficult at times to decide which extracts to include or exclude in presenting Thando's life history section of the findings. Therefore, we selected quotes that most succinctly demonstrated Thando's lived experience to help answer our main research question. Next, we present the two themes.

Findings and Discussion

A Look at Thando's Childhood Socialisation

Thando knew that he was different from a very young age and that he could not admit it to his parents. Comments made by his parents about gay relations appearing on television and the fear of being disowned by his family made it difficult for him to converse with them regarding his sexuality. He said the following about his childhood:

I discovered that I was different at a very young age, but I could not tell my parents . . . my father would be so angry when homosexual scenes appeared on TV while I was watching with him. . . . He would change it and voice out his negative stances or views on what is happening, loudly and boldly . . . he would say "andizithandi ezintwana" (I hate these boys) or "Hey! Kissing men" with a disgusted face . . . while he said and changed the TV channel. I internally said, "if you knew that's who I am and that what you are prohibiting is inevitable." My mother was very subtle about it, but she would too. My parents know even though they did not say it to me. . . . So, I never came out to them. . . . My sister has always been fine with whatever.

Families play an integral part in children's holistic development and in creating a safe and enabling environment. However, they can be primary sites for the production of heterosexism through socially constructed hegemonic ways of being man and woman, girl or boy, leaving no space for other identities to exist, and creating localised notions of femininity and masculinity (Msibi, 2019; Paechter, 2003).

Thando's recollection of how he grew up indicates compulsive heterosexuality forced on him by his father through his dominant discourse about television scenes of homosexuality and his mother's subtleness towards the matter. Msibi (2012) posited that language is integral in preventing LGBTQIA+ people from claiming their identities fully in various heterosexist patriarchal contexts. Hence, Thando's father's explicit hate for gay people in television scenes led Thando to believe his parents knew about his sexuality and believed their behaviour was to deprive him of being himself from a young age. Disclosing his sexual identity to his father could have "threatened [his] notion of normalcy, create [him] as other, instil a negative identity, and ultimately loss of support" (Brown, 2020, p. 480).

Many same-sex desiring males do not disclose their sexual identities to their families because of their derogatory words or fear of being disowned by their family members (Brown, 2020; Msibi, 2012). Thando's early discovery of his sexuality, but not being able to freely engage with his parents about his feelings and desires, indicates a highly conservative family structure. Thando's childhood experience is similar to LGBTQIA+ youth in Msibi's (2012) study in a highly traditional schooling context. The participants in Msibi's study experienced "derogatory language to vicious reactionary hate" (2012, p. 515) from peers and teachers at school, just as Thando in his home setting endured spiteful comments from his parents from a young age. Both Thando and Msibi's participants became courageous and developed ways of coping with homophobic comments in their settings. It can be said that, considering Davies and Gannon's (2011) theorisation of agency, Thando was being agentic to preserve his sense of belonging to his family (Brown, 2020). Msibi's participants accepted derogatory language and naming as a strategy to cope with their schooling situation. Also, Thando chose to keep to himself and not converse with his parents about how he felt but spoke to his friends during playtime. Thando further explained his childhood play experience as follows:

I grew up playing more often with girls, my sister's friends and others from Elalini [rural area]. We (my sister and I) explained my home situation to them . . . we played skipping, hopscotch and other indigenous games . . . I never played dolls because I didn't want to play "father." Even now at work, I tell them [learners and colleagues] that I am not their father, I am just a teacher to them . . . It was only this one time when I came back late from playing . . . I think I was in Grade 4. Then he [my father] invited me to the bedroom and asked, "Tell me, are you gay?" Before I could answer, he said, "Are you gay? So that we can buy you dresses" and so on. Which he then said to me, "I don't have an option of admitting because I don't want to wear dresses." So, my response was, "No, I'm not," you know? I wanted to remain the person I am, but with a different sexual orientation or sexuality, and that was the end of it . . . from that day, he started following me, checking who I was playing with . . . if it's girls, he would just use his index finger and subtly point home . . . some other times, my friends would say, "your father is coming" . . . then I'd leave or hide until he was gone.

Bhana and Mayeza (2016) posited that play areas are spaces that offer children the opportunity to have fun, be happy, and relax, far away from the control and constraints of teachers and parents. A safe space for Thando during his childhood was during playtime after school, where he played with his sister and their mutual friends. Thando referred to games he played with girls as indigenous; however, Bhana and Mayeza (2016) have found that boy learners in primary schools regard such games to be too feminine and suited for girls only, which means that within the politics of play, children associate certain games with boys and others with girls, depending on the nature of play. It is interesting to note that Thando did not play with dolls because he was afraid to be assigned the father's role. His disassociation from the father's role could have been influenced by his experience with his father who was not supportive of his sexuality. This could also have been a rejection of the type of masculinity that was prevalent in the community. Ideas of what gender is and how it should be performed are passed on through institutions and systems such as family, school, church, or community. These are

established as norms in what Paechter (2003) called feminine and masculine communities of practice. Therefore, assuming the father's role during play and at work might have forced him to relive the oppressive experiences with his father or the community as a whole. He chose to avoid this experience, which is an example of how young children, in fact, can be agentic (Davies, 2003). Thando further rejects the male assignment of a father figure to his FP learners, which shows his agency as an adult. He declares that he is only the teacher and a positive adult in his learners' lives. Scholars have argued that when male teachers are recruited in the FP, it should not be to play the father figure or serve as a male role model to learners but for their ability to teach and care for learners in this phase (Brownhill, 2015; Msiza, 2020). Because of his childhood experience, Thando may have chosen not to take up the father figure role solely to not reproduce the compulsory heterosexism in which he grew up thus, disrupting the dominant discourse.

Thando explained how his father confronted him about being himself, and his denying the accusation of being gay because he did not want to be classified under the essentialist assumption that being gay is to be feminine. Thando argues that he wanted to keep his masculine identity through his dress sense and not be regarded as a girl by his family. Thando's father's association of homosexuality with wearing girls' clothes shows a lack of understanding with regard to the diversity of sexualities. Msibi (2012) and Brown (2020) posited that conversation on diverse sexualities in the South African context is taboo, leading to misinformed understandings of what it means to be homosexual. Furthermore, Brown (2020) argued that our subjectivity is also characterised by fear of shame and punishment. Thando's father monitored his play locations and with whom he played during playtime. Thando chose to hide his true self, to go home and hide from his father out of fear of being punished or being shamed in front of his friends. This led to Thando being under constant surveillance to regulate himself to comply with his father's standard of playing with boys or staying home. Thando said, "He wanted me to play with boys, and I chose not to do that. After school, I would go straight home. . . . I ended up not having any friends." Thando ended up not socialising with his friends due to his father's monitoring and policing. Childhood socialisation is essential for anyone to become a responsible citizen. Thando's father did not realise the impact he caused through policing Thando and choosing male friends for him. Thando's childhood experience led to him continuing to police and self-regulate his behaviour due to the fear of punishment and shame he experienced as a child. As a result, he carries the fear and possibilities of being outed by guarding himself in his adult social and professional life, which we discuss in the next section.

Self-Regulatory Policing While Teaching About Sexuality

During the conversation, I asked Thando: "Do you ever teach your Grade 3 learners about sexuality more specifically, related to diverse sexual orientations and gender identities?" Thando explained how he relegates the topic to the female teachers when complaints of such nature surface during playtime or in his classroom:

I try by all means not to be seen talking to learners about issues of gays, lesbians and moffies [derogatory term for gay]. I refer them to uMam [female teacher] to deal with them, so that I am not found talking to learners about inappropriate things. . . . I remember recently during break time, one of my female learners came crying to me saying another learner says she is an isitabane [lesbian]. I screamed and said, "Ma'am, come listen to this," so that she could intervene. . . . Another incident was in my classroom during the morning ring, a learner screamed, crying and saying his desk mate says he smells like condom oil. I had to calm the child and asked the whole class questions about condoms . . . I was so scared, but I had to do it just to make this learner not feel bad or anything like that. I asked them questions while standing at the door so that when someone comes, I stopped and talked about other school-related things.

When it comes to Thando's position regarding teaching about sexuality in and around his classroom, he takes a teacher avoidant role. Ezer et al. (2019) posited that it is a role that conservative and self-regulating teachers use to avoid engaging learners on uncomfortable topics such as sexuality. This is despite the evidence that FP learners are familiar with sex and sexuality related content. Thando's lived experiences have made him regard discussions dealing with aspects of sexuality as inappropriate. Due to a widely held irrational fear that he might influence them or from the possible accusation of gay recruitment, he distances himself (King, 2004). Thando may be disassociating himself from feminine perceived roles within FP teaching to align with the dominant discourse of a hegemonic masculinity and to not be seen as soft male or gay by peers or community members as has been found in other research about male FP teachers (Msiza, 2021). Foucault (1981) argued that power is always supplemented by resistance—as denoted in Thando's words: “‘Ma’am, come listen to this’, so that she could intervene.” This corroborates the existing notion of feminisation of the FP in which female FP teachers’ motives are unquestioned. Thando reinforces the essentialist notion that defines care work as a maternal and feminine discourse by relegating complaints and learners’ gendered accusations to the female teacher. In doing so, Thando is also reinforcing this deeply ingrained belief in society with his FP colleagues and the FP learners. Hanlon and Lynch (2011) posited that, for an equitable teaching system that embraces diverse sexualities, male FP teachers need to distance themselves from an essentialist stance when it comes to the conceptualisation of what constitutes care work. Further, male teachers need to allow themselves to be vulnerable to open up possibilities for deconstructing dominant and patriarchal hegemonic masculinities so they can take up masculinities that are caring and pro-femininity (Ratele, 2015). This, however, comes at a very real cost. In particular, for some people who do not fit societal norms, there are severe consequences; they remain silent and suppress themselves rather than risk being ostracised from families and communities or being killed (Tsewu, 2021). This fear is very real in South Africa and many other African countries for the LGBTQIA+ community. While Thando identifies as a same-sex desiring male, there might be an underlying fear of being found out, which might also be reason for him to dissociate from any incident that is related to sexuality education.

Since the realisation of the importance of involving men in the learning and teaching of young children in early grades, heterosexual men have been policed and questioned regarding their intentions towards others within the school setting and broader community (King, 2004; Moosa & Bhana, 2017; Xu & Waniganayake, 2018). Furthermore, King (2004) and Bhana (2016) posited that for same-sex desiring males such as Thando, the policing is even worse. They are socially regarded as having a negative influence on the children’s sexual orientation; hence, Thando chooses to distance and police himself on when, how, and if he engages with learners on issues around sexuality, such as the condom discussion in his classroom. Thando standing at the door to see who might be watching or listening to him having a discussion of such nature in the classroom was a strategy to safeguard himself from being labelled as “the gay teacher” who speaks to young learners about sex and being regarded as a recruiter (King, 2004, p. 124) even though he presents as cisgender. Although Thando may think his behaviour is protecting himself, it can be seen as sending messages that could be harmful to him and the learners. As a male teacher, he is already scrutinised for his decision to work with FP learners. His behaviour, in the example of discussing condoms, could be interpreted as somewhat secretive, making him look suspicious or guilty of the things he is in fact trying to avoid, namely, being known to be same-sex desiring and influencing or recruiting the FP learners. For the learners, it supports the deeply embedded ideology that children are innocent and talking about sexuality is only an adult activity, thus reinforcing “‘risk’ over ‘desire’ and ‘shame’ over ‘pleasure’” (Bhana et al., 2019). Although many adults believe children are too young to discuss sexuality, research suggests that the more children know and understand about sexuality, the less likely they are to participate in dangerous sexual behaviour (Artz et al., 2018; Ngidi et al., 2021). Interventions that promote abstinence and disease are often found to be ineffectual (Artz et al., 2018).

Historically, in South Africa, it has never been a man's role to talk about sexuality in the home because the men were usually absent—working away as migrant labourers (Bhana, 2016; Ratele, 2015). The homes are sites that produce cultural and social discourses that determine who does what, and talks about what, and to whom. It therefore becomes difficult for male teachers in FP to take up socially constructed feminine activities such as having courageous conversations about sexuality (Msiza, 2021). Thando, like many other non-heterosexual teachers (Gray & Malins, 2016; Msibi, 2019), deprives learners the opportunity of having frank and informative learning opportunities on sexuality. We cautiously note that his lived experience provides him with insight that might support his ability to handle aspects of sexuality education different to that of his peers. However, we do not want to assume this, nor do we assume that he can speak for all the diversity situated in sexuality. Therefore, we cannot say his sexuality places him in a better position over others.

Implications for a University Module, Life Skills for Foundation Phase

We also reflected on a new module that is currently being moderated and will be offered to FP pre-service teachers starting in 2023, in conjunction with Thando's lived experience. The module is called Life Skills for Foundation Phase. Prior to re-curriculation, the module was offered to first-year students and there was a unit about sexuality education in which Thando was enrolled. In the revised curriculum, it will be offered in the fourth year. Sexuality education forms only part of the module because life skills in the FP consists of these study areas: beginning knowledge, creative arts, physical education, and personal and social well-being (DBE, 2011).

The findings imply that more and different pedagogical opportunities are needed to explore the meaning of sexuality education to facilitate a kind of learning in pre-service teachers that enables them to see the relationship between self and society and, more specifically, to teaching practice. Francis (2021, p. 286), citing Kumashiro, recommended that in order to challenge and change compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity in communities and schools, "sometimes painful, critical reflection, especially as it relates to developing a critical consciousness for changing self and society" is necessary. Identity is the means through which teachers make sense of themselves and others; therefore, it would be imperative to facilitate experiences that provide pre-service teachers like Thando with the opportunity to reflect on their understanding of sexuality in relation to themselves, learners, and their work.

Reflecting on the new module and what we learned from Thando's lived experience, we thought about what kind of experiences could shift students' thinking from theoretical knowledge to practical knowledge. Pithouse et al. (2009, p. 54) found that when teachers use self-study, they become "more conscious of and thoughtful about aspects of their teaching practice that they [had] previously not noticed or perhaps avoided thinking about." Notshulwana (2020) found in exploring gender with FP pre-service teachers, that using participatory visual methodology as a pedagogical tool to start with the self (Kirk, 2009) enabled her students to work towards a gender-sensitive practice. This enabled seeking new possibilities through language and discourse as well as gaining skills to be critical and relevant in the context of heteronormativity. Consideration of their experience, what it is, and how it supports the ability to facilitate well-informed, critical, and inclusive sexuality education experiences in their classrooms warrants much consideration.

We know that teachers enter their classrooms having been deeply embedded in heteronormativity (Bhana, 2016; Francis, 2021). Therefore, it would be necessary to facilitate a process that raises awareness of how we form our ideas and beliefs about sexuality in the broad sense, and how it translates into teaching. Providing students the opportunities to reflect and consider the present with other pre-service teachers has the potential to enable them to see how the power of language and discourse has subjugated them in their lives, thus enabling them to see the connection between

themselves and their teaching practice. In doing so, FP pre-service teachers, however they identify, may be better equipped to see practices that are unjust and do nothing more than reproduce the status quo—and to seize moments of agency in their classrooms and beyond.

Conclusions

This article reflected on an FP life skills module, focusing on its sexuality education unit. Life history methodology with a single case study was used as impetus of the reflection. It has highlighted that FP is not impervious to incidental moments that require FP teachers to facilitate discussions related to sexuality, specifically the challenges of facilitating these discussions when the FP teacher is a same-sex desiring male. In reflecting on the findings, we were able to rethink the unit on sexuality in a rearticulated life skills module for FP. It is important to mention that this paper considered aspects of sexual orientation within the broader discourse of sexuality as defined and used in the manuscript. Moreover, a reflective approach might enable opportunities to integrate more comprehensively the content base as captured in the definition of sexuality. We used a feminist post-structural lens which "emphasises how ways of 'doing gender' reproduce existing gender norms" (DeJaeghere et al., 2013, p. 542). Exploring Thando's lived experience allowed us to think more about how one's identity, influenced by past experiences, can be present in one's teaching practice. With this, and knowing that subjectification is influenced by external factors, we needed to consider more deeply the experiences we create for the FP pre-service teacher to raise their awareness and understanding of how sexuality is reified. We suggest using a particular pedagogy, namely, a participatory visual methodology that centres the self as an entry point (Kirk, 2009). This has the potential to facilitate meaning-making that is deeper. It further creates the space for FP pre-service teachers to begin to see how they may have been rewarded for behaviour, and those who incentivise behaviour that is seen as normal and appropriate by society and that is attached to heteronormativity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). In doing so, Thando might have been better equipped to see and seize teaching moments about sexuality education. Further, he would have a greater understanding of how he has been positioned, which might support his ability to engage with colleagues and administration about FP sexuality education safely, thereby educating the next generation to better navigate all aspects of sexuality.

References

- Artz, L., Ward, C., Leoschut, L., Kassanjee, R., & Burton, P. (2018). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in South Africa: The Optimus Study South Africa. *South African Medical Journal*, 108(10), 91–792. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7196/samj.2018.v108i10.13533>
- Bhana, D. (2016). *Gender and childhood sexuality in primary school*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2239-5>
- Bhana, D., Crewe, M., & Aggleton, P. (2019). Sex, sexuality and education in South Africa. *Sex Education*, 19(4), 361–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2019.1620008>
- Bhana, D., & Mayeza, E. (2016). "We don't play with gays, they're not real boys . . . they can't fight": Hegemonic masculinity and (homophobic) violence in the primary years of schooling. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 51, 36–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.08.002>
- Blaise, M. (2005). *Playing it straight: Uncovering gender discourse in the early childhood classroom*. Routledge.
- Blaise, M., & Taylor, A. (2012). Research in review: A queer eye for early childhood. *Young Children*, 67(1), 88–98.
- Breuner, C. C., & Mattson, G. (2016). Sexuality education for children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 108(2), 498–502. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1348>

- Brown, A. (2020). Queering family dialogue through entertainment education: Narratives from minority sexual identity youth. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 16(5), 475–487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2019.1686720>
- Brownhill, S. (2015). The “brave” man in the early years (0–8): Defining the “role model.” *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 23(3), 370–379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2015.1043811>
- Carrera, M. V., DePalma, R., & Lameiras, M. (2012). Sex/gender identity: Moving beyond fixed and “natural” categories. *Sexualities*, 15(8), 995–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1363460712459158>
- Davies, B. (2003). *Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender*. Hampton Press.
- Davies, B., & Gannon, S. (2011). Feminism/post-structuralism. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.), *Theories and methods in social research* (2nd ed., pp. 312–319). SAGE.
- DeJaeghere, J., Parkes, J., & Unterhalter, E. (2013). Gender justice and education: Linking theory, policy and practice. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 6(33), 539–545. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.ijedudev.2013.05.006>
- Department of Basic Education of South Africa. (2011). *National curriculum statement (NCS): Curriculum and policy statement: Mathematics Foundation Phase Grades 1–3*. <https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/CD/National%20Curriculum%20Statements%20and%20Vocational/CAPS%20MATHS%20%20ENGLISH%20GR%201-3%20FS.pdf?ver=2015-01-27-160947-800>
- Dhunpath, R. (2000). Life history methodology: “Narradigm” regained. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(5), 543–551. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390050156459>
- Ezer, P., Jones, T., Fisher, C., & Power, J. (2019). A critical discourse analysis of sexuality education in the Australian curriculum. *Sex Education*, 19(5), 551–567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2018.1553709>
- Foucault, M. (1981). *Untying the text: A post-structuralist reader*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Francis, D. (2021). “A gay agenda”: Troubling compulsory heterosexuality in a South African university. *Teaching Sociology*, 49(3), 278–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0092055X211022472>
- Gray, C., & Malins, J. (2016). *Visualizing research: A guide to the research process in art and design*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315547923>
- Hanlon, N., & Lynch, K. (2011). Care-free masculinities in Ireland. In E. Rusoini, J. Hearn, & K. Pringle (Eds.), *Men and masculinities around the world* (pp. 45–57). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230338005_4
- Heyman, G. D., & Legare, C. H. (2004). Children's beliefs about gender differences in the academic and social domains. *Sex Roles*, 50(3), 227–239. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SERS.0000015554.12336.30>
- Kagola, O. (2019). Exploring the perceptions of school governing bodies towards Foundation Phase male teachers in Eastern Cape schools [Masters dissertation, Nelson Mandela University]. South East Academic Libraries System.
- Kagola, O., & Khau, M. (2020). Using collages to change school governing body perceptions of male Foundation Phase teachers. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 9(2), 65–80. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2020/v9i2a5>

- King, J. R. (2004). The (im)possibility of gay teachers for young children. *Theory into Practice*, 43(2), 122–127. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4302_5
- Kirby, D. (2011). Sex education: Access and impact on sexual behavior of young people. United Nations.
- Kirk, J. (2009). Starting with the self: Reflexivity in studying women teachers' lives in development. In C. Mitchell, S. Weber, & K. O'Reilly-Scanlon (Eds.), *Just who do we think we are? Methodologies for autobiography and self study in teaching* (pp. 231–241). Routledge.
- McLaren, P. (2009). Critical pedagogy: A look at the major concepts. In A. Darder, M. P. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 61–83). Routledge.
- Mertens, D. M. (2010). Philosophy in mixed methods teaching: The transformative paradigm as illustration. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 4(1), 9–18. <https://doi.org/10.5172/mra.2010.4.1.009>
- Mfecane, S. (2018). Towards African-centred theories of masculinity. *Social Dynamics*, 44(2), 291–305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2018.1481683>
- Moosa, S., & Bhana, D. (2017). Men managing, not teaching Foundation Phase: Teachers, masculinity and the early years of primary schooling. *Educational Review*, 69(3), 366–387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2016.1223607>
- Msibi, T. (2012). "I'm used to it now": Experiences of homophobia among queer youth in South African township schools. *Gender and Education*, 24(5), 515–533. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2011.645021>
- Msibi, T. (2019). Passing through professionalism: South African Black male teachers and same-sex desire. *Sex Education*, 19(4), 389–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2019.1612346>
- Msiza, V. (2020). "You are a male teacher but you have a woman's heart": Foundation Phase teachers negotiating identities in South Africa. *Education 3–13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 48(6), 651–660. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2019.1638957>
- Msiza, V. (2021). South African male Foundation Phase teachers distancing from homosexuality. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1367>
- Ngidi, N. D., Moletsane, R., & Essack, Z. (2021). "They abduct us and rape us": Adolescents' participatory visual reflections of their vulnerability to sexual violence in South African townships. *Social Science & Medicine*, 287, 114401. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114401>
- Notshulwana, R. (2020). Girls here and boys there: Participatory visual methodology as pedagogy to facilitate gender sensitive practices with pre-service Foundation Phase teachers [Doctoral thesis, Nelson Mandela University]. South East Academic Libraries System.
- Notshulwana, R., & de Lange, N. (2019). "I'm me and that is enough": Reconfiguring family photo albums to explore gender constructions with Foundation Phase preservice teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 82(2019), 106–116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.03.011>
- Paechter, C. (2003). Masculinities and femininities as communities of practice. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 26(1), 69–77.
- Paechter, C. & Clark, S. (2007). Who are tomboys and how do we recognise them? *Women's Studies International Forum*, 30, 342–354. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395\(02\)00356-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(02)00356-4)

- Pithouse, K., Mitchell, C., & Weber, S. (2009). Self-study in teaching and teacher development: A call to action. *Educational Action Research*, 17(1), 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790802667444>
- Plummer, K. (2001). The call of life stories in ethnographic research. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland, & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography* (pp. 395–406). SAGE.
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2012). *Teachers as agents of change: An exploration of the concept of teacher agency*. University of Stirling. <http://hdl.handle.net/1893/9266>
- Ratele, K. (2015). Working through resistance in engaging boys and men towards gender equality and progressive masculinities. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 17(2), 144–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2015.1048527>
- Robinson, K. H., Smith, E., & Davies, C. (2017). Responsibilities, tensions and ways forward: Parents' perspectives on children's sexuality education. *Sex education*, 17(3), 333–347. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2017.1301904>
- Sauerteig, L. D. H. (2012). Loss of innocence: Albert Moll, Sigmund Freud and the invention of childhood sexuality around 1900. *Medical History*, 56(2), 156–183. <https://doi.org/10.1017/mdh.2011.31>
- Scott, L. (2021). *Inxeba* [the wound], queerness and Xhosa culture. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 33(1), 26–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2020.1792278>
- Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., & O'Connor, W. (2003). Analysis: Practices, principles and processes. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 199–218). SAGE.
- Tsewu, S. (2021, April 13). Another gay man murdered allegedly because of his sexuality. *Drum*. <https://www.news24.com/drum/News/Local/another-gay-man-murdered-allegedly-because-of-his-sexuality-20210413>
- UNESCO. (2018). International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach.
- Venketsamy, T., & Kinear, J. (2020). Strengthening comprehensive sexuality education in the curriculum for the early grades. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 10(1), 1–12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v10i1.820>
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Blackwell.
- Weeks, J. (2011). *The languages of sexuality*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203930328>
- Xu, Y., & Waniganayake, M. (2018). An exploratory study of gender and male teachers in early childhood education and care centers in China. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 48(4), 518–534. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2017.1318355>