“We have to know what is happening!”

Student experiences of a year 10 sexuality education programme

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Abstract

This thesis highlights the complex nature of students' experiences in the sexuality education classroom. It seeks to provide insight from the perspectives of Year 10 students in two classes on their experiences of a particular sexuality education programme.

The purpose of this study was to 'give voice to' and explore the experiences of a small group of nine Year 10 students in their compulsory co-educational sexuality education programme. To this end, the main source of data was focus group interviews with student participants. Students were asked to participate in focus group interviews part way through the unit of work and invited to share their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the programme.

The data analysis generated themes that describe student's experiences in relation to course content, pedagogy and classroom organisation. The analysis of students' talk in focus group interviews also showed that gender relations and emotional safety were important features of the students' experiences of their sexuality education programme. More particularly, it was found that students valued their exposure to this subject and felt that school was a good place to learn about sexuality education. They enjoyed social constructivist teaching approaches that were student-centred and interactive. The students expressed some dissatisfaction with the way in which their sexuality education programme was organised and being delivered. In addition, there was evidence of both male and female students being influenced by traditional, hegemonic constructs of masculinity and femininity, and also a heteronormative culture within the classroom.

The findings present implications for sexuality education teaching in relation to programme development and classroom practice. They suggest that sexuality educators may need to consider the way in which their classrooms are organised, as well as the pedagogical approaches they use, as it appears these aspects have significant influence on the emotional safety of students, on relationships within the classroom and on the student experience of sexuality education as a whole.

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Chapter One: Introduction

> We don't have any consistency of resources, we don't have comprehensive training and the extent to which sexuality education is implemented is hugely erratic. Far too many young men get their sex education off the internet. So young people don't have as much knowledge and understanding as we often think they do.
>
> Dr. Gill Greer quoted in Barnett, 2006, p. 12.

1:1 The Challenge

Sexuality education is a key area of learning within the *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum (*Ministry of Education, 1999) and more recently in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). It is compulsorily taught from Year 1 to Year 10. There is, and has been for sometime, significant debate and discussion surrounding the teaching of sexuality education within New Zealand schools. According to Dr. Gill Greer in *The Listener* article, 'Up Front' by Barnett (2006), the quality and content of sexuality education programmes in New Zealand varies between schools throughout the country, and many young people particularly young men are resorting to other sources for information about sex and sexuality. These sentiments are echoed by Twine, Robbe, Forrest and Davies (2005), who conclude that the single most effective form of sexual health education intervention is still unclear due to the significant variation between programmes in terms of duration, components, approach, age and setting of the target population, coupled with the variability in terms of the standard of evaluation and research.

In addition, New Zealand has consistently demonstrated over many years, high rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases in comparison with other developed nations in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In an attempt to understand and in some way address these concerns in 2006, the Labour Government commissioned the Education Review Office (ERO) to review the quality of sexuality education programmes being taught to Year 7-13 students in 100 New Zealand schools. The purpose of the ERO review was to assess the effectiveness of sexuality education programmes for students in Years 7 to 13, and specifically to evaluate:

- the quality and content of teaching and learning programmes in sexuality

education provided by teachers in schools;

- the quality and content of teaching and learning programmes in sexuality education provided by outside providers to students in schools; and
- the extent to which teaching in sexuality education supports high quality learning outcomes for all students including Maori, Pacific, international, those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, those with special education needs, and those with strong religious or cultural beliefs.

(Education Review Office, 2007, p. 4).

The Government also scheduled a Parliamentary Hearing in late 2006 entitled *Youth Sexual Health: "Our Health, Our Issue"* to enable key stakeholders to share their concerns and perspectives on issues of sexuality education and sexual health in New Zealand. Representatives were many and varied; New Family Planning Association, Office of the Children's Commissioner, New Zealand Aids Foundation, Abortion Law Reform Association, New Zealand College of Midwives to name but a few.

The findings of the ERO review (Education Review Office, 2007) and the Parliamentary Hearing provided a useful snapshot of sexuality education and adolescent sexual health across the country. It confirmed many of the inconsistencies referred to by Dr. Gill Greer, as well as highlighting other significant issues associated with the delivery of sexuality education programmes across the country, such as a lack of meaningful assessment of learning outcomes and a failure to meet the needs of diverse learners. The ERO report concluded that up to two thirds of the schools in the evaluation needed to improve their performance significantly in these two areas (Education Review Office, 2007).

As useful as this information was, from my point of view as a sexuality educator, there was one important omission and significant limitation of both fact-finding missions. There was no student voice. Neither the ERO review nor the Parliamentary Hearing provided the opportunity for the students themselves, who were the recipients of sexuality education in New Zealand schools and whose sexual health statistics were the catalyst and driving force behind both reviews, the chance to share their thoughts, ideas, opinions, perspectives and feelings about sexual activity, sexuality education

and sexual health. All the information and findings about sexuality education and the sexual health of young people were generated from adult perspectives; the students themselves were all but invisible.

As a result, I decided to undertake a qualitative research study into sexuality education focusing on student voice. I wanted to provide students in a co-educational secondary school with the opportunity to share their ideas and perspectives about their sexuality education class and also sexuality education in general.

1:2 The Research Questions

The purpose and focus of this research study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of Year 10 students as they participated in school-based sexuality education classes. The overarching research question addressed by this study is:

How is sexuality education experienced by Year 10 students in two classes?

This is supported by the following sub-questions:

1. What opinions do these Year 10 students have about their sexuality education programme?
2. What are the Year 10 students' ideas and opinions of their sexuality education needs?
3. From their perspective, how has their participation in sexuality education classes met their perceived needs?

The experience of the students is the key focus of this research study. I am attempting to explore and understand how Year 10 students' 'received' and 'perceived' what went on in their sexuality education classes. I want to 'see' the experience from the perspective of the students and to try to establish how they made sense of the 'curriculum' they experienced in their sexuality education classroom.

In order to clarify for myself this concept of experience, I sought to define the key words 'receive' and 'perceive'. According to *The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus In One Volume* (McLeod, 1987), 'receive' is defined as "to take (something offered)

into one's hand or possession" and/or "to be informed of (news or information)" and/or "to apprehend ideas or perceive (ideas, etc.)" (p. 830). In other words, I will explore and determine how the students responded to their sexuality education classes. 'Perceive' is defined as "to become aware of (something) through the senses" and/or "to come to, to comprehend, grasp" (McLeod, 1987, p. 734). This is relevant to this study because I am attempting to undercover and understand the way in which the students interpreted, comprehended and made sense of their sexuality education programme. In other words, what meaning did it have for them and why?

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), the concept of experience is nebulous. It is defined in *The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus In One Volume* as "direct personal participation or observation" (McLeod, 1987, p. 349). Abbiss (2011) suggests it can be defined more specifically in two ways: firstly to engage or participate in an activity is to 'experience' it and secondly to 'be experienced' is to know or understand something. Abbiss (2011) also contends it is "personal and situated and subject to broad social constructs and culture" (p. 603). Given the highly subjective nature of experience itself, any research exploring this concept can be challenging and difficult to negotiate.

Research exploring the concept of 'experience' can also be problematic because as researchers we can never truly know what the experience has been for the participant. Abbiss (2011) maintains the "personal nature of student's experiences makes it knowable only to the student having the experience" (p. 603). As researchers we are only privy to whatever the participant chooses to share with us and the meaning we make of what is said. Obviously we will be left unaware of whatever is left unshared. In spite of this, it must be stated that attempting to understand issues from the perspective of those who are involved remains an important aim of this research study. Personal experience research methods therefore enable the researcher to understand as near as possible the experience from the participant's perspective (Abbiss, 2005).

1:3 Sexuality Education Curriculum in New Zealand

At the time the data were collected for this research study, sexuality education was one of the seven key areas of learning from the *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999). In 2007, a new curriculum document, *The New Zealand Curriculum* was unveiled by the Ministry of Education and mandated by the New Zealand Government. In terms of overall theoretical foundations and achievement objectives, this new curriculum superseded the 1999 document. However, the expectation was that the 1999 curriculum was still to be used to support the new document, as it contained explicit detail about the teaching of sexuality education and other key areas of learning not included in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Sexuality education is described in the *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) as "a lifelong process" and it aims to provide "students with the knowledge, understanding, and skills to develop positive attitudes towards sexuality, to take care of their sexual health, and to enhance their interpersonal relationships, now and in the future" (p. 38). Sexuality education programmes in schools across the country vary in terms of number of sessions, pedagogical delivery and number and quality of learning outcomes and may be influenced by factors such as the perceived needs of the students, the expertise and commitment of the teaching staff implementing the programme, and the degree of commitment of the school to health education in general (ERO, 2007).

There are a range of ways of thinking about and characterising curriculum. Commonly used ideas distinguish between curriculum that is official, that is formalised in documents, signals intent, or is defined through practice, and that which is unofficial, such as the 'experienced' and 'hidden curriculum'. According to Goodson (1994) 'curriculum' is a broad term described as "a multi-faceted concept that is constructed, negotiated, and renegotiated at a variety of levels and in a variety of arenas" (p. 111). Cornbleth (1990) also emphasises the idea of curriculum as a particular type of process that is "an ongoing social process comprised of [sic] the interactions of students, teachers, knowledge and milieu" (p. 5). Connolly and Clandinin (1988) offer this definition of curriculum

> Curriculum is often taken to mean a course of study. When we set our imaginations free from the narrow notion that a course of study is a series of textbooks or specific outline of topics to be covered and objectives to be attained, broader more meaningful notions emerge. A curriculum can become one's life course of action. It can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow. In this broad sense, curriculum can be viewed as a person's life experience. (p. 34).

Typically, official curriculum documents focus on specific educational goals, milestones and subject matter content. However, if we are to take seriously broader notions of curriculum, such as that described by Goodson (1994), Cornbleth (1990), and Connelly and Clandinin (1988), then we must contend with multiple contexts that affect curriculum, students, and teachers and acknowledge that curriculum cannot be understood adequately or changed substantially without attention to the setting or context (Cornbleth, 1990).

Also problematising the concept of curriculum is McGee (1997), who drawing on a range of theorists, suggest there are various levels of curriculum. Firstly there is the 'official curriculum' and in this instance this is the curriculum statement entitled *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) and has informed the 'planned curriculum' which encompasses the teacher's plans and programmes in health and physical education that outline what is intended to happen in the classroom. The 'enacted curriculum' relates to that which happens in practice in the health and physical education classroom and is usually determined by the teacher, but can be affected by the students themselves. The 'experienced curriculum' is the students' experience within the health and physical education classroom while the 'hidden curriculum' is the hidden learning that occurs as a by-product of the health and physical education curriculum, social relationships and organisation of the school.

In regard to New Zealand based research into the pedagogical experience of sexuality education for young people, there is limited material to draw upon. In the past decade the most significant bodies of work focused in this area have been undertaken by two New Zealand researchers, Dr. Gillian Tasker, formerly of the University of Canterbury, and Dr. Louisa Allen of the University of Auckland. Both these

researchers have produced substantial research and findings that form much of the theoretical foundation for my study, and consequently are referred to and referenced to a large degree in the literature review section of this thesis.

1:4 Research Position, Bias and Purpose

As a former health education lecturer in the School of Secondary Teacher Education at the University of Canterbury College of Education, I had a special interest in the content and delivery of health education programmes in New Zealand secondary schools and a particular passion in the area of sexuality education. My role at the University involved working with pre-service students in an attempt to prepare them for teaching health education in New Zealand secondary schools. In my discussions with my own students returning from teaching placements and as a past adviser to practising teachers for UC Education Plus, I have been at times surprised over the years by what I know is being taught under the guise of 'sexuality education' in schools. I was very aware that there was a huge variety in the direction and nature of sexuality education programmes across the country and was conscious of the inconsistencies and inadequacies referred to in the 2007 ERO review of sexuality education in New Zealand. As a result of this inside knowledge, I was interested and eager to hear from the students themselves; to hear how they experienced this particular sexuality education classroom. I also acknowledged that as a so-called 'health education curriculum expert', I have strong views on what I believe is comprehensive and high quality sexuality education. Whilst I would have been happy to have had my opinions and beliefs confirmed and validated by this research study, I was prepared and would be pleased to have some of these ideas challenged and contradicted.

It is important as the researcher that I make clear this was not an evaluative study. I was not attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of a sexuality education programme. Instead I was offering students the opportunity to share their experiences of a sexuality education class. While I acknowledge that as a consequence of this research focus, certain research findings may identify and highlight issues that may need to be addressed for future programmes, it was not the purpose of the study to achieve this outcome. Rather, the purpose of this study was to give 'voice' to the participants so

we could attempt to gain insight and to understand their experience of the sexuality education classes. The fundamental belief underpinning this research study is that it is imperative that the students who are being exposed to compulsory sexuality education in our schools are given the opportunity to share their experiences with those of us who develop and deliver their programmes. In doing so, I hope that we as educators will gain greater insight into what is effective teaching and learning in sexuality education from the perspective of the key stakeholders, the students themselves.

I hoped this research study may ultimately inform those of us who teach sexuality education, and could result in teachers adopting practices in the future in order to ascertain student perceptions and reactions to the sexuality education programmes they deliver. Obtaining this feedback is integral to the pedagogical process and a fundamental best practice principle in the teaching of sexuality education and I believe there is a crucial need for teachers to gain insight about the extent to which sexuality education programmes are being both received and perceived by students. As educators, it is my opinion that we should clearly understand the needs of our students, and also question to what extent we are addressing and meeting those needs with the sexuality education programmes we are planning and teaching. In other words, we need to gather credible information in order to ensure we are providing relevant and meaningful learning opportunities for our students about sexuality education. It is hoped therefore, that this research may provide both myself and other teachers with both the inclination and the tools, to continue to evaluate aspects of our pedagogy in light of student experiences.

I was also hopeful that the students in this study would take advantage of the opportunity their participation afforded them, to articulate and clarify their own perspectives about sexuality education. In doing so, hopefully they became more conscious of both their own viewpoints and their sexuality education needs.

1:5 Overview of Thesis Format

This thesis is organised around six chapters. Having introduced the topic and provided a rationale for the research in Chapter One, literature and past research that has informed and shaped this study is discussed in Chapter Two. Chapter Three describes

the methodology of the research study and includes a discussion of ethical issues and data sources, collection and analysis. Chapter Four reports on the analysis of the data, analyses the initial findings, identifies key themes emerging from the analysis and makes connections to relevant literature. Chapter Five discusses key findings in depth and also links them to past research and literature. Chapter Six draws all the information and findings together into a succinct conclusion, which seeks to address and answer the overall research questions, as well as highlighting the implications for practice, the strengths and limitations of the research study and posing possible questions or directions for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides a summary of the general literature and past research into the delivery of school-based sexuality education. This review therefore, attempts to provide a context within which this research study sits by outlining what others have already discovered and established in the field.

This chapter has been organised into two sections, and then further into sub-sections that reflect the keys aspects underpinning and informing this research study. The first section Student Experience of Sexuality Education will examine research about the experiences students have had in sexuality education classrooms in various countries around the world. I start this section by looking at studies that have provided students with the opportunity to share their thoughts about sexuality education directly with the researcher, exploring ideas such as the value they place upon school based sexuality education, their thoughts on programme approach and content, and their perceptions of teachers and the teaching of sexuality education. I then move on to reviewing research relating to gender and sexuality in the classroom exploring the different ways boys and girls experience sexuality education and how research theorists suggest that these concepts are constructed and understood by the students in the classroom. The final aspect of this section is a review of emotional safety in the classroom and how this impacts on student learning outcomes and experiences particularly in the context of sexuality education.

The second half of this chapter entitled Sexuality Education – Curriculum, Pedagogy and Content investigates relevant curriculum documents and research relating directly to the implementation of sexuality education in schools. This section also reviews research into effective classroom pedagogy and processes in the sexuality education context. The final section focuses on research exploring content of sexuality education programmes. Wherever possible and relevant I have tried to make use of New Zealand based research. Compared to overseas, little research has been conducted in New Zealand around student experience of sexuality education. As previously stated, over the past decade Dr. Gillian Tasker (2002, 2004b, 2005) and Dr. Louisa Allen (2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b) have provided the most

extensive and relevant New Zealand-based research in the area of sexuality education, and consequently their work is extensively used in this literature review. In order to highlight the key themes emerging from a range of research in relation to student experience and sexuality education and to offer broader perspectives, I have also drawn upon international research for this literature review.

2:1 Student Experience of Sexuality Education

Given that this research study is centred around providing selected students with the opportunity to share their perspectives of a sexuality education programme, it makes sense to begin this literature review by exploring past research that has also directly involved students and their sexuality education experience.

A review of literature in regard to student experience has highlighted some important and enlightening findings. British researchers Measor, Tiffin and Miller (2000), maintain that these insights into the values and views that young people bring to bear on the sexuality education they receive, should have an important role to play in the development of policy and practice of those involved in sexuality education work. They believe

> There is a need for government to take seriously the task of listening to what young people have to say about their sexual culture, and then to create policies and legislation that allow those committed groups working in this field to react flexibly and swiftly to the needs of young people (p. 166).

To this end Measor's et al. (2000) phenomenological research into sexuality education programmes in secondary schools in south-east England attempts to understand more about adolescent sexuality and the viewpoints which young people bring to sex(uality) education. They maintain that we need to understand more of the student's perspectives, adolescent informal cultures and the attitudes of young people to sexuality in the modern world. Measor et al.'s (2000) viewpoint is strongly corroborated by Aggleton and Campbell (2000) who suggest that in order for sexuality education to be effective, it must meet the needs and interests of young people as determined by them. Both Measor et al. (2000) and Aggleton and Campbell (2000) contend that asking for student feedback and perspective is paramount in

ensuring sexuality education programmes meet the physical, emotional, social and academic needs of participants.

2:1:1 Talking to the Students

The value and timing of school-based sexuality education

As previously discussed, student voice has an important role to play in the exploration of student ideas and perceptions about sexuality education. Kloop and Miguel (2003) for SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) published a paper in which two teenagers aged 17 years old shared their ideas about how sexuality education should be improved in order to meet adolescent need. *Teens Campaign for Better Sex Education* suggested that teenagers feel it is their right to have sexuality education in the classroom because often it is the only place they can be assured of a safe, neutral environment to receive this type of information. The paper goes on to suggest that many parents are not comfortable giving sexuality information to teens, leading to teens gathering information from other sources such as peers and popular media, both of which can give misleading, confusing and sometimes dangerous messages about sex and sexuality. Lawlor and Purcell (1988) found that the majority of the 400 students in their study agreed that sexuality education should be provided in schools. A significant proportion of the students in a study by Macdowall et al. (2006) also found that as well as parents, school was the preferred source for sexuality information.

The opportunity to participate in ongoing sexuality education and the timing of initial sexuality education programmes are two key considerations that have been highlighted by students in various research studies. Kloop and Miguel (2003) found that students insisted they should have access to sexuality education through all their secondary years of schooling. Elliott, Dickson and Adair (1998) established that when asked most students indicated they would like more time spent on sex and sexuality education particularly at senior secondary school level. Many of the 810 participants aged between 15-21 years also said sexuality education should start earlier in their lives with one student saying “I think it would be more useful to continue sexuality education all through school to Form 7 (Year 13)” (Elliot, et al., 1988, p. 1).

Elliott et al. (1998) reported that most school-based sexuality education in New Zealand (51-55 percent) occurs in Years 7-10 and drops significantly from Year 11 onwards. Students expressed dissatisfaction with this, with one student commenting that sexuality education should be extended beyond junior secondary school levels "because the older students are more likely to be sexually active and need the programme" (p. 1). This finding was supported by a Scottish study conducted by Devine (1995), with one senior secondary school student commenting, "when you are younger, sex education isn't so relevant. It's just a laugh. It's not until you get into S5 and S6 that you start thinking about it and want to ask questions" (p. 7). According to Devine (1995) this highlights the fact that teachers may assume that by the time pupils get to S6 they know all there is to know about sex education; yet the above quotation from one of the senior pupils interviewed suggested that this is not so. Allen's (2005) New Zealand research also supports this conclusion. In her work with 16-19 year olds, the students said they thought more time should be spent on sexuality education, indicated their dissatisfaction with the irregularity of the delivery of sexuality education and wanted schools to offer it as a senior subject.

Young people are sexual beings

Acknowledgement and recognition of young people as sexual beings is another aspect consistently discussed by students in research exploring their perspectives of sexuality education. Allen (2004) maintains there are few sex education programmes that embrace the idea that positive experiences of sexual desire and pleasure are integral to young people's sexual health and well-being. This observation is supported by a tradition of feminist research that identifies the way in which much sex education denies that young people are sexual subjects (Allen, 2004). In her research with 16-19 year olds Allen (2006b), sought to obtain young people's ideas about what they had already learned in sexuality education and what they would like to know more about in the future. A significant number of young men were very open in expressing their desire for sexuality education programmes to include sexually explicit material and information and demonstrated their "recognition of the incongruity in teaching a sexual subject in a way that de-sexualises content" (p. 70). Allen (2006b) concluded "without the official recognition of young people as positive sexual subjects, it is

unlikely that schools will provide them with information that supports their needs and interests" (p. 81).

Elliott et al. (1998) also found students expressing a need for their sexuality education programmes to openly address desire, with one student commenting there was "too much emphasis on saying no – you don't always want to say no" (p. 4). Elliot et al. conclude that because many young people may already have considerable knowledge and/or experience of issues around sex and sexuality, it is extremely important that programmes acknowledge adolescents as emerging sexual beings, and are positive in their approach. Both Ollis (1996) and Gourlay (1996) also identify the importance of any programme taking a positive and accepting approach to the sexuality of young people.

Student perspectives on school-based sexuality education programme content

Many studies have sought to gather feedback from students relating to their satisfaction (or otherwise) with the content of sexuality education programmes. Elliot et al. (1998) reports a gap between the public agenda of sexuality education and the needs and opinion of youth. In other words there appears to be a disparity between sexuality education policy-makers in terms of what is to be taught and the reality of what is needed and desired as described by the students themselves. Young men involved in a study conducted in 1999 by the New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs, indicated that while they obtained most of their information about sex and relationships from school sexuality education programmes, they perceived these programmes to be inadequate in meeting their needs in regard to content, skills and knowledge. Among other things, the young men said they wanted to learn about sexual technique, safe sex and contraception, communication skills and information about the diagnosis and treatment of STIs. (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 1999).

Past research asking students to share their perspectives on sexuality education content clearly demonstrates that students' perceive there is a significant emphasis on fact-based, risk-focused and physiological information in their sexuality education programmes. Students in Elliott et al.'s (1998) study indicated that the six most commonly taught topics in sexuality education programmes were those with a

biological or practical focus; male puberty, safer sex, female puberty, STI's, contraception and pregnancy. Findings from a study by Abel and Fitzgerald (2006) involving 42 young people from a New Zealand secondary school found that a programme focusing only on the negative aspects of sexuality such as unwanted pregnancy and STI's was highly ineffective in regard to both student recall of information and sense of vulnerability. These findings were supported by students in a study by Allen (2001) who said they would have "preferred less emphasis of the dangers of sexual activity" (p. 117). Limmer (2010) believes that sexuality education programmes in the United Kingdom are also dominated by associating sexual experience with risk (pregnancy, infection, exploitation and coercion) and that this does not resonate with many young men in particular who understand risk in a different way.

Other New Zealand based research with young people suggests they perceive that much of the sexuality education programmes they experience are of limited relevance to them. Allen (2005) asked 1180 senior school students to share their thoughts about the content of their school-based sexuality education and they responded by saying they often found programme content repetitive, irrelevant and/or boring. One student said it should be "less scientific and more reality based" (p. 397). The need for sexuality education to contain more detail was a recurrent theme. Participants felt some information was too basic and other areas like sexually transmissible infections were covered extensively, while other issues such as 'actual' sexual intercourse were avoided (Allen, 2005). Like the students in Allen's study, many students interviewed by Abel and Fitzgerald (2006) felt their sexuality education programme was boring and repetitive and consequently did not have a great deal of relevance for them or impact on them.

Hilton (2001) explores the issues in sex and relationship education for boys in particular, in the United Kingdom and concluded that many young men felt that sex education was irrelevant to them, as it focused on pregnancy and contraception and that those aspects were seen as predominantly the responsibility of girls. Abel and Fitzgerald (2006) also highlight comments made by a male student that not enough of the programme was relevant to males and the problems they had. Davidson (1996)

echoes this finding stating that from the perspective of young men, the purpose of sex education has been to prevent girls becoming pregnant, which has resulted in boys' needs being marginalised. Hilton's (2001, 2007) research also showed that boys felt they were not being taught what they wanted to know and they felt they were not being taught at an early enough age.

Allen (2005, 2006b), Limmer (2010) and Measor (2004) suggest there is a high level of anxiety among some boys about knowing enough about sex and the way in which many boys dealt with this situation was to refer to pornography for knowledge and information and that accessing this explicit detail eased their anxiety. One young man commented that pornography was "probably the most educational thing you will ever see" and was discussed in terms of its ability to "show you how to do it" in the context of pleasure, and provided young men with the opportunity to access information and expertise without having to expose their ignorance (Limmer, p. 353). Another young man said he thought his sexuality education programme should make use of pornography because he wanted to look at "the real thing, not just looking at cartoons having sex (how boring)" (Allen, 2005, p. 395).

In response to comments like this, Allen (2004) suggests that sexuality education programmes have historically focused on the 'bird and the bees' with the "positive exploration of desire and pleasure part of sexuality being largely ignored and sidelined" (p. 154). Weir (2009) supports this when she states there is considerable emphasis on bodies and things being done to bodies to make them safe and unsafe with the physical dimension remaining a prevailing discourse. Allen (2004) outlines three major ways sexuality education has been de-eroticised. Firstly through exclusive emphasis on the heterosexual reproductive aspects of sexual intercourse without any acknowledgement of pleasure and desire, secondly the strong connection made between any type of sexual activity and risk and danger, and finally through the way in which students are taught, for example the use of diagrams labelled the 'Reproductive Organs' instead of images of actual bodies. This type of approach only serves to "de-eroticise the body and sexual intercourse and disassociate them from feelings of desire and pleasure" (Allen, 2004, p. 155).

When asked what they wanted to learn about, students requested more information about the following; sexual identity, negotiating skills, emotions involved in sex and sexual activity, relationship choices and abstinence (Elliott et al., 1998), recognition of the pleasurable aspects of sexual activity (Allen, 2001), same sex attraction, homophobia, transgender issues, teenage parenthood and emotions in relationships (Allen, 2005), how to make sexual activity enjoyable for both partners, abortion, dealing with relationships break ups, teenage pregnancy and emotions in relationships (Allen, 2008a, 2008b). During focus group interviews, Hilton (2001) found boys requested more teaching around feelings and emotions, sexuality, sexual techniques, sexually transmitted infections, pornography and the effects of 'boy culture'. They also asked for more active teaching approaches and time away from the girls. Both Allen (2008a) and Measor et al. (2000) found that students wanted to know more about "dealing with break ups". Findings by Macdowall et al. (2006) support these perspectives, with the majority of participants saying they would have liked to have been "more knowledgeable about broader sexual matters when they first felt ready for sexual experience - not just about the mechanical and biological aspects of human reproduction" (p. 809). The topics least desired were reproduction, periods and puberty (Allen, 2008b; Macdowall et al., 2006). These findings echo those of Measor et al. (2000) who found that 14-15 year olds complained that their sexuality education programmes lacked information in two areas; emotional content and explicitness around actual sexual activity and the experience of sexuality. Recent New Zealand research by Allen (2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b) investigating student ideas about sexuality education content reached the same conclusion. Allen (2008b) also found via questionnaires and focus group interviews collected from 1,258 senior school students throughout New Zealand, that young women and men had similar content preferences for sexuality education.

In their study of Northern Irish youths' opinions of their school-based sexuality education Rolston, Schubotz and Simpson (2005) concluded that there was an avoidance of rigorous and open discussion of sex in general, and of specific topics in particular such as "homosexuality, contraception, abortion and the whole area of eroticism and desire" (p. 222). This reflects the findings of Allen (2008a, 2008b), who believes that by asserting their need for this information, young people are positioning

themselves as legitimately sexual. Rolston et al. (2005) go on to suggest that programmes that do not acknowledge the legitimacy of youth sexuality and fail to address these topics, are not preparing young people for these aspects of adulthood, and are thereby negatively impacting on their ability to make informed choices.

The literature indicates that students have a clear idea of what they would like to learn about when it comes to sexuality education and what their sexual health needs are. The research outlined above indicates that many programmes are failing to meet student need in regard to content because they tend to have "a strong biomedical focus and have not been designed to allow students to express their needs or to engage in open discussion about those aspects of sex and sexuality that are significant and relevant to them" (Tasker, 2002, p. 24).

Effective teachers and teaching of sexuality education

Research findings focused on exploring student ideas about who taught their sexuality education programmes and how it was taught highlighted that students had very clear ideas about the qualities they felt a teacher of sexuality education should have in order to assist in making programmes effective. When directly questioned about who teaches them sexuality education research indicates students overwhelmingly require someone who is approachable and comfortable in discussing sexuality issues (Allen 2005; Buston & Wight, 2004; Hilton, 2003; Tasker, 2002).

Tasker's (2002) research highlights the characteristics of an effective teacher of sexuality education as discussed by the Year 12 students in her study. A key finding was the importance to students of a teacher who is able to connect to the students in a positive and respectful way. The comment below indicates that this degree of 'realness' has a profound effect on the students' willingness to be open, honest and authentic in the sexuality education classroom

> Mrs B. brings out our openness and makes us talk and say things. She gets really involved with the class. She gets in the circle. She doesn't believe in having a desk to hide behind and barriers and that kind of thing. If you've got a question she always answers them. She never puts anyone down. She's the best teacher I've got. She teaches us so much. She gets onto our level. She doesn't think well like, 'I'm the teacher and you're the kids and you'll

> do it my way, and what I say is all that matters.' She doesn't get in the class way. She's one of us (p. 178).

These sentiments were echoed by the boys in Hilton's study in 2003, that the most important quality a sexuality education teacher must possess is the ability to encourage trust in the students. In addition, the teacher must keep student confidentiality, be approachable enabling the boys to relax and to discuss difficult and personal subjects, and be able to produce a safe environment and answer questions in a relaxed manner (Hilton, 2003).

Research studies have provided students with the opportunity to comment on the teaching approaches utilised in the sexuality education classroom. Male students in Hilton's (2003) research study said they wanted a teacher who used "many different methods to deliver material" (p. 41). Students requested "more interactive activities in which students are active, such as group discussions as well as expressing a desire to participate in skills practice, drama, demonstration and role-play activities" (Allen, 2005, p. 394). The students in Tasker's 2002 study also said they particularly enjoyed the hands-on activities, group work and the interactive nature of the programme. The students went on to indicate they felt these types of social-constructivist activities were valuable and assisted their learning by enabling them to construct and reconstruct their understandings. One student commented "you learn from each other because the other people have things they see differently. Other people may know something you don't know and then they describe it and tell you" (p. 153).

Class Composition

Students in various studies have discussed their preferences for the gender composition of sexuality education classes. Byers et al. (2003) found that 60 percent of girls and 35 percent of boys thought that some single sex classes would be appropriate for some sexual health topics and would make them feel more comfortable. Hilton (2003) also found that many boys preferred to have time away from the girls. Student opinion in a study by Newby, Wallace, Dunn and Browne (2012) was varied, with 21 percent wanting single-sex classes, 30 percent mixed gender and almost 50 percent of students saying they had no preference. Allen's (2005) research in New Zealand secondary schools found that 65 percent of students

preferred mixed-gender classes and felt it was "important for males and females to understand each other" (p. 396). Tasker (2002) found that students who had initially indicated a preference for single sex classes in sexuality education, then later stated they felt it was important that boys and girls undertake classes together in an attempt to better understand one another's perspectives on sexuality issues.

Overall research findings from the perspective of students relating to teacher characteristics suggests that students value teachers who are able to interact positively with them and someone they are able to trust. In terms of teaching approaches in sexuality education students indicated their preference for methods that were varied and involved their active participation. Student perspectives on single sex and mixed gender classes for sexuality education were varied.

2:1:2 Gender and Sexuality in the Classroom

Research into gender and sexuality in both the school setting and classroom has been extensive over many years, with countless studies seeking to understand how these concepts are constructed, understood and maintained, how they interrelate and how they impact on classroom processes and student learning and understandings. Both Tasker (2002) and Sideman (1994) consider learning about sexuality and gender to be closely aligned and inextricably linked. Before embarking on a research study focused on these phenomena, it is important to clarify each of the terms 'sexuality' and 'gender', and to consider how these relate to the sexuality education classroom and context.

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Houghton Mifflin, 2009), sexuality is "the condition of being characterised and/or distinguished by sex; concern with or interest in sexual activity; sexual character or potency". The *Collins English Dictionary* (Harper Collins, 2003) defines sexuality as "the state or quality of being sexual; preoccupation with or involvement in sexual matters; the possession of sexual potency".

Definitions of gender also vary to some degree from source to source. The following definition from *Social and Ethical Issues in Sexuality Education* by Tasker (2004a)

clearly outlines the meaning of gender as it relates to sexuality education in the New Zealand context. It is described as "a collection of social attributes and qualities a particular society associates with being either male or female. These constitute 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in any given society" (p. 39).

In regard to gender itself, there are two schools of thought. The first is the essentialist paradigm that implies a belief that certain phenomena are natural, inevitable, universal, and biologically determined (Irvine, 1990). Essentialists take the position that sexual phenomena such as sexual orientation or gender--reside within the individual (Bohan, 1993). They believe differences "between males and females are biologically based – hormonally, structurally and genetically – and individuals have a unitary sexual identity' (Tasker, 2002, p. 139). Gendered behaviour is therefore determined by our biological sex and according to Chodorow (as cited in Measor et al., 2000) are labelled either masculine or feminine and Tasker (2002) believes that "such a theory supports the view that males can't help but be aggressive, dominant or unemotional and similarly that the opposite qualities are inherent in females" (p. 139).

The opposing school of thought in terms of gender is that of social constructionism. Proponents of this paradigm argue that that social learning rather than biology is the key influence on gender and sexuality (Tasker, 2002). Whilst they do not deny biological differences, social constructionists see gender not as a trait of the individual, as essentialists do, but rather as a process external to the individual. They contend that learning about sexuality and gender takes place within contexts of power that position people differently. Knuttila (as cited in Abbiss, 2005, p. 14) believes that how gender is organised, how "women and girls, men and boys are categorized, expected to behave, do behave, and are treated" is one of the most important influences on human behaviour and interactions.

Other theorists such as Butler (1990), Kimmel (1995) and Pleck (1987) believe that through the process of socialisation individuals learn what are considered to be appropriate behaviours for masculinity and femininity. They also assert that gender is defined by interactions between people, by language and by the discourse of a culture and believe these stereotypes provide a collective, organised and dichotomous

meanings of gender, and often become widely shared beliefs about who men and women innately 'are'. According to Courtney (2000), many theorists suggest people are encouraged to conform to stereotypic beliefs and behaviours and commonly do conform to and adopt dominant norms of femininity and masculinity.

DeLamater and Shibley Hyde (1998) and Kimmel (1995) suggest that the construction of gender through cultural and subjective meanings results in constant shifts of what it is to be male and female depending on time and place. Connell's (2002) theories also support this conceptual understanding. Gender is described as the "relationships, boundaries, practices, identities, and images that are actively created in social processes, come into existence in specific historical circumstances, shape the lives of people in profound and often contradictory ways, and are subject to historical struggle and change" (p. 27). Connell (2002) maintains gender is the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes. Connell's view of gender is useful for the purposes of this study because it acknowledges the body, as well as the social shaping of that body in a mutually reinforcing and continuous process (Weir, 2009).

Butler's (1988) essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* contends that certain gendered behaviour is an act of sorts, a performance and one that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality. Within each gender performance, there are attributed societal roles and behaviours associated with the individual's gender. Butler (1988) asserts that when an individual adheres to the constructs of gender, they are rewarded with the comfort and mental security of acting within the means of their gender's frame of reference. However, when they deviate, they are faced with a dissonance resulting from a disparity between their expected roles, and the roles that they performed.

It is widely acknowledged and understood that schools are a reflection of society in which they exist and they therefore create and sustain concepts of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1989). Schooling therefore provides a site for the production, articulation and contestation of femininities, masculinities and sexualities (Epstein &

Johnson, 1998; Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 1998) and consequently gender performativity as described by Butler (1988). Other theorists such as those discussed by McCormack (2011), have demonstrated that school-aged boys are hierarchically stratified according to a hegemonic mode of masculine dominance. Boys are expected to conform in orthodox gender roles by demonstrating misogynistic, homophobic, and aggressive attitudes and behaviours (Nayak & Kehily, 1996; Plummer, 1999). Over the years, the sexuality education classroom in particular, has provided researchers with fascinating examples of gender stereotypes, expectations and behaviours in action.

Many theorists assert that sexuality is a central site through which masculine identity is constructed and that the sexuality education classroom provides an effective context in which boys can express, consolidate and reinforce their masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is described by Connell (2005) as competitive and reflects a tendency for males to seek domination over other males and subordinate females. Holland, Ramazanoglu and Sharpe (1993), Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (1996) and Hilton (2001) suggest that the sexuality education curriculum enables males to assert this hegemonic masculinity through their response to content, with Hilton adding that "sex education provides a setting where boys can assert themselves by shouting down girls and attempting to embarrass women teachers and those whose sexual orientation differs from their own" (p. 33).

According to Hilton (2001), the socialisation of boys is a significant issue for consideration for sexuality education teachers, and therefore it is essential to operate within the contexts of their lives and experiences. She believes much of society still expects and perpetuates a macho image and much sexuality education is received by boys from areas other than school, such as media and the internet and that "this material often depicts women as victims and men in positions of power " (Hilton, 2001, p. 34). Other powerful constructions of masculinity may influence boys' reactions to aspects of the sexuality education curriculum. For example, some boys perceive discussing feelings and displaying caring attitudes as feminine and this may result in boys "acting out" through noisy, disruptive behaviour in order to reflect these traditional masculine stereotypes. Hilton (2001) supports this with her suggestion that

parents often collude by expecting their boys to be naturally boisterous and less interested in academic pursuits than girls. However she also insists recognition must be given to the fact that not all boys who receive sexuality education have the same outlook, beliefs, maturity, sexual orientation or power. She believes that "teachers of sex education must be aware of difference between boys and not assume that all boys have power over girls, lack of emotional maturity or are not concerned about their bodies" (Hilton, 2001, p. 34).

I have previously discussed the de-eroticisation of sexuality education according to Allen (2004). Both Allen and other researchers suggest that this phenomenon has influenced the construction of femininity within the sexuality education context. The content of programmes and the way in which it is taught often aligns with traditional notions of female sexuality, with girls and women being positioned into discourses of femininity, passivity and irrationality by the reinforcement of dominant societal sex roles in school settings, and that this perpetuates the dominant societal gender stereotypes (Weir, 2009; Youdell, 2005). Whatley (1994) found that the recurring theme in texts and curricular materials is that there is a powerful, innate, hormonally determined sex drive in men, with very little evidence of an equivalent for women. Fine (1991) also maintains there is a prevalence of gendered understandings that construct female sexuality as essentially nonsexual. These biological determinist and essentialist perspectives creates a man-woman double standard where sexual behaviour seems inevitable and natural, removing the need to challenge power issues in existing gender relations.

Sexuality education programmes are often discussed in terms of discourses. Foucault defines discourse as a system of representation and the production of knowledge through language (Hall, 1997). Foucault argues that discourse constructs the topic and defines and governs the way something can be meaningfully talked and reasoned about, and it influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others (Hall, 1997). According to Bay-Cheng (2003), Morris (1994) and Whatley (1994), the saturation of sexuality education programmes with fear-and morality-based messages has been increasingly highlighted as an ongoing fundamental flaw in the approach to sexuality education. Gagnon and Simon (1973)

suggested that "learning about sex in our society is learning about guilt; conversely, learning how to manage sexuality constitutes learning how to manage guilt" (p. 42). Tolman (1999) believes that both comprehensive and abstinence curricula rely on a dichotomy of good and bad in conceptualising and discussing sexuality, the only difference being the behaviors they assign to each of those points.

Fine's (1988) identification of three prevailing discourses of female sexuality that she says operate inside public schools reflects and highlights this dichotomy, as well as deterministic and essentialist perspectives. The discourses of 'sexuality as violence', 'sexuality as victimisation', and 'sexuality as individual morality' set women up as the moral gatekeepers or potential victims of male predators (Fine, 1988). The notion of female passivity and/or victimisation is explored further by Allen (2004) who states that the expression of young women's sexuality is regulated by their need to maintain their sexual reputations, "displaying too much interest in the sexual pleasures of relationships (without emotional investment) puts young women in danger of being a 'slut' and gaining a negative sexual reputation" (p. 161). The pressure to conform can impact on sexual decisions made by adolescents as discussed by Nahom et al. (2001), who concluded that gender differences in condom use may stem from societal norms about the meaning of sexual activity for boys and girls, for example it is seen to be more socially acceptable for boys to desire sex than girls. In a comparative study in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, Hird and Jackson (2001) concluded young women were found to take on the role of gatekeepers in heterosexual relationships, and to negotiate complex and contradictory discourses that cast them as either 'sluts' or 'angels', with female sexual desire being defined by its absence.

According to many theorists and researchers, schools have and continue to be, strongly biased towards heterosexuality, with other sexual identities invisible (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Nairn & Smith, 2003; Quinlivan, 2006; Tasker, 2002) and while homosexuality may be mentioned in the classroom, it usually related to gay males with lesbianism being absent (Quinlivan, 1994). Epstein and Johnson (1994) suggest "heterosexuality is the silent term because it is assumed – unspoken and unremarked – when sexualities are spoken of. Its invisibility is part of its power" (p. 215). Heterosexuality, the dominant term, is therefore normalised and

this mirrors the heterosexism that persists in broader society. This construct results in people who are heterosexual receiving privileges, benefits and recognition, while those who are non-heterosexual do not (Flood, 1997) and is often referred to as heteronormativity. Flood (1997) maintains homophobic attitudes are central to contemporary heterosexual culture and suggests that these attitudes are harmful to everyone regardless of sexual orientation in that they lock people into rigid and gendered ways of being that limit self-expression. This assertion is corroborated by Nairn and Smith (2003), whose study exposed extensive heterosexism and heteronormativity pervading schools and its damaging effects on many students at the classroom level. Mac an Ghaill (1996) and Plummer (2001) maintain that homophobia plays a powerful role in male peer culture and that boys develop various manoeuvres to avoid homophobia such as monitoring and carefully styling their behaviour, deflecting scrutiny by labelling others first, avoiding 'danger zones' and seeking the security of groups (Plummer, 2001).

The school environment is not exempt from this hegemonic construct and New Zealand based research has confirmed the findings of overseas studies such as those discussed by Quinlivan (1994), and concluded that for many gay and lesbian students, schools were not safe places to be anything other that heterosexual. According to Tasker (2002), "for many students who identify as homosexual, or who are struggling to understand their sexual subjectivity, their educational experiences have not only valorised heterosexual sex, but have blocked any understanding of homosexual sex" (p. 17).

Given that the goal of many sexuality education programmes has generally been to reduce unplanned pregnancy and rates of STI transmission (Kirby et al., 1994; Lusk, 1999; Tasker 2002, 2004b), it is hardly surprising that many programmes have been regarded as being heterosexist in nature. Quinlivan (2006) maintains that silence and invisibility surrounds the issue of same sex desire in the formal curriculum and this ensures the invisibility of any other constructions of human sexuality other than heterosexuality in school-based sexuality education programmes. Tasker (2002) believes that effective sexuality education should be about challenging these traditional constructions of heterosexuality as the norm and it should seek to recognise

and validate the diversity of sexual identity. She also maintains that an effective curriculum should take into account the social context in which some groups are privileged over others and analyse how schools actively produce both gender and heterosexual divisions (Tasker, 2002). This mirrors the thoughts of Mac an Ghaill (1996) who claims that it is within schools, where heterosexualities need to be deconstructed.

The implications of these studies, as reported in the literature, is that if sexuality education programmes are to be relevant and engaging they must acknowledge how young people construct meanings about their sexual selves (subjectivities) (Allen, 2003). Traditional constructions of male and female sexualities can be limiting to young people and may need to be reconstructed in order to provide alternative discourses in which young people can operate in different ways. Allen's (2003) empirical research with 17-19 year olds explored young people's understandings of themselves as sexual in relation to dominant discourses of (hetero)sexuality *(author's brackets)*. The study found that generally young people do draw upon dominant discourses of (hetero) sexuality in their talk about themselves as sexual but not all young women and men follow these traditional discourses. One woman drew on discourses that resisted dominant meanings about female sexuality through attending a school renowned for its alternative pedagogies. Her experience at school enabled her to resist the positioning of young women as always wanting commitment and love from relationships. This example highlights that young people's sexual subjectivities "do not always neatly conform to traditional notions of passive female and active male (hetero)sexuality" (p. 232). Sexuality education programmes that stereotype for example women's lack of sexual desire or which ignore men's aspirations for love, may not be relevant to students as they do not encapsulate the diversity in young people's conceptualisation of their sexuality. Allen (2003) supports Whatley's (1988) call for sexuality education programmes to move away from the perpetuation of dominant societal gender norms by suggesting educators should be challenging the biological, determinist and heterosexist models that predominate in school sexuality education, and recognise that to challenge them is to challenge the dominant discourses that operate within a school and also those in society at large. By critiquing both the scientific nature of sexuality information and the popular cultural

constructions of sexuality, the status quo in gender relations can be challenged (Whatley, 1988). Young men may then be freed from having all sexual power linked to power over and domination of, and young women can be assisted to explore a variety of sexual subjectivities that they may choose to operate within. In this way both can be assisted to reconstruct a more health enhancing, meaningful way of being.

Fine's (1988) suggestion of a fourth discourse; a 'discourse of desire' would position women as negotiators and initiators as well as receivers in sexual contexts is supported by Allen (2003, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b) and provides the opportunity for alternative sexual subjectivities (the way in which young people sexually view and define themselves) for both young women and young men. It would name desire, pleasure and sexual entitlement for women as well as men and would assist in facilitating the critique of dominant gender and sexuality discourses.

2:1:3 Emotional Safety in the Classroom

This section of the literature review discusses the concept of emotional safety in the classroom context and considers the impact that research literature suggests this has on student comfort levels and learning in sexuality education. I begin by discussing general research focused on the classroom climate and followed by an investigation of the importance of emotional safety in the context of sexuality education. Research into the role of the teacher in establishing a climate of trust in the classroom will also be discussed. Wherever possible I have tried to utilise both New Zealand and international research that has directly asked students for their perspectives of the emotional safety in their classrooms.

As recognition of the impact of emotional safety in student learning is growing, so too is the body of research to support it in general. Many researchers (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996; Harvey & Evans, 2003; Noddings, 1992) have acknowledged the important role the classroom climate plays in enabling students in the process of learning. According to Thompson and Wheeler (2008), the "emotional environment of the classroom is comprised of [sic] feelings of safety, support and respect" (p. 37). Significant research has highlighted the role of emotion in the learning process. The portion of the brain that regulates emotion and memory are in

the limbic system and given their location and function (Thompson & Wheeler, 2008), therefore it would seem that the limbic system has a primary role in determining what is learned and remembered and if the emotions are pleasant, the students place the facts associated with the events in long-term memory storage. Thompson & Wheeler (2008) also believe that in order for students to participate fully in the educational process they must feel safe.

Tasker's (2002) research led her to conclude that feelings of self-worth, pleasure, enjoyment, wonder, trust, acceptance and support were an integral part of both "the student learning and the establishment of an affective learning environment needed to facilitate learning" (2002, p. 188). Hattie (2003) also claims that effective teaching and learning best occurs when a positive classroom environment exists, and that teachers need to be aware of the variety of students that exist in the classroom. His research highlights the importance of teachers demonstrating their care and commitment by creating a positive classroom climate in which all students feel safe and able to contribute. Research by Harvey and Evans (2003), and Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai and Richardson (2003) have taken this a step further and identified that the emotional relationship between the teacher and the student is the central concept of emotional climate in the primary classroom.

In regard to health education in particular, Weir (2009) argues that creating and maintaining emotional safety in the classroom is integral to the subject, and is perhaps even more crucial in sexuality education. Studies undertaken in Australia and New Zealand indicate there is a "level of relational engagement between teachers and students in health education topics such as sexuality education that is unusual in secondary schooling" (Weir, 2009, p. 140) and requires special preparation and attention. Tasker's (2002) research in a sexuality education classroom concluded that by establishing a classroom environment that is responsive to student need, by adopting a facilitative role in which power was shared and with the effective utilisation of social constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, students were encouraged to openly express their ideas and to challenge one another. The classroom climate created was one in which students felt safe, that valued caring, trust and confidentiality and in turn promoted active and enjoyable learning (Timperley,

Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). In a qualitative classroom based study in the United Kingdom, Buston and Wight (2004) concluded that a positive, safe, classroom environment was essential to students' participation in sexuality education. Also crucial was the material used, the time allocated to learning, the timing of the lessons and the teacher's style. Not surprisingly, students' active and constructive participation in the lessons was found to be essential for effective learning (Buston & Wight, 2004).

Other New Zealand based research in sexuality education classrooms (Munro, 2000; Munro & Ballard, 2004; Munro & Price, 2001), have explored the anxiety of teachers about their perceived inability to establish a trusting and caring classroom environment due to inadequate time. Weir (2009) states that in order for positive and meaningful relationship to develop in the health education classroom people must meet at regular intervals. This mirrors the thoughts of other researchers (Bishop et al., 2003; Harvey & Evans, 2003) highlighting the importance of the relationship between the teacher and his/her students on student learning. Hargreaves (2001) also suggests we cannot know or understand people we rarely meet; nor can we be understood by them in return. The desire and need to establish meaningful relationships and a safe and functional emotional environment within the classroom, supports the notion of frequent and regular contact between classroom teachers and their students, and also between the students themselves in a health education and sexuality education setting.

In canvassing the literature relating to emotional safety in the sexuality education classroom, it became apparent that there is limited research that focuses explicitly on student perspectives and voices. However, research that has explored these phenomena from student perspectives has provided some insights into the influence the class climate has on student comfort levels. Buston and Wight (2004) discuss the work of other researchers, who contend that a particular climate must be created in the sexuality education classroom by the teacher, in which students feel secure, valued and trusting of others in the class. Only when this climate exists will students willingly participate in class or group discussions or activities (Buston & Wight, 2004). Tasker (2002) provided an opportunity for a group of students to share their perceptions of the emotional climate in their classroom with thoughtful results.

Comments from the students indicated they valued emotional safety and were concerned with trust and security in the sexuality education classroom. One of the students, Joanne said "my class is very good at discussing things. All the people get on well and if we want to say something we say it. We don't feel the need to hold back because we're scare or shy or anything" (p. 170). When asked what was special about her class, another student from the same study, Hannah, responded

> They have respect for everyone else, they feel more willing to say something and people don't make fun of you when you say something, like in some classes you don't know whether to say some things because people might laugh at you. You don't feel held back [in this class] like you do in some classes (Tasker, 2002, p. 170).

Students in a research study by Allen (2005) suggested that smaller class sizes would be of benefit to them, as it would afford them more privacy, enabling them to ask questions they felt embarrassed about in a large group. Another recommendation offered by students in this study was that "teachers become more competent in controlling this class" (2005, p. 400). These same criticisms have been made by students in other studies where students' participation hinges on feeling confident that inappropriate student remarks and behaviours would be dealt with by the teacher (Buston, Wight, Hart & Scott, 2002).

From the limited research available it can be concluded that the emotional environment in the sexuality education classroom is highly influential when it comes to student comfort levels and their desire to participate in the classroom and the degree of emotional safety in the classroom is a significant factor in determining levels of student engagement. Literature suggests that if students feel safe and comfortable they are more likely to participate fully, but if they are nervous and therefore inhibited, there is the potential they may disengage from the programme to some extent or perhaps even completely.

2:2 Sexuality Education – Curriculum, Pedagogy and Content

This section of the literature review has been organised into the three aspects; curriculum, pedagogy and content all of which literature suggests inform, influence

and impact on the delivery of sexuality education and are therefore integral to the experience had by the students.

2:2:1 Curriculum

This section of the literature review begins by outlining international perspectives of the concept of health and demonstrates how they have influenced the development of the contemporary health education curriculum in New Zealand and consequently the sexuality education curriculum. Next I outline the curriculum guidelines and aims of sexuality education in New Zealand as outlined by the official curriculum documents, as well as an exploration of others' ideas around the goals and purpose of comprehensive sexuality education. Literature voicing its opposition to comprehensive sexuality education is also addressed.

The teaching of sexuality education in New Zealand state schools is informed and guided by two documents: *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999). These official documents outline intentions and requirements for both content and practice and provide guidelines for teachers who construct the curriculum in practice. In the 1980s and 1990s, the health education curriculum in New Zealand moved away from a medicalised, biological and individualistic emphasis to more holistic, democratic and inclusive focus (Elliot et al., 1998; Tasker, 2002, 2004b). The principal writer of the curriculum, Dr. Gillian Tasker, believed it should be designed to improve the social and learning environments in schools and enhance the health prospects of all students (Tasker 2004b). The construct of the curriculum was very much aligned with and informed by the tenets of post-modern curriculum theory, being designed to address an ever-changing environment, rather than the acquisition of a fixed body of knowledge as described by Doll (as cited in Tasker, 2004b). It was felt a curriculum based on this model would enable learners to participate in a broad range of learning experiences designed to empower them and develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to enhance personal identity and health status (Tasker, 2004b).

The philosophy of the current official health education curriculum is also reflective of the global "shift in the dominant concept of health from an 'absence of disease' to a more holistic concept of 'wellness'" (Tasker, 2004b, p. 203) over the previous three decades, and was further reinforced by the development of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Ottawa Charter in 1986. According to Tasker (2004b), this charter recognised that major health gains were not linked so much to advances in medical knowledge, but rather to increases in wages and living standards as well as improvements in public health services and health oriented legislation. Other international health-focused curricular informing the development of the official New Zealand health education curriculum included Jewitt's "ecological integrative perspective and Lawson's "socio-ecological conception" (as cited in Tasker, 2004b, p. 206), both of which place emphasis on the interrelatedness of personal interpersonal and societal factors on health and wellbeing.

Sexuality education is one of seven key areas of learning in *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum (*Ministry of Education, 1999), and as such draws upon the philosophy of the document as a whole. The teaching of sexuality education is compulsory from Year 1 through until Year 10 within *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and its supporting document *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999). Sexuality education in *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) is grounded in a democratic paradigm and is positive, holistic and comprehensive in its approach (Tasker, 2004b). The framework of the document is underpinned by four underlying concepts: 'Hauora', 'Health Promotion', 'Socio-ecological Perspective' and 'Attitudes and Values'. Students are encouraged to consider and explore all aspects of wellbeing in any given sexuality context and curriculum requirements engage students in exploring the wider interpersonal and societal factors that influence sexual attitudes, choices and behaviours. This approach to sexuality education provides recognition of the centrality of sexuality to an individual's sense of identity and well-being, whilst also acknowledging that individuals, social groups, society and the environment are inextricably linked. Students are required to critically examine the social and cultural influences that shape the ways people learn about and express their sexuality, for

example, in relation to gender roles, the concept of body image, discrimination, equity, the media, culturally-based values and beliefs, and the law (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Content to be taught in sexuality education from Year 1-10 according to *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) includes knowledge of sexual development (physical, emotional, and social), knowledge, understandings, and skills to enhance their sexual and reproductive health, personal and interpersonal skills and related attitudes, attitudes of respect and care and concern for themselves and other people, problem-solving and decision-making skills and understanding and skills to enhance relationships. This concept of sexuality education is also supported by publications such as *Sexuality Education: Revised Guidelines for Boards of Trustees, Principals and Teachers* (Ministry of Education, 2002) and *Inclusive Sexuality Education: A resource to develop and implement sexuality education programmes for all students* (Ministry of Education, 2001).

The aims and content of the current official curriculum documents reflect the perspective of Lusk (1999) who contends the primary goal of sexuality education should be the promotion of a positive attitude to personal relationships and sexual health amongst the students who participate in the programme. She maintains that if this goal is achieved, two secondary goals are likely to follow: "children and young people will experience their sexuality as a positive and fulfilling part of life now and in the future" and "there will be a reduction in the negative outcomes of adolescent sexual activity" (p. 6).

The intent of the current documents aligns with this approach because the focus is on the creating positive and responsible attitudes towards sexual health through the development of knowledge, skills and risk-minimising and health-enhancing behaviours. For most of the twentieth century any inclusion of sexuality education in New Zealand school curricula had been primarily concerned with the management of public health crises, with the aim being to reduce unplanned pregnancies and STIs, reflecting the dominance of a medicalised, disease-prevention model (Tasker, 2002).

Prior to the implementation of the *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) there had been persistent calls from the public health sector over the previous three decades for more effective sexuality education in schools in an attempt to improve youth sexual health statistics (Tasker, 2002). The philosophy of this new curriculum was to address these concerns by enhancing positive aspects of sexuality and exploring the broader socio-cultural influences on sex and sexuality (Tasker, 2002). Up to this point, most school-based sexuality education programmes had been designed to delay the onset of sexual activity and to reduce the rates of STI transmission and HIV infection (Kirby et al., 1994), with no consideration given to the exploration of positive sexuality or cultural and societal influences on youth sexual health behaviours. The hope was that implementation of a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum across the nation's schools would translate into positive and responsible sexual attitudes among New Zealand youth, and that this in turn would lead to a reduction of unplanned teenage pregnancy and high rates of STI infection.

According to Tasker (2002), the main goal of sexuality education programmes in the past has been on achieving behaviour change outside the classroom in terms of adolescent sexual behaviour and that this has been problematic when it comes to researching the effectiveness of these programmes. She believes much of the research has used empiricist, quantitative approaches and that this approach may overlook other benefits students may gain from comprehensive sexuality education.

> Little consideration appears to be given to how a sexuality education programme moves beyond reproductive health… taking a broader focus on well-being (physical, emotional and mental, social and spiritual) along with a critical stance on the socio-ecological factors influencing conceptualisations of sexuality and sexual behaviour, could enhance students' lives in relation to their sexuality and contribute to the creation of more positive social norms. Furthermore, much of the research does not elaborate on the nature of the learning experiences. Nor is there widespread analysis of the quality of the teaching even though many analyses of sexuality education argue that the teacher is a crucial component in the effectiveness of classroom programmes (e.g. see Klein, 1983; Picker, 1984; Tatum, 1989; Kirby, 1994, 1997, 1999; Lusk, 1999). (Tasker, 2002, p. 18)

Gourlay (1996) and Lusk (1999) go on to suggest that any research attempting to determine the effectiveness of school-based sexuality education must also remember

and acknowledge that sexuality education in schools is just one source of information in students' diverse lives. Lusk (1999) also believes there must be recognition in the curriculum statement that "classroom teaching is only one part of the educative process with the school environment and a supportive community also being important in shaping the values, attitudes and behaviours of students" (p. 3). Gourlay (1996) also maintains that such programmes "carry an enormous burden of expectation to achieve what other curriculum areas, families, health and welfare agencies and government departments and policies have not been able to accomplish" (p. 39). He asks us to consider that when young people report that sexuality education has a positive effect on them they are referring to more than the measurable behaviour change. Instead they may be referring to the impact of programmes on their body awareness, self-esteem, self-efficacy, values, spirit, confidence, hope understanding and all those innumerable factors which potentially link with and nourish our sexuality (Gourlay, 1996).

Opposition to this comprehensive approach to sexuality education in New Zealand has been vocal and ongoing since both the development and implementation of *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999). In 1998, a draft curriculum document was released for public comment. Whilst the vast majority of responses were overwhelmingly positive, four of the 683 were strongly critical of the document arguing that areas such as sexuality and spirituality were the sole domain of the church and the family (Tasker, 2004b). One particular group, the Education Forum (1998), argued that the document had lacked "precision and clarity", had "grandiose aims" (para 19) and overall sought to change the nature of New Zealand society.

Debate around the teaching of sexuality education in our schools consistently appears in most forms of media, with opposing groups often engaging in robust discourse and debate about its relevance, intent and appropriateness. Articles by Binning from the *New Zealand Herald* in September 2011, are typical of the coverage sexuality education receives on a regular basis. The following quotes by various individuals were in response to a story entitled 'Too Much 'Grubby Stuff'', So Dad Steps In' published on September 19th 2011, about a concerned father who removed his 12 year

old son from his school-based sexuality education programme due to concerns about the content being covered.

Jackie Edmonds, Chief Executive of Family Planning in New Zealand, attempted to explain the rationale behind the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education when she said "comprehensive sexuality education aims to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills and values to have safe, fulfilling and enjoyable relationships and to take responsibility for their health and well-being" (Binning, 2011a, para. 3).

This perspective was supported by Dr. Katie Fitzpatrick from the University of Auckland, who stated it was crucial that young people had access to high quality and comprehensive sexuality education because

> Today's youth have access to vast amounts of information on the internet and via social media. Inevitably, these sites contain misinformation, pornography and gossip in addition to useful anatomical and psychological knowledge. Quality sexuality education at school can enable youth to critically evaluate and question these sources of information. Why would we exclude this process from contemporary schools unless we want our education system to be distanced from social reality and the worlds that our youth inhabit? (Fitzpatrick, 2011, para. 9).

In reaction to and contributing to the public debate, regular columnist for the *New Zealand Herald*, Jim Hopkins expressed his disapproval of sexuality education in his article entitled 'Time Parents Fought Flawed System' with the following comments

> So, without remit or sanction, they introduce 12-year-olds to oral sex, anal sex, the joys of imagining they're gay and, lest that weren't enough, a bit of clitoral advice as well. Meanwhile, in the junior school, 6-year-olds are being told about "sexual touch" and the possibility that a babysitter may try to put a hand down their pants.
>
> This is well-intentioned wickedness and should be named as such. It is child abuse, as the responses of 6-year-olds reported in the Herald this week make clear. Moreover, maintaining a system in which such 'lessons' cannot be effectively challenged is an abuse of the adults who fund it as well. (Hopkins, 2011, para. 7 & 8).

Bob McCroskie, the National Director of Family First New Zealand, joined the debate, and in another article for the *New Zealand Herald* remarked

> There is also the flawed and dangerous ideology that showing teenagers how to have sex will reduce their desire to want sex - just writing that sentence makes me laugh out loud. And the education should be as explicit as possible. That will - apparently - discourage them even further. And the younger we start teaching them this, the better. (McCroskie, 2011, para. 12).

As the above quotes demonstrate, the area of sexuality education continues to be contentious and elicit passionate and often diametrically opposed responses from individuals and groups within New Zealand society. Public debate and disagreement about sexuality education such as that demonstrated above may make it somewhat challenging and potentially overwhelming for schools to implement comprehensive sexuality education and could be one of many reasons why a comprehensive approach to sexuality education as outlined in the official curriculum documents has not always been adopted (Elliot et al., 1998). In addition there are also other issues impacting on the effective implementation of sexuality education; the comparatively low status of health education as a curriculum subject and a lack of adequately trained and committed health educators.

As previously discussed in Chapter One and demonstrated in the ERO report findings from 2007, there are significant issues and inconsistencies in the implementation of sexuality education across New Zealand schools highlighting discrepancies between the official and planned curriculum and the curriculum in practice. In view of these limitations and compromising factors, it can be concluded that the potential of the sexuality education as outlined in *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) is unknown, because it is yet to be implemented with any consistency, or as it was originally intended across the New Zealand school sector. The reality of sexuality education in New Zealand schools is perhaps best summed up by the Chief Executive of Family Planning Association New Zealand, Jackie Edmonds, who was quoted as saying “it's patchy at best - the quality and content of what is provided in schools - so we can't say we have had a quality and comprehensive sexuality programmes running in our schools yet” (Binning, 2011b, para. 28).

2:2:2 Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the process of teaching and learning as it occurs in the classroom. Extensive research has been done around the world and in New Zealand to establish what is effective pedagogy and to improve academic and social outcomes for students. This section explores some of that broad research and particularly that which has been undertaken in a sexuality education context and is advocated as being the preferred approaches for the delivery of health education.

According to Tasker (2002), educational researchers in the mid 1980s and early 1990s in New Zealand shared findings that sought to challenge and encourage a move away from traditional and hegemonic pedagogical practices, such as the transmission models of teaching and learning. Moore (2000) suggested this shift occurred a result of "an increasing understanding that learning is an active, creative business rather than an essentially receptive one" (p. 6). Consequently, educational policies and practices in New Zealand became both informed by and based on constructivist theories of teaching and leanring. Ayrton (1999) describes the constructivist approach as participants making meaning out of their experiences, adapting and altering the educative event to fit past versions of their world. Learners are defined as active participants in the construction of knowledge rather than being passive recipients of knowledge-out-of-context (Lauritzen & Jaeger, 1997). In this approach, learners are seen as coming to an educational experience with knowledge, information and experience and it is "in the interaction of this prior knowledge and current experiences that learning takes place" (p. 55) and "learners are empowered/facilitated through stories that grow from their prior knowledge to new understandings that are appropriate to their experiences" (Bishop, 2005, p. 262). Constructivism and the constructivist approach has been extensively supported and advocated by both government policy and commissioned research over the last decade in New Zealand and current pedagogy is strongly inflenced by this approach to learning. The foundation of this approach is to empower students in the learning process and is responsive to learner need (Tasker, 2004b) and learning activites and contexts must be flexible to ensure relevancy for the learners as well as responsive to cultural and individual difference (Ministry of Education, 1995).

Other more recent New Zealand-based research has also highlighted the value and effectiveness of constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. In the research report *Te Kotahitanga*, Bishop et al. (2003), emphasised that effective teachers support student learning through acknowledging and using their prior knowledge and experiences. Alton-Lee's (2003) meta-analysis into effective teaching maintained that effective links must be established between school and the other cultural contexts in which students are socialised in order for effective student learning to take place.

By nature *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) recognised the interplay between individual and their environment. The philosophy of each document was to develop not only student knowledge, but also skills and attitudes to improve their own health status. Students were also encouraged to take an interest in and responsibility for, health status of their communities, therefore empowering students to take action to bring about change at personal, community and societal levels. According to Coates (2003), enabling and encouraging students to take an active role in their own learning relies on the use of student centred, cooperative, interactive processes with the teacher as a 'facilitator of learning'. This 'teacher as facilitator' approach is underpinned by a constructivist view of learning.

The constructivist approach to learning is of great significance to health education and is strongly advocated as the preferred pedagogical approach. Its relevance and value has been highlighted by the research of Abel and Fitzgerald (2006), Allen (2005), Tasker (2005) and Fine (1988), who concluded that as far as the students were concerned, the way in which health education was delivered had enormous influence on the quality and impact of the programme. They all suggest that in order to meet student need, programmes should be student-centred and cooperative, and should take into account the prior knowledge, needs and experiences of the students. According to Tasker (2002), the constructivist approach encompasses two positions; individual and social. Social constructivism largely originates from Vygotsky, who views teaching and learning as essentially a social activity whereby students are encouraged to

verbally explore developing concepts with others, therefore constructing and reconstructing meaning for themselves and "'construct' knowledge through experience" (Moore, 2000, p. 5). This approach emphasises and recognises the importance to learning of social interaction between students and between students and teachers in the classroom.

Research undertaken by Tasker (2002) in a New Zealand secondary school health education programme, highlighted the importance and impact of social constructivist pedagogical processes on teaching and learning outcomes in the sexuality education classroom. Tasker found that elements of a social-constructivist approach and socio-environmental dynamics brought about enhanced social and cognitive learning outcomes for both male and female students. She argues that a social-constructivist teaching and learning pedagogy can provide experiences to enhance student learning in health education contexts by enabling students to take up alternative positions to the dominant gender stereotypes so frequently described in sexuality education classroom studies (Tasker, 2002). Tasker (2005) also concluded that the nature of relationships exemplified by the pattern of positive inter-gender relationships appeared to be integrally linked to effective learning for the students in her research study.

The impact of the physical environment on effective teaching and learning in sexuality education is an area in which there has been little explicit research undertaken. However, a statement made by the teacher in Tasker's (2002) research serves to reinforce what she believes is needed in order to create a functional and effective physical teaching environment in sexuality education

> Well it's got to be somewhere where the kids are comfortable and the teacher feels comfortable teaching… It needs to be somewhere where you can put them in a circle and they can work away in groups so I think the room is very important. I always chose a room that's without desks and has got chairs you can move around. And I think the whole surroundings, the posters on the walls and colourful, just a room that's fun to be in and that invites kids, you want your pupils to come and to want to come (p. 171-2).

A study by Buston and Wight (2004) also highlighted the influence of the placement of sexuality education classes in the school timetable on student participation levels.

Teachers identified first period on a Monday and the final period of any day as undesirable times during which to deliver sexuality education.

Other than the study by Tasker (2002), a review of the literature reveals little by way of material that reports empirical research findings, particularly in a New Zealand context, seeking to overtly and explicitly establish what is effective pedagogical practice in sexuality education. The use of Tasker's study to illustrate the use of a social constructivist approach in sexuality education is highly reflective of the lack of other studies focused on this area. It should be noted also that Tasker's (2002) own work was modelled on pedagogical approaches from science and mathematics, as examples in health education contexts were non-existent at the time. This, along with the fact that Tasker's work is consistent with the theoretical approach of my own study, explains why her work is so heavily relied upon, and referenced in this section of the literature review.

2:2:3 Content

Research into the content of sexuality education programmes has highlighted and revealed some interesting findings. This section discusses both New Zealand and overseas research in an attempt to outline what sexuality education content is being taught to young people in school-based programmes.

Many studies into the content of sexuality education programmes have concluded there is a significant and inequitable focus on the physical components of sex and sexuality at the expense of other dimensions of well-being such as mental and emotional, social and spiritual aspects (Abel & Fitzgerald, 2006; Allen, 2003, 2004, 2005; Elliot et al., 1998; Hilton, 2001; Weir, 2009). Elliot et al. (1998) suggests that with little time to cover sexuality education it may be that the teachers determine that the time is better spent on the practicalities of sex, with a view to reducing the risk of teenage pregnancies and also STIs. Another contributing factor could be that teachers may "feel more comfortable teaching fact-based topics such as STIs rather than the values based topics such as sexual orientation and sexual identity" (Elliot et al., 1998, p. 2). They may also reflect wider public health sector goals aimed at reducing the rates of unplanned pregnancies and STI transmission. An approach that essentially de-

eroticises the sexuality curriculum may also protect schools from unwanted negative publicity and believes that the idea of providing young people with the knowledge about their bodies and sexual activity that they actually seek is almost unfathomable in the current New Zealand schooling climate (Allen, 2006b).

A study by Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck and Knijn (2008) investigating the content of Dutch sexuality education discovered that there was an implicit and underlying belief that young people are curious about sex and sexuality and that they need, want and have a right to accurate and comprehensive information about sexual health. Safe sex is a dominant focus as is the concept of responsibility. Specific content requested included information about different types of contraception, how to gain access to contraception and how to negotiate contraceptive use with a partner. Dutch sexuality education also encourages young people to think critically about their own sexual health, including their sexual wishes and desires. "Programmes and materials support young people in developing the skills to uphold and communicate those desires whether they decide to become sexual active or remain abstinent" (p. 103). This approach to sexuality education in the Netherlands echoes Fine's (1988) call for the inclusion of a 'discourse of desire' in contemporary sexuality education programmes and has been discussed earlier in this chapter from a gender perspective. She contends that adolescents, particular young women, are entitled to a discussion of desire instead of the anti-sex rhetoric that controls the controversies around sex education. She believes programmes should meet student need as opposed to conforming to political expectation and an attempt to avoid controversy. Fine (1988) maintains that three discourses commonly pervade the sexuality education in our schools: "sexuality as violence, sexuality as victimisation and sexuality as individual morality" (p. 34-5). They use scare tactics and links are made between sexuality and violence such as rape, incest, HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy and according to Fine, they are "designed to terrorise our children" (p. 33). Supporting Fine's position is Sears (1992), who asserts that studies of sexuality education programmes in the United States have consistently found the topics least discussed, but perhaps most needed by young people are homosexuality, gynaecological examinations, birth control, abortion, masturbation and other safer sex practices.

2:3 Summary of the Literature

This review of literature has drawn attention to a range of issues relating to student experience of sexuality education. These issues included the way in which constructions of gender and sexuality are constructed, negotiated and understood by the students within the classroom and how emotional safety and aspects such as curriculum, pedagogy and programme content influence student experience in sexuality education programmes. Strong and significant links and complex interplays between these aspects have been demonstrated in the literature and these must be carefully considered in order to make sense of student experiences of sexuality education in our schools. This literature will underpin the discussions in subsequent chapters.

This review has also highlighted a lack of New Zealand based research seeking to uncover and explore the experiences of young secondary school students in their sexuality education programmes directly from the students themselves. While there is no doubt that a vast amount of time, energy, effort and money has been invested over many years and in many countries into sexuality education related research, most of the New Zealand research and indeed much of the international research into sexuality education from student perspectives, generally focuses on the experiences of older students aged 16 and over.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes the research design of this particular study. It will begin by outlining the research theory underpinning the study and then move onto a description of the methodology employed. A discussion of the research setting and data collection methods follows, along with an outline of the data analysis methods used. The ethical issues associated with this research process are also addressed in this chapter.

3:1 Methodological Theory

I have outlined in the Pedagogy section of Chapter Two the strong connection that literature suggests exists between health education and social-constructivism, and therefore between sexuality education and social-constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. Fundamentally I believe that knowledge is socially constructed and that any research seeking to explore the perspectives of participants must reflect this. In regard to this study, the interpretative approach lends itself nicely to my own perspective of research and its function and purpose because it is consistent with social constructivist theoretical foundations, as illustrated by Davidson and Tolich (1999) in their definition of an interpretive approach to research: "the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds" (p. 26). An interpretive approach is therefore a description of how a group's meaning system is generated and sustained.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) describe interpretative research as beginning with individuals and setting out to understand their interpretation of the world around them while Taylor and Bogdan (1998) believe a key aspect of interpretative research is to understand people from their own frames of reference and to attempt to experience their reality as they experience it. An interpretive approach is characterised by the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct and detailed observation of people in natural settings (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Theory is emergent and should be 'grounded' on data generated by the research act (Cohen et al., 2000) and therefore should not precede the research but follow it. Theorising

should occur once data has been collected and analysed, as opposed to the presentation of an initial hypothesis. Research employing an interpretative approach attempts to illuminate the usually invisible by making the familiar strange, more examined and better understood, and in order to be able to interpret these experiences the researcher needs to employ a range of data gathering techniques including interviewing and observation.

My research sought to explore and understand the experiences of Year 10 students in two sexuality education classrooms. The students involved were asked to share their perspectives with the researcher and in doing so they displayed their personal constructions of knowledge in relation to sexuality education and also broader ideas about sexuality and relationships in their everyday life and interactions. In order to make sense of these perspectives it was necessary to analyse and interpret through a phenomenological approach. According to Bogden and Biklen (1998), researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the "meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in natural situations" (p. 25). Similarly Holstein and Gubrium (1994), define phenomenology as a social science that seeks to interpret and explain human action and thought. Ayrton (1999) maintains that phenomenology is concerned with exploring the individual's ideas about the 'phenomenon' (sexuality education in this study). In view of these definitions, this research study can be described as phenomenological in nature, because the study is attempting to explore, interpret and explain the experiences of the students in their sexuality education classrooms. Strong links can be made between phenomenology and social constructivism in that both are underpinned by a theoretical belief that knowledge and understandings are constructed within the contexts of people lives.

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), attempting to see things from other people's points of view is a key aspect of phenomenology. Consistent with this phenomenological approach, I have attempted to give a voice to a people who are rarely heard. Strauss and Corbin (1994) discuss the value and importance of the voice of participants in their overview of grounded theory methodology. They suggest that as researchers we have an obligation to "the actors we have studied: obligations to tell

their stories to them and to others – to give them voice – albeit in the context of their own inevitable interpretations" (p. 281).

The approach taken by this research study was also charactersitic of feminist research because it stresses the need to give individuals a 'voice' in order to reveal their lives from their own perspectives (Alice, 1999). Personal experience methods of research were integral to this research study and it must be acknowledged that as the researcher I too was "experiencing the experience" (Clandinin & Connolly, 1994, p. 418). Clandinin and Connolly (1994) maintain we must recognise the centrality of the researcher's own experience: their own tellings, livings, re-livings and re-tellings and also suggest personal experience research methods permit the researcher to enter into and participate with the social world and they provide the opportunity to create a middle ground where there is conversation among people with different life experiences. They go on to suggest that personal experience methods of research must be focused in four directions:

- *inward* – the internal conditions of feelings, hopes aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions and so on;
- *outward* – existential conditions, the environment or reality;
- *backward* and *forward* – past, present and future

Measor (2004) argues that effective sexuality education programmes can only be achieved if we know more about adolescent sexuality and the attitudes of young people. With that key consideration in mind, this study offered a small group of students the opportunity to share their thoughts, and it therefore provided an opportunity for me to interpret and understand the meaning this experience had for these particular students. Students were asked to share their prior knowledge and experiences, and offered the opportunity to reflect on their involvement in a sexuality education classroom in a focus group interview context. This enabled them to clarify, articulate and share how they thought their needs had or had not been met by the programme. This process mirrored the constructivist and social constructivist approaches integral to health education and I felt it was important to utilise this approach given that the purpose of the study was to highlight student voice and student perspectives.

3:2 Case Study

Mutch (2005) defines case study as a study that focuses on a bounded object, usually a person, group, setting or concept. Merriam (as cited in Bogden & Biklen, 1992) describes case study as a detailed examination of one setting or a single subject. Cohen et al. (2000), suggest that the purpose of case study is to portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts. It is useful in presenting and representing reality – to give a sense of 'being there'. In this research it is the students' experience of a sexuality education classroom that forms the 'case' and aligns itself with Merriam's definition in that it is one school and one context (sexuality education).

Case study methodology is especially useful and appropriate in the context of this research as it enabled the researcher to focus on a particular situation and on the combinations of people and settings. This research study was an attempt to understand and explore the 'experience' of a small group of Year 10 (14-15 year olds) students from two health education classes, all of whom were participating in a compulsory sexuality education programme. Each class was taught by a different teacher and it was the intention of the study to explore the students' thoughts, perspectives, feelings and reactions to the lessons delivered to them. In this instance it is the student perspectives and reactions to a particular pedagogical programme of work that constitutes the 'case'. The students in this research were invited to share their perspectives of their sexuality education programme as a way of illuminating the 'reality' of being a member of the class for these students.

The purpose of this research study stemmed from a genuine desire and interest to explore student perspectives and reactions. This lends itself nicely to the purpose of intrinsic case study as defined by Stake (2003), who states it is not to come to understand some abstract construct or generic phenomenon and is not undertaken not to theory build, but rather because of an intrinsic interest in a particular child, clinic, conference. That being said, although this study has intrinsic value, it is also hoped that it may provide a general understanding of the phenomenon of student experience of sexuality education in situation where the contexts and type of programme is similar.

3:3 The Research Setting and Participants

This research study was conducted in a co-educational state secondary school and I undertook purposive sampling in order to select my school for this study. According to Mutch (2005), purposive sampling is defined as a sampling strategy that selects participants because they suit a particular purpose or fit a certain profile and this was certainly the case in this research study. The participating school was selected because factors such as willingness to participate, commitment to health education and also logistical issues such as timing of sexuality education programmes during the year, were all factors when considering in the school's suitability for the research study.

Health education was a compulsory subject for Year 9 and 10 students and was delivered once a week for approximately 60 minutes. The health education classroom was located in a small pre-fabricated building to the side of the gymnasium and classes were delivered by their Physical Education teacher, whom the students also saw twice a week for their Physical Education classes. The sexuality education unit of work was eleven periods in duration giving the teachers eleven hours in which to cover the programme. Given the fact that a term is generally ten weeks long it was inevitable that, even without interruption, the sexuality education unit was going to straddle two school terms.

Two Year 10 classes were selected to participate in this research study. These classes were selected on the basis of the willingness of the classroom teacher for them to be involved and also by the day and time at which the sexuality education sessions were taught. This was simply due to my need to fit the observations alongside my own teaching schedule. The classes were taught by different teachers (one of whom was an ex-student of mine from the University and the ethics associated with this will be explored later in the chapter) and were from different academic 'bands'. One class was from the 'low-band' and the other was a 'high-band' class. Classes in Year 10 at the school were streamed with the academically above average student classes being referred to as the high-band and those who are below average regarded as the low-band classes.

The decision to select Year 10 students to participate in this study was due to the fact that this year level is the final year in which sexuality education is compulsory in the New Zealand curriculum framework and research such as the *Youth 2000* (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003*)* and *Youth '07* (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2008) study conducted by the Adolescent Health Research Group (2003, 2008), has shown us that there is a significant increase between the ages of 14 years and 15 years, in regard to involvement in sexual intercourse. The findings of the *Youth '07* (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2008) research study found that most students surveyed were not sexually active, but that appproximately 23 percent of 14 year olds and 38 percent appproximately of 15 years old had had sexual intercourse.

3:4 Data Collection

According to Bogdan and Biklin (1992), the collection of data from a range of sources ensures a multi-method approach and also enables a fuller understanding of the phenomena that is being studied. In the context of this study data was obtained from a variety of sources, Data was gathered from sources such as teacher planning documentation, classroom observation, informal discussions with the classroom teachers, written student questionnaires and focus group interviews. Some data collection methods, such as teacher planning documentation and the initial student questionnaire, were employed in an attempt to gather background information to inform the study, while other methods, such as the summative student questionnaire, classroom observations and the focus group interviews, were specifically used to illuminate the student experience of the sexuality education classes. Multiple sources were utilised in order to facilitate triangulation of the data. Davidson and Tolich (1999) believe triangulation involves "using different research methods to hone in on an event from two or three different angles" (p. 34). Denzin and Patton (as cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) describe it as the "combination of methods or sources of data in a single study" (p. 80).

Data were collected over a period of three months from July through to October. The main sources of data were the focus group interviews and classroom observations. Of these two sources the focus group interviews provided the most detailed and extensive data on student experiences. Data gathered from these two primary sources were

supplemented by secondary sources of information such as teaching material provided by the teachers including the overall unit plan and individual lesson plans, numerous informal conversations with teachers usually undertaken at the end of the classroom observations and also from written qualitative questionnaires from the students themselves.

The focus group interviews focused on exploring student perspectives as they participated in sexuality education programme. This provided an opportunity for the Year 10 students to share and reflect on the experience of the sexuality education lessons and for them to consider and discuss to what extent their needs may or may not have been met. The final element of the research study was a summative written questionnaire that was completed only by those students involved in the focus group interviews. The data collection process is briefly outlined below with a more detailed description of each aspect to follow.

3:4:1 Written Questionnaire

Prior to the start of the sexuality education programme, students from both classes were asked to complete a questionnaire comprising four questions (Refer Appendix 1*)*. There were 39 students in total who completed the questionnaire (19 from one class and 20 from the other). The purpose of the four questions was to gather information regarding the students' previous experience of sexuality education lessons, topics they remembered covering and what they hoped would be covered in the upcoming unit of work. The information elicited was used to provide stimulus material for the focus group interviews and was also gathered as background information from which I could obtain a 'snapshot' of current student ideas and perspectives about their experience of sexuality education. The questionnaire was to be completed individually in an attempt to provide an opportunity for students to respond to the questions independently and free from the influence of others.

The final question on the questionnaire asked the students to consider participating in focus group interviews to further explore their perspectives on sexuality education. Their willingness to participate was indicated by filling out a 'tear-off' portion at the bottom of the questionnaire. I requested that all students tear the bottom off their

questionnaires and hand in the two separate pieces regardless of whether they have volunteered to be part of the focus groups or not. The purpose of this was to ensure anonymity for those students who volunteered, so that it wasn't apparent to other classmates who was volunteering, as all the students were required to hand in the tear-off sheet. Twenty students across the two classes agreed to participate in the focus group interviews.

3:4:2 Classroom Observations

Prior to the focus group interviews I undertook some classroom observations. According to Cohen et al. (2000), observation enables the researcher

> To understand the context of programmes, to be open ended and inductive, to see things that might be unconsciously missed, to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations, to move beyond perception-based data (e.g. opinions in interviews) and to access personal knowledge (p. 305).

Gold (as cited in Cohen et al., 2000) offers a classification of researcher roles in observation. At one end is the complete participant, moving to the participant as observer, then to observer as participant and finally to the complete observer. The nature of the classroom observations in this research study aligned more closely with observer as participant in Gold's classification outlined above. The purpose of these observations was simply for me as the researcher to get a 'feel' for the classroom and to 'make sense' of the context of the lessons. They served as an opportunity for me to gain insight into the social dynamics of the class and also enabled me to describe the physical setting in my final report. As Cohen et al. (2000) discuss, the classroom observations provided me with the opportunity to see how events evolve over time, and to catch the dynamics of situations, the people, personalities, contexts, resources and roles, etc. The observations were not designed for me to watch in great detail the students to be interviewed nor an opportunity to critique the pedagogy of the teacher.

I made two observations of each class (only one was during the sexuality education unit) and in each instance was introduced by the classroom teacher as an observer. I had already met each of the classes when I had asked them to complete the written questionnaire so the students were familiar with me. I felt this was important as it

served to reduce the likelihood of my presence being a distraction to the students and therefore potentially changing the dynamics of the classroom. Known as reactivity or the 'Hawthorne Effect' and according to Cohen et al. (2000), this is when the presence of the researcher alters the situation as participants may wish to avoid, impress, direct, deny and/or influence the researcher. Typically the problem of reactivity is addressed by the researcher's careful negotiation in the field and by remaining in the field for considerable time. As I was present in the classroom only on one informal and two formal occasions, it could be argued that I was not in the presence of the students for enough time to negate any altering or influential effect on the students. I did however attempt to be as unobtrusive and 'invisible' as possible during the observations. I positioned myself at the back of the classroom and made a conscious effort to refrain from continually writing as the lessons progressed instead trying to focus on listening to the conversations and observing the students as they engaged in the activities. On occasion one or two of the students would talk to me (mostly to ask when my baby was due - I was heavily pregnant at the time) but for the most part they ignored me and from my perspective got on with their learning as they would have if I had not been there.

After each of the observations I either remained in the classroom and immediately wrote up my notes in my research journal or, if another health education class was scheduled in the room, I completed them in my car before leaving the school. Taylor and Bogden (1998) claim that the recording of complete and detailed field notes is a key aspect for providing the raw data of participant observation. In my notes I included descriptions of the people, events, conversations and the setting, as well as my own reactions, hunches, thoughts and feelings. I tried to ensure the sequences and detail of events and conversations were noted as accurately as possible. According to Mutch (2005) keeping a journal helps beginning researchers to chart their "development as they face challenges, learn new skills and come to new understandings" (p. 157) and encourages self-reflection. The keeping of a research journal enabled me to regularly reflect on the data being collected and to identify potential emerging themes. It also enabled the research process and the research questions, to evolve as new insights were gained along the way.

3:4:3 Focus Group Interviews

Interviewing is the primary method of phenomenological data collection and this was the main one used in this study. Interviewing offers the "opportunity to access thoughts, views and opinions in the participants own words – rather than that of the researcher" (McBride, 2011, p. 45) and the fact that most people are more comfortable talking than they are writing lends itself to this research approach. The purpose of interviewing is to attempt to see the world from the perspective of the interviewee and the interactive nature of the process enables the interviewer to check any consistent meaning being attributed to the world by the participant (Ayrton, 1999, p. 41).

According to Kisker and Zane (as cited in Sears, 1992), focus groups are recognised as an effective means of eliciting useful information from target populations because they legitimise the voices of participants and provide insight into their beliefs, attitudes and experiences of group members. Focus group interviews involve intensive group discussion 'focused' around particular issues. This type of interviewing can provide a powerful means of gaining an insight into the opinions, beliefs and values of a particular segment of the population and its strength lies in the relative freedom that the group situation gives participants to discuss issues of concern (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) also suggest that in encouraging them to engage in conversations in which they articulate their views about a particular topic, participants may actually realise and become more conscious of their own viewpoints and perspectives.

According to Mutch (2005), focus group interviews can be a useful tool for practitioners because they can combine the best of surveys and interviews and are not as time intensive as a series of individual interviews or as labour intensive as sending out a set of questionnaires. Davidson and Tolich (1999) also believe that focus group interviews can produce "considerable and often complex information in a comparatively short space of time" (p. 64) and this was a major consideration in this research study. Given that this research study was conducted by a lone researcher and also taking into account time constraints, focus group interviewing as a method of data gathering made considerable sense in the context of this study.

From my perspective one of the most significant and meaningful advantages of focus group interviews for this study was that it both mirrored and facilitated the social constructivist philosophy operating in the classroom and advocated as effective health education pedagogical practice. The dynamics within the focus group interview were reflective of what was actually happening in the classroom, in that students were continually constructing, negotiating and renegotiating meaning for themselves as the interviews progressed. Focus group interviewing provides the opportunity for group dynamics and interactions, spoken and unspoken messages, body language and gestures and the complex interplay between these aspects to become more visible and obvious in the research process. The rich data gathered as a result was one of the most attractive characteristics of this type of data collection in the context of this research study.

Focus group interviews can be challenging and somewhat daunting to undertake, especially for the fledgling researcher. One of the challenges associated with conducting focus group interviews as discussed by Taylor and Bogdan (1998), is that in some circumstances people may feel inhibited during the interviews. They may not say the same things in a group that they might say to an interviewer in private. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) also suggest that group discussions can sometimes lead to a superficial group consensus in which some members defer to those who are most outspoken. Mutch (2005) comments that conducting focus group interviews requires skill and they can also be difficult to transcribe.

I considered both the advantages and disadvantages of focus group interviewing, and despite the challenges it presented, determined that the positives outweighed the negatives in the context of this research study. I gave significant and considered thought to the mitigation of the disadvantages and felt that through effective forward-planning, careful consideration of ethical issues and good management of the interviews themselves, I appropriately addressed and minimised any potential difficulties. As a result valuable and rich data was obtained via the focus group interviews.

Despite originally having twenty students volunteer to participate in the interviews, only nine students were interviewed. Some students changed their minds about participating and other students forgot to arrive at the previously arranged interview times. Consequently these students were not interviewed. It also became apparent that in spite of organising the participants into groups that offered diversity in terms of gender, the groups became gendered containing either all boys or all girls. Ultimately the organisation of these gendered groups was done by the students themselves. In regard to ethnicity, one of the students in the boys group was of Asian descent and one of the girls identified as Māori. All the other students identified as Pakeha. The focus group composition is shown in Table 1:

Table One: Focus Group Composition

Class A – Low-Band	**Class B – High-Band**
Group One – 3 girls (Danni (Māori), Jess & Megan)	**Group One** – 2 girls (Nadine & Kylie) **Group Two** – 4 boys (Brad, Anthony (Asian), Craig & Simon)

The focus group interviews were conducted approximately halfway through the sexuality education programme and were undertaken during lunchtimes in the health education classroom. The students and myself were arranged around one of the tables in front of the whiteboard. I placed some questions on the board I hoped we would discuss during the semi-structured interviews (Refer Appendix 2). The students were asked to consider and comment on what they perceived they had learnt as a result of their involvement in the programme. They were given the opportunity to reflect on what they were enjoying about the sessions, what may have surprised them, what they were finding either useful or not useful to them and their thoughts on their classroom teacher. The students were also invited to comment in the physical teaching environment and the resources they were exposed to. Other questions encouraged students to consider the programme more holistically by asking if the unit thus far was covering what they thought it would, were their needs being met by the programme and if not what they still hoped to learn about and some suggestions for improvement. It was also anticipated during the interviews that other topics relating to sexuality

education would arise as a result of the free-flowing conversation that would hopefully occur.

Before the interviews began we discussed 'safety issues' such as confidentiality and anonymity and the students were asked if they were still happy to participate and it was reiterated that if they became uncomfortable they could leave the interview at any time. They were also informed that the interviews would be recorded and the dictaphone was placed in the centre of the table in readiness for the interviews to begin. I also provided the students with some food to snack on as they participated.

3:4:4 Summative Written Questionnnaire

Finally the students who had participated in the focus group interviews were asked to complete a summative questionnaire at the conclusion of the sexuality education programme (Refer Appendix 1). The summative questionnaire was undertaken to provide further opportunity for students to share thoughts about their experiences of sexuality education, and thereby provide further insight into how they made sense of their participation and their experience in sexuality education.

3:5 Data Analysis

According to Davidson and Tolich (1999), analysis is about searching for patterns and regularities in the data collected. The raw data collected was subject to analysis as the study progressed through the keeping of a research journal in which I recorded my thoughts, questions, reactions, observations and interpretations, as well as detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, activities and interactions within the classroom. The ongoing analysis of my field notes enabled me to identify possible preliminary emergent themes. I achieved this by reading through my field notes as soon as possible after they were written and by 'marking up' as described by Davidson and Tolich (1999). This process involves writing notes pertaining to the quality of the data collected in either negative or positive terms. The purpose is to identify data both within and outside the research theme, identify where more data may be required and also to flag notable data (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Subsequent and more detailed analysis of the data collected was undertaken at the conclusion of the collection phase, and involved the re-examination of my research journal notes

(including those made during the classroom observations), the focus group interview transcripts and the written responses of the students questionnaires.

In the analysis of the transcripts, a thematic approach was adopted. According to Mutch (2005), thematic analysis is described as a qualitative strategy that takes its categories from the data, unlike quantitative strategies which have pre-determined categories. The text of each transcript was then closely scrutinised for patterns and themes by identifying key words, ideas and concepts. The following analytical statements were developed that then guided the coding process:

1. Content the students learnt and what surprised, interested and/or challenged their ideas around sex, sexuality and sexuality education as they progressed through the programme.

2. Knowledge, skills and/or understandings the students recognised they already had as a result of their exposure the previous sexuality education programmes and other sources of information around sex and sexuality.

3. Content and/or skills students still wanted to learn about. Information students were hoping would be covered before the end of the sexuality education programme.

4. Personal thoughts, opinions, beliefs, attitudes and values about sex, sexuality and relationships that emerged during the interviews.

5. Student thoughts, feelings and opinions about their sexuality education class, including the physical environment, organisational processes and logistical issues.

6. Student thoughts, feelings and opinions about the pedagogical activities undertaken within their sexuality education programme.

7. Student thoughts, feelings and opinions about the other students in their sexuality education classroom.

8. Student thoughts, feelings and opinions about teachers of sexuality education.

9. Other sources of information outside the classroom identified by students that inform and educate them about sex, sexuality and relationships.

10. Student ideas and opinions about what adults think about teenagers and sex, sexuality, sexuality education and relationships.

The data relating to each of these statements was analysed further and subsequently grouped into four themes. The numbers in brackets indicate the questions that contributed to each theme.

- **A Student experience of content** (1, 2, 3 & 4)
- **B Student experience of pedagogy and classroom organisation** (5 & 6)
- **C Student experience of classroom relationships** (7 & 8)
- **D Student experience outside the classroom** (9 & 10)

Each of the four themes relates strongly to the research questions of the study and the analysis of the data is discussed in depth in the following chapter.

3:6 Ethical Issues

Ethically there were many elements to consider in this research study. The safety of the participating students and teachers was paramount, as was as the integrity of the school.

> It is a major requirement of ethics that humans must never be treated as means to someone's ends for they must be seen as 'ends in themselves' (Davidson & Tolich, 1999, p. 72).

This quote resonated strongly with me and it was a thought I kept in the forefront of my mind as I negotiated my way through this research study. This concept along with three ethical principles identified by Tolich and Davidson (1999) guided me through this process from beginning to end. They were 'Do no harm', 'Informed consent' and 'Confidentiality and anonymity'. I believed the students who shared their perspectives and time with me were the most important element of this entire process. Their safety, comfort and well-being was paramount at all times and the purpose of this research study should be of greatest benefit to them before anyone else and while I felt the safety of the students was the most critical element, it was also important and necessary for me to ensure the well-being of the teachers whose students were participating in the research.

According to Kvale (1996), ethical decisions do not belong in a separate stage of the interview investigations, but arise during the entire research process and there were many ethical implications to be considered and dealt with in relation to this research study. The nature of the topic being explored (sexuality education) is a sensitive area for many people and presented some potential for social and psychological risk to the participants. As the researcher, I gave significant thought to the potential risks associated with this study and took appropriate action in order to mitigate and/or eliminate the identified risks. I was mindful of the two attributes of the researcher identified by Eisner and Peshkin (1990) – sensitivity towards the research and the participants and the ability to identify an ethical issue; and the responsibility to act appropriately in response to an ethical issue. My efforts to sensitively address the identified ethical issues are outlined below.

In writing about and reporting the findings, Pseudonyms were used for the names of student participants and teachers to ensure they were not identifiable. In reference to the written questionnaire I ensured all student responses remained confidential and anonymous. I am the only person who saw and has ever seen this raw material and there is no way to link students to particular responses. During the classroom observations, I ensured I was aware of and adhered to the previously established safety guidelines set by the class at the start of the academic year. I also informed the students that this expectation applied to me as a visitor to their classroom. I was aware of my obligation to be willing, under any circumstances, to terminate a classroom observation if it was necessary and appropriate i.e. if the teacher requested it for whatever reason.

During the focus group interviews, I established an expectation of confidentiality among the participants by having an explicit discussion before the interviews began in which we reached a shared understanding of the term 'confidentiality'. I requested they agree not to discuss anything that occurred or was said in the interviews with a third party in a way that could harm, upset, embarrass or anger another participant. We talked about the need to ensure that people's ideas and opinions remained confidential. Participants were encouraged and assisted to personally identify someone they could speak to outside the focus groups if they needed to discuss an

issue further. However, it was emphasised that even in this context, participants were not to discuss personal information shared by others during the interview. This expectation of confidentiality reflected that set up in the classroom by their health education teacher at the start of the year and reinforced at the beginning of the sexuality education unit. I also asked the participants to consider that although we may agree on confidentiality as a group, it was important to acknowledge that confidentiality could not be guaranteed. It was always possible that someone could discuss what was said in the interviews with non-participants and that this could be harmful. The concept of confidentiality in this context was a matter of trust between participants, and the undertaking of this conversation and the establishment of this shared understanding before embarking on the focus group interviews, was of extreme importance to the integrity and ethics of the research study.

Throughout the interviews, I was conscious of my need to be sensitive to any topics of conversation that might be causing some participants distress and/or discomfort, and was willing to close a topic of conversation and move on to another aspect of discussion if required. I also reminded students that they could leave an interview at any time if they felt it was necessary, and that they may also remove themselves from the study at any time if they felt it appropriate. I was also willing to terminate an interview if it was necessary and/or appropriate; for example, if one of the participants appeared upset or there was significant tension within the group. In addition I was also aware of my moral and legal responsibility to follow standard school procedures should a participant disclose certain information that required follow-up and support.

Given that New Zealand is a relatively small place and the fact that with only limited information i.e. decile ranking and size, it would be quite easy to identify the school involved in this research study. Therefore, I have offered only minimal information about the school in this report. The urban area in which the research has been conducted has also been excluded from this final report.

In order to carry out the research study in the school, written consent was obtained from the Principal. All correspondence to be given to teachers, students and parents/caregivers during the research process was made available to the Principal and written consent was also sought from the teachers whose classes were involved in the

research. The Principal agreed that separate consent for each student was not required in regard to the written questionnaire. It was explained to the students before the questionnaires were handed out that in completing the questionnaire they have effectively given consent, but that they could leave the questionnaire blank if they did not want to participate in this aspect of the research. Written consent from the students and parental/caregiver consent was required and obtained for all the participants in the focus group interviews. In accordance with the Christchurch College of Education ethical procedures, all parties were fully informed of their right to remove themselves from the study at any time. Examples of selected consent letters can be found in Appendix 3 at the back of this report.

As previously mentioned, I was particularly aware of the need to be extremely sensitive to the teachers throughout the research process and particularly during the classroom observations. It can be an unsettling experience for a teacher to have another 'teacher' in the room during their classes. Prior to any classroom observations, I explained to both teachers that there would be no critique of their teaching performance on my behalf in any way and that the research had not been constructed as a systematic critique or evaluation of their delivery of the classes. Throughout the observations I purposely refrained from making any comments about the teaching of the programme that I thought could be in any way construed by the teacher as a judgement of their pedagogy

However, given the fact that students were both invited and encouraged to share their thoughts and perspectives of the sexuality education classes during the focus group interviews, it was necessary to acknowledge that it was more than likely they would voluntarily make comments about their classes that could be construed as critical, or as making judgements, of their teacher. These comments and insights would be relevant to the research in that that they would signal the ways in which the students experienced the sexuality education classroom, and how they described and made sense of those experiences. It was anticipated that student observations about the teacher and the teaching of the classes would also potentially raise questions about and provide insights into, the nature and delivery of sexuality education and for this reason they are central to this research study.

3:6:1 Issues for the Researcher

3:6:1:1 Identification

In regard to my position in the research study, it was prudent when being introduced to the students that it was not disclosed that I was a teacher educator. I did not want the students to associate me too closely to their teacher as this could have caused them to be less than authentic with their responses throughout the research process.

Despite my perceived need to position myself as independent of the classroom teacher, I felt ethically I had a responsibility to respond if the teacher asked me for input and/or advice about the sexuality education programme. One of the teachers, Miss A, was a past student of mine from a Christchurch College of Education programme. As a result of this connection, from her perspective, there may have already been a perceived hierarchy between us. She may have felt she could not refuse my request to include her class in my study; she may also have regarded me as the sexuality education 'expert' and herself as the 'student' and consequently sought advice from me about how best to teach her class and meet the needs of her students; she may have felt some degree of intimidation throughout the data gathering process.

Given the positive relationship I felt I had with this teacher when she was a student at the College, I was confident she did not feel threatened by my presence in her classroom and I considered her willingness to be involved in the research was reflective of the mutual respect I felt we shared. Miss A and I had several informal conversations about the teaching of sexuality education at the end of class sessions and at other times when I was on campus collecting data. During these conversations I was conscious in my responses to ensure I remained as neutral as possible. The second teacher involved in the study, Miss B, was also aware of my role at the College of Education and she also engaged me at various times into discussions about the challenges she faced in teaching sexuality education (see Appendix 4 for condensed notes based on the informal conversations had with various teachers during the research study).

I recognised that this dynamic and these conversations could impact not only on my objectivity as a researcher, but also on the trustworthiness and credibility of my

research findings. In the various conversations with both teachers over the course of the research study, I consciously and successfully refrained from offering advice and instead actively listened to their ideas and concerns, and tried to assist them in clarifying their purpose and direction in their sexuality education classrooms.

3:6:1:2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Before undertaking this research study, I felt I would have an obligation to make initial student written responses to the questionnaire available to either teacher should she request access to them to assist with the planning of lessons. By this I meant that I would be willing to verbally give a summarised account of the student responses to the questions if requested by the teacher. However, I would not provide the teacher with access to the actual written student responses, as this would contravene my promise to the students that their individual responses will remain confidential and therefore anonymous. Neither teacher had access to any information obtained during the focus group interviews due to the fact that the teachers knew which students were participating in the focus group interviews and I did not want to compromise the confidentiality of students' responses. As it turned out neither teacher requested access to any information obtained from the students throughout the research study.

3:7 Summary

The research study was designed to capture student voice and the methodology employed reflects this fundamental aim. The phenomenon being explored was the students' experience of their sexuality education classes and this was examined using a case study research design and personal experience methods, primarily through focus group interviews. The student experiences were interpreted and made sense of using an interpretive framework. The social constructivist foundations of the research design enabled findings to be presented as a socially constructed reality for the students. An analysis of the data is presented in the following two chapters.

Chapter Four: Initial Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This chapter reports on the four themes emerging from the initial analysis of the data collected and will be presented using student quotations to reinforce key findings. Some connections will be made to relevant literature in an attempt to make sense of student experiences, however, the emphasis in this initial analysis is on student voice and of their experience as described by them. In-text student quotes are shown in double quotations and italics, while dialogue has been blocked, italicised and indented. These have been included to illustrate key findings from the data and to maintain the prominence of student voice throughout the data analysis chapter.

The four themes in this chapter are presented as distinctive and discernable aspects of student experience, but it is important they are viewed as interconnected and overlapping. The four interrelated themes are:

A Student experience of content

B Student experience of pedagogy and classroom organisation

C Student experience of classroom relationships

D Student experience outside the classroom

These terms broadly encapsulate students' experiences in sexuality education classes. In an effort to clarify each theme, definitions of the key words and terms within each theme are outlined below:

All Themes

Student Experience – This seeks to unpack how the students' perceived and reacted to each of the aspects above; content, pedagogy, classroom organisation, relationships in and beyond the classroom, as well as their thoughts and reactions to the subject of sexuality education itself. Central to this concept is an attempt to understand the meaning they attached to their experience and the value they placed on sexuality education as a compulsory course of study in Year 10.

Theme A

Content – the information, skills, knowledge and processes presented to and/or learnt by the students during their sexuality education programme.

Theme B

Pedagogy – teaching and learning activities undertaken within the sexuality education programme and subsequently discussed by the students. This also included the frequency, duration and timing of classes because these aspects appeared to have had a significant impact on the quality of the pedagogy within the programme and on the experience of the students.

Organisation – the way in which the classroom was organised including seating plans/arrangements, the physical environment and student access to additional resources in the classroom. These aspects appeared to influence the teaching and learning programme in practice, hence their inclusion within this pedagogical theme.

Theme C

Classroom Relationships – the relationships within the classroom between students and also between the students and the teacher.

Theme D

Outside the Classroom – sexuality education experiences received in situations away from organised classroom contexts.

4:1 Setting the Scene

In order to give context, I have provided a description of the physical space in which the students experienced their sexuality education classes. The health education classroom was a stand-alone, pre-fabricated building. It was small with one entry/exit point at which the students queued until the teacher arrived to unlock the classroom. The room had a lockable storage cupboard to the side, a whiteboard and a teacher's desk at the front, a TV/AV unit in the corner and was carpeted underfoot. The walls were white and decorated with various health education-related posters and past

students' work. On the opposite side of the room to the entry door, was a display unit full of health education-related pamphlets and material.

The desks in the classroom had been pushed together to create eight tables with up to five students at each depending on the size of the class being taught. The distance between each cluster of desks was narrow and moving around the classroom was difficult. In some instances students had their backs to the board, the teacher (if she was at the front) and/or to one another.

4:1:1 Class A

According to their teacher Miss A, Class A was a low-band class, meaning they were a group of students of lower academic ability in the Year 10 cohort. The class had 20 students and students were allowed to choose their own seats each time they entered the classroom. On the day of one of the observation there were 18 students present, including the three students who participated in the focus group interview (whose names are in brackets). They were arranged around five tables (T1 to T5) with two tables remaining empty. I occupied another table. **Figure One** on the following page shows the layout of the classroom.

T1 – 3 girls (Danni)
T2 – 3 girls, 2 boys (Jess, Megan)
T3 – 5 boys
T4 – 3 boys, 1 girl
T5 – 1 boy
T6&7 – empty
T8 - me

4:1:2 Class B

In Class B, the high-band class (as described by their teacher Miss B), there were 29 students on the class roll but only 24 were present on the day of one observation. The students were arranged around six tables and I sat on my own at the table nearest the door. In this class there was a seating plan that had been implemented without alteration since the start of the school year.

T1 – 3 boys, 2 girls (Simon)

T2 - empty

T3 – 1 boy, 3 girls (Brad, Nadine)

T4 – 3 girls, 1 boy

T5 – me

T6 – 1 girl, 2 boys

T7 – 1 girl, 2 boys (Kylie, Anthony and Craig)

T8 – 3 boys, 2 girls

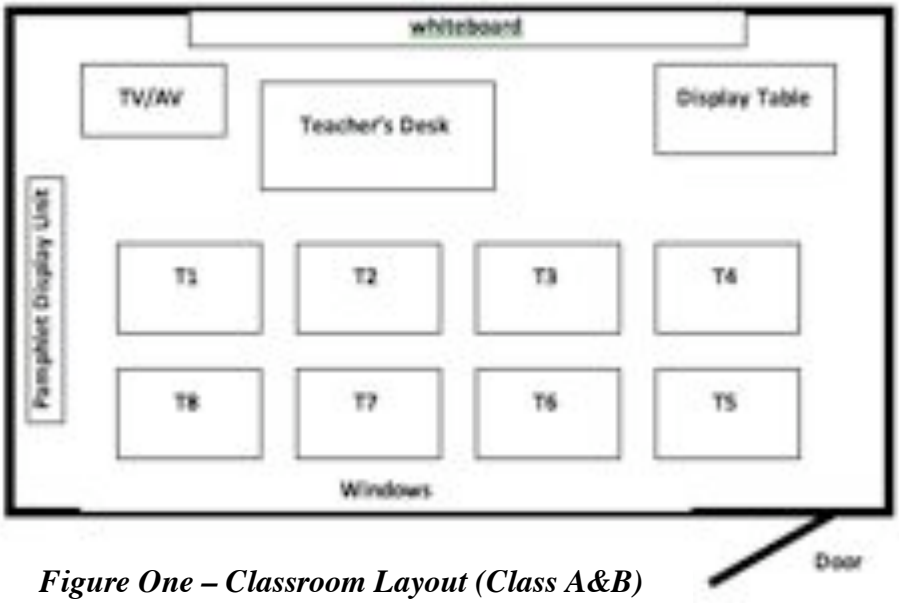

Figure One – Classroom Layout (Class A&B)

4:1:3 The Planned Curriculum

The teachers provided me with an outline of the unit of work they were intending to deliver to their students (both were delivering exactly the same unit of work). While there was no overall unit aim or statement about its relationship to the four underlying concepts (Hauora-Wellbeing, Socio-ecological Perspective, Health Promotion and Attitudes and Values), the teachers had identified eight achievement objectives from *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) they hoped to address. For each lesson there were between two and four expected learning outcomes for students. Topics to be covered included relationships, mixed gender messages, influences on sexual behaviour; risks and responsibilities associated with sexual activity including STIs and unplanned pregnancy; assertiveness, decision-making skills and other risk minimisation strategies. At the point at which the focus group

interviews occurred, the students were five lessons into an eleven week programme. An excerpt from the programme outline provided to me by the teachers can be found in Appendix 5.

4:2 Student Experience of Content

The students had a great deal to say about their experience of the sexuality education programme in terms of what they learned, enjoyed and what had surprised them. In the focus group interviews they also shared their prior knowledge and expressed what they still hoped to learn from their future classes. Students also made comments outlining their attitude towards sexuality education and indicated their perception of the value of it as a subject in their curriculum.

Most of the students interviewed said it was important to learn about sexuality education at school and they valued their exposure to it as a subject area. When asked if school was a good place to learn about this topic, Simon from Class B replied *"yes"*, while Jess from Class A said it was a *"pretty important subject."* Nadine said that although it was a compulsory subject, she felt school was a good place to learn about sexuality education because *"we are learning heaps about safe sex and consequences and stuff."* Anthony said he felt he needed to learn this information at school because he couldn't really talk to his parents about sexuality issues.

The students shared what they had learned since the implementation of their sexuality education programme approximately five weeks earlier. Jess, Megan and Danni from Class A said they had learned about how to protect themselves in relationships, both physically and emotionally, including "*how to say no*" and other assertiveness strategies, and they had also learnt about different forms of contraception. Much of the initial interview conversation around what had been learned in Class B interviews was related to teenage pregnancy and this may have been due to the fact that the previous week the students had watched a video about unplanned teenage pregnancy. Nadine said she had learned how easy it was to *"get pregnant"* with Kylie adding "*they used it (contraception) every time and then this one time they forgot and they got pregnant*." In contrast, the boys' reaction to the video was more focused on the long-term effect of the pregnancy on the relationships in the scenarios. Brad was

concerned that if a couple got pregnant *"most of the men were walking out on the women"* and the women were then *"stuck with the baby 24-7*." He attributed this outcome to the situation becoming *"too stressful"* while Anthony said the men left because they *"want to have a life*."

In regard to other content, Anthony and Brad from Class B said they had *"learned heaps."* Specific topics mentioned by the boys included safe sex, avoiding pregnancy and STIs, and healthy and unhealthy relationships. The boys also talked about different forms of contraception including condoms. Craig said he had learned "*how they work and that condoms only work 90 percent of the time*."

When asked what they were finding interesting about their sexuality education classes, Kylie said she had found it interesting to explore the *"different reasons why people wanted to have sex… like because they are curious and they what to see what it is like*." While Nadine had enjoyed considering the risks associated with sexual relationships. Danni said she was finding *"everything"* in her classes interesting. Both the girl groups talked specifically about an activity they had undertaken in class when students were asked to estimate what percentage of teenagers at a certain age they thought would be sexually active. The girls said they were surprised at the difference between the perceptions of the class and the reality in research statistics given to them by the teacher. When discussing the percentage of students leaving school who are sexually active Nadine and Kylie had this conversation

Nadine	*I think it was 49 percent. I thought more people would have done it by that age.*
Kylie	*Yeah my group thought it would be like about 95 percent. We all seemed to think that lots more people were 'doing it' than there actually were.*

A similar comment was made by Megan from Class A who said *"I can't remember what it was but it was quite low compared to what you would think because everyone is always talking about it and stuff and that they have done stuff but it turns out they actually haven't."* In contrast to this was Nadine's reaction to the percentage of Year 9 boys said to be sexually active. The figure given by the teacher was 20 percent and Nadine was shocked by this number *"I thought it was way high. That is like one in*

five boys! I had no idea it was that high. Although some people might have lied on the survey. You know how people do." The girls seemed quite affected by this activity that encouraged them to think critically and consciously about an issue that obviously resonated with them. It certainly appeared to make them reconsider and subsequently challenge their pre-existing ideas about the numbers of young teens engaging in sexually activity. In contrast the boys did not comment on this activity at all.

When looking at the content learned as discussed by the students, in conjunction with the planned curriculum, it was apparent the students were being exposed to a broad sexuality education programme, with emphasis on all four underlying concepts as outlined by *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999). While the students mentioned physical aspects such as contraception, teenage pregnancy, STIs and other risks associated with sexual activity, they also talked about what they had covered in regard to relationships, mixed gender messages relating to sexual activity, media messages, influences on teenage sexual behaviour and assertiveness skills and other 'how to say no' strategies. Other research relating to the content of sexuality education programmes (e.g. Elliot et al., 1998; Feldman & Elliott, 1994) has shown that often there is an imbalance in regard to content and that the vast majority of it is focused on physical elements of sexuality. In contrast, the planned curriculum and that experienced by the students in this study demonstrated balance between the physical, emotional and social dimensions of wellbeing.

The students in both classes indicated they still wanted to learn more about STIs and also more about other forms of contraception, in particular condoms, with a couple of the boys saying they were hoping to be able to practice putting condoms onto wooden penises. This was mentioned again at a later stage in the interview with Brad saying *"yeah we want to do condoms*". Both the boys and the girls from Class B indicated they would like the opportunity to explore broader aspects of sexuality education, such as music videos, and to analyse the gender stereotypes and associated relationship issues stemming from them. Jess from Class A said she would like to learn more about pregnancy.

It is interesting to note that many of the knowledge 'gaps' identified by the students were focused on physical aspects of sexuality and this could be attributable to many influences and factors. Perhaps it is because sexuality education has an obvious and immediate connection to physical well-being. Another interpretation of the students' preoccupation with the physical aspects of sexuality could be the result of their past exposure to 'sex education', which tends to be largely focused on the technicalities of sex and sexuality, as opposed to 'sexuality education' which encompasses a broader approach such as social, mental and emotional aspects. The students' focus may also be attributed to the fact that many comprehensive sexuality education programmes initially explore physical elements of sex and sexuality as a prelude to moving onto other aspects of sexuality education such as relationships, gender and social justice. The student desire to learn more about contraception, STIs and pregnancy may have also simply reflected the stage in life they were at. As adolescents they were continuing to develop in sexual maturity and awareness and this may have influenced what they wanted to know about and what they felt was important for them to know.

The boys in Class B mentioned they were experiencing some repetition of material in their classes. Three of the four boys said the information they had learned in class this year had already been covered the previous year in Year 9. Anthony stated there was too much recapping and that each period would begin by referring back to what was taught the previous week. However, he also said he thought material was being covered in more depth in Year 10. Brad said he was frustrated because for him the topic of relationships had been covered in *"Year 7, 8 and 9"* and he was finding it *"boring."* The girls in Class A also commented that they were experiencing some repetition in their classes and that this frustrated them. They said Miss A explained everything *"a lot*" and that sometimes she had to repeat herself when another student asked the same question. Across the two classes the students' experience of repetition of content occurred both across years and within lessons. These finding reflects similar conclusions drawn in a research study by Allen (2005) who found students were persistently frustrated with boring and repetitive content in their sexuality programmes and that the evolving needs of young people were not being addressed.

These student comments were enlightening in view of an informal conversation I had with one of the classroom teachers, who indicated her anxiety around ensuring the class was pitched at the right level for all the students. Miss A said she was concerned that she was not able to meet the needs of all the students in her class due to varying degrees of maturity, sexual awareness and prior experience of sexuality education. In her opinion, there were some students in her class who were very naïve, but in contrast, there were others who were in need of very detailed information relating to sexual activity and behaviour. Consequently she found it challenging to ensure she was meeting the needs of all her students. When the student comments are considered, it becomes apparent that her instincts about students varied interests and needs aligned with what the students themselves said. There were some students who were frustrated at times with the 'pitch' of content within the class and who would have preferred activities to be have included more detail and variable content relating to sexual activity and behaviour. Some students also indicated they would have preferred if their classes had been completed more efficiently allowing time for other material to be explored.

When the boys' group was asked what they would like to learn about in regard to relationships they embarked on a lengthy conversation that explored their ideas about trust, loyalty and love. Brad began by stating that when you enter a relationship you *"just trust them*." Simon said that was *"hard"* and questioned how you can do that. The boys went on to discuss love in the context of relationships with Craig posing the question "*what if you don't know what love is?"* Brad responded; *"you kind of know if you are in love… you get the feeling*". As the conversation evolved Brad, Anthony and Simon said they would like to learn about how to deal with certain situations such as if someone cheats on you or if you want to break up with someone. These three boys seemed keen to explore real life 'situations' and to consider how they might successfully negotiate and manage particular relationship scenarios. Contrary to Brad's earlier comment about being fed up with this topic, it became apparent that he and the boys were actually very interested to explore these concepts in the context of real situations, such as if a partner were to cheat on you or you wanted to break up with someone and this appears to contradict their previous comments about being bored by this topic. However, it does highlight the importance of context, as the boys

appeared to be happy to discuss and explore these issues as long as they were framed within 'real life' situations they could relate to. This assertion relates strongly to Allen's (2005) recognition of the importance of context and relevance of sexuality education to students' own lives. Allen (2005) argues that the repetition of information without contextualising and expanding on it each year in order to make it meaningful for students, depreciates young people's own knowledge and experiences and is likely to disengage them from the programme content.

The conversation continued and then reverted back to the topic of trust when Craig, who had been pretty quiet, commented that although he thought trust was a significant part of a relationship *"we don't really care about that yet."* All the boys began to laugh and Simon elaborated on Craig's comment saying *"cos we are not looking for a major relationship yet."* This statement from Simon contrasted his involvement earlier in the conversation in which he appeared to be genuinely attempting to gain some understanding of how trust, loyalty and love could be created and maintained in relationships. His willingness to 'go along' with Craig's comment could indicate that perhaps Simon recognised Craig's status within the group as the dominant male and he therefore wanted to align himself with Craig and his ideas. At the same time Simon seemed to be expressing a need and/or desire to have multiple views on the issue of relationships and to be redefining meaning for himself while the conversation progressed and as alternative opinions and perceptions were shared.

The topic and tone of the conversation completely changed after Craig made his *"cos we are not looking for a major relationship yet"* comment. This was an interesting feature of the boys' focus group and one that was repeated throughout the course of the interview. In this particular instance, it was as though Craig sabotaged the conversation because perhaps he felt things were getting a little too 'touchy feely' (marked emotional openness) with the other boys discussing trust, love and loyalty at length. His comment had the immediate impact of shifting the focus away from talking about the emotional aspects of relationships and instead towards a conversation based around the physical aspects of sex. The construction of masculinity within this focus group was fascinating and will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

The only indication of the boys feeling somewhat dissatisfied with the content was Brad's comment *"I think we should learn about where girls can get their contraceptives cos all we learned about was boys and condom and stuff…I don't think it is all the guys thing to learn.*" Simon added

> *Are we talking about how boys should be protecting themselves and all that stuff? Then you think if the boys have to do it why don't the girls do it as well and then we wouldn't have to worry about it.*

The girl group from Class B (same class as the boy group) said they felt the class was covering content equally, because it was focused evenly on issues pertinent to both boys and girls.

In summary, in regard to sexuality education content, the students' demonstrated a strong emphasis on and interest in the physical aspects of sex and sexuality. However, they also showed an awareness of and willingness to explore other dimensions of well-being in the context of sexuality, such as social and emotional aspects. Most of the boys expressed a genuine interest in exploring the nature and characteristics of romantic relationships, while the girls demonstrated their enjoyment of activities that involved myth debunking and critical thinking. The majority of students expressed some frustration with the repetition of material and the boys expressed an interest in exploring more explicit detail around the act of sexual intercourse itself.

4:3 Student Experience of Pedagogy and Classroom Organisation

The students had strong opinions on what they liked and what they did not like as far as both the learning activities and the learning environment were concerned. This theme explores their thoughts and feelings about classroom activities, organisation, and layout.

4:3:1 Classroom Activities

The written unit plan provided to the researcher by Miss A indicated that the programme was to be delivered using cooperative and interactive pedagogy such as small group work, role-plays, jigsaw activities and whole class discussions. The

students were vocal in their response to questions relating to the activities they experienced in their sexuality education classroom. When asked about their preferences, Danni said she liked it when they worked in groups. She said *"when you are working in groups it is cool… cos everyone throws ideas. Whereas like singly you might not know much and then you try to answer questions and it is really hard."* In the boys' group Craig liked doing *"activities."* Simon elaborated on this by adding *"practical stuff."* At this stage in the conversation the boys were referring to student-centred and interactive teaching approaches but Anthony added another dimension to the conversation when he made his *"how to"* comment and this will be discussed further in Chapter Five. Two of the three groups were enthusiastic in their discussion around the use of role-play as an effective teaching and learning process. Kylie stated that role-plays are *"great"* and it was *"good to move around the room."* Craig was also positive about the use of role-play in the classroom. Anthony agreed with Craig, while Simon gave an example of a scenario he was given and said he had to *"make up an answer for that and do it like a play."* Brad elaborated further by saying *"you come up with a real serious thing and it's real hard but it makes you think that you are in that situation."*

This finding mirrors that of Allen (2005) in which students expressed a desire to participate in skills practice, drama, demonstration and role-play activities (p. 394). Simon went on to say he felt it was *"good doing practicals"* and Brad suggested "*boys learn more from practicals than just writing it down."* Anthony added that he would prefer it if there was *"not so much writing"*. Brad said *"girls loved writing but the boys are like 'arrggghh'"* and Craig indicated he didn't see the point in writing anything down; *"cos like we don't go back and look at the writing ever… we just put it on paper and we don't do anything with it."* Simon added to Craig's comment when he said he didn't know why they wrote anything down because *"we don't have tests."* From this comment we can infer that Simon perceives one of the key reasons to write information down in class is so it can be referred to later in the event of a test or assessment. Therefore, Simon seems to be of the opinion that if there are no tests in sexuality education or health education, there is little purpose in writing notes.

The girls from Class A mentioned they had an anonymous question box used by the students to ask questions about sex and sexuality they didn't feel comfortable to ask in front of the class. When asked if they thought this was useful and all three students replied *"yes"* and that everyone in the class had used it at some stage. Danni said she thought it was a good idea because it is *"anonymous so like no one laughs at them."* Jess mentioned twice in the discussion about the question box that *"most of the time"* the teacher forgets to read and address the questions students have placed in the box.

The girls from the Class B were asked if they had a question box in their classroom. Nadine and Kylie responded by saying they had one last year but didn't have one this year. Kylie added that their teacher had said she was going to set one up but as yet had not, but she felt a question box would be *"really good"* even though *"some people would use it to write dumb questions."* Nadine agreed with Kylie and thought they should have one in their classroom. The issue of the anonymous question box was not raised or discussed in the focus group interview with the boys, but it would appear that for many of the students the presence of a question box could be a useful tool in exploring the ideas and questions students have about sex and sexuality they felt uncomfortable discussing in front of the class. Although their personal experience and use of a question box was patchy and to some extent limited, as far as the girls were concerned a question box could potentially provide a safe and anonymous way for them to raise issues they were curious about.

The unit plan provided by the teacher made reference to a question box being used at the end of session four, with questions to be answered at the end of session five and again towards the end of the unit when the process would be repeated. At the point at which the interviews took place (after session five) the question box was yet to be initiated in Class B and although the students from Class A had put their questions in the box, they were yet to be addressed by the teacher. The girls indicated some frustration with this saying that often Miss A forgets to answer the questions.

The comments made by the girls' groups about the question box appear to relate to an apparent lack of emotional safety in the classroom and also a sense of frustration with the boys, both of which will be discussed in the third theme: Classroom Relationships.

It could also be recognition of the fact that sexuality education itself is a sensitive area of study with the potential for students to become embarrassed and uncomfortable in front of their peers (both boys and girls). The discussion each of the girls' groups had about the use of an anonymous question box maybe an acknowledgement that they would value the anonymity it would offer them in seeking answers to questions they may not want to ask in an open classroom forum.

The boys' interview, in particular, generated some interesting comments about the repetitiveness of some content covered in their sexuality education classes. Whilst this may seem to be just an issue of content, it is in fact also related to the teaching and learning processes operating in the classroom and therefore fits under the pedagogy aspect. When discussing a particular activity the researcher had observed the Class B completing, Brad commented passionately that he got

> *real frustrated when you had to do that cos the same stuff comes out of every activity – the same words, the same thing. Yeah there was something that was the same as something else you had done two minutes before and I find that really boring.*

When asked if they felt if there was too much repetitiveness, Brad replied *"yip"*, while Anthony commented that there was *"too much recapping"* and that *"the next period you would like recap what you did last week.*" Simon elaborated further by saying *"you would be recapping most of the period instead of actually learning new stuff."*

The recapping or repetition of what was taught in the previous lesson at the beginning of each session frustrated these students, who obviously felt that too much time was being taken up going over what had previously been covered. It appeared this was not only an issue of content, but also of pedagogical practice. The decision on the teacher's behalf to utilise this teaching and learning strategy may have been influenced by a number of factors. Sexuality education classes were only held once a week, so the teacher may have spent time recapping in order to remind and reconnect students with what was covered in the previous session. She may have used this approach in order to determine what information and knowledge the students had retained from the week before and to provide an indication of what may need to be further reinforced in future lessons. The teacher may also have been responding to the

varying needs within the classroom in regard to prior student maturity and previous experience of sexuality education. Whatever the reasons the teacher used this approach, the boys in particular, were experiencing frustration as a result of this practice, and to some extent may have been disengaging from this aspect of their sexuality education classes.

The female students in the focus group interviews seemed to connect with and enjoy a particular classroom activity utilising a social constructivist approach, in which they were asked to consider an issue in small groups and respond with their thoughts. They were then required to compare their group's ideas to the reality of the situation as provided to them by the teacher. A whole class discussion ensued in which students were invited to share their opinions and to debate 'myth vs reality'. The girls all commented that they found this 'myth debunking' activity particularly eye-opening, because it challenged their previous ideas and those of others in the classroom. The activity facilitated and encouraged them to think critically about the issue and mirrors the type of approach employed by the teacher in Tasker's (2002) study in which students were encouraged to think critically about their ideas and to have their assumptions challenged through hearing alternative perspectives. Tasker (2002) maintained that students became more reflective as a result of this teaching approach and this in turn altered the emotional climate in the classroom.

4:3:2 Frequency and Duration of Classes

Logistical issues such as timing, duration and frequency and also classroom organisation and layout appeared to relate strongly to and impact significantly on the quality and effectiveness of the pedagogy in this sexuality education classroom. Students expressed their dissatisfaction about the frequency of their sexuality education classes. When asked by the researcher how they felt about having sexuality education for one period (60 minutes) per week, the girls from Class A indicated they felt it was not long enough. Jess said she felt it was *"too fast"* and they didn't *"learn as much"*, implying she felt more could be learnt in class if they had sexuality education for a longer period of time each week. Danni commented *"you had to take everything in one session"* and Megan thought it was *"so rushed*." Jess went onto say *"I think we should have it at least twice a week 'cos it goes so fast that you don't*

actually get enough information." These sentiments were echoed by Anthony from Class B who suggested they should have sexuality education *"maybe like twice a week or something and not at the end of the week when we really can't be bothered."* These student responses corroborate findings by Allen (2005) in which students also said they should spend more time on sexuality education at school.

Additional comments were also made about the ineffective placement of classes during the week. Anthony's class had their sexuality education classes on a Friday afternoon and according to Anthony this wasn't ideal as *"we just can't be stuffed doing anything*." When the boys' group was told they were to spend 11 periods on sexuality education and asked if they thought that was enough time, Brad responded by saying *"we need to spend more time on it than like drugs and stuff."* These student comments highlight the issue of the placement of health education classes particularly when they only occur once a week. Given Anthony's comments perhaps as far as the students are concerned, Friday afternoon was not the most effective time to schedule a class that occurred only once a week and this reflects the findings of Buston and Wight (2004), in which teachers discussed undesirable times during the week to deliver sexuality education classes. The students in my study felt having one period per week was not sufficient to meet their needs and ensure the effectiveness of the programme. From the students' perspective, it would also seem that how the time is used during each session also requires careful management and thought. Brad's comment referring to the time spent on sexuality education in comparison with other health education topics, such as drug education, would tend to suggest he feels sexuality education is of greater importance to him than other aspects of health education. He is suggesting more time should be spent on learning about sexuality education than other topics.

4:3:3 Classroom Logistics and Physical Environment

The students had much to say about the way in which the classroom itself was organised. The physical classroom environment attracted many comments, most of them critical, however most students went on to make suggestions for improvement.

When asked if she liked the classroom Nadine replied "the posters are pretty cool." Megan said the classroom was "too small" with Danni adding "it is so plain… there is nothing on the walls… it doesn't look like a proper classroom… it looks like a teacher's room." Jess said she would like to see the classroom become *"a bit more like appealing. Make it better to come into. Make you feel kind of liked more welcomed."* When asked how they though this could be achieved the three girls came up with suggestions such as painting the currently white room a different colour, putting more books around about different subjects not *"just about sex"* and the need for more heaters. Jess commented that the classroom was *"hard to get around"* and *"all the desks are real like crammed up"*. Megan said she would like to *"get rid of some of the desks."* From the other class Anthony said the classroom was *"not really open"* and Brad commented *"some people have their back to other people."* He went on to add *"I reckon we should have like a 'u' type of thing so everyone can be in the middle and everyone can look at the teacher and she is not blocked by some people."*

These calls to improve the physical classroom environment and make it more welcoming and functional for students echo the thoughts of the teacher in Tasker's (2002) study, who stated she felt the sexuality education classroom should be inviting to students and flexible in its layout in order to facilitate a wide variety of interactive teaching approaches. The room being used for sexuality education in this study was a very small room crammed with desks and chairs. While students showed an appreciation and preference for group and interactive tasks (as previously discussed), they also expressed their frustration with the physical constraints of the classroom, which appeared to limit physical movement and social interactions.

In regard to the seating arrangements in the classroom, the students in Class A explained they were allowed to sit wherever they liked in their sexuality education classes. When asked if the boys and girls end up at different tables all three students answered *"yes."* Megan added sometimes *"we get told to make a mixture into boys and girls and then some of us stay at the same tables anyway."* When asked if the place they chose to sit was influenced by their feelings about some of the boys in the class both Megan and Danni replied in emphatic agreement. Megan elaborated and explained that when Miss A asked them to make mixed groups she and Jess would

stay at the same table to avoid working with the boys. It was interesting to note that during the classroom observation Jess and Megan were sitting at a table with another girl and two boys. This contradicted Megan's comment about avoiding the boys and it is interesting to speculate how this situation came about. Perhaps the boys sat at the table after Megan and Jess had already settled themselves? Did the teacher influence this outcome by instructing the boys to sit at that particular table? Perhaps Megan preferred to and often did sit with just girls, but for whatever reason on this occasion she found herself at a mixed table.

Some of the students from Class B, in which the seating arrangement had been organised by the teacher at the start of the year, felt they would benefit from changing seats and therefore being able to work with different people more often during classroom learning activities. Brad indicated his frustration with the seating arrangements in Class B saying he was *"stuck with girls…. these three girls."* Nadine and Kylie said they felt ready for a change to the seating arrangements. Nadine commented *"we need to change groups. We need to work with other people. We have been in the same groups since the start of the year."* Kylie reminded Nadine that occasionally they got to choose another person from another group to work with but that over she agreed they needed *"a change."* Interestingly given their comments above Nadine and Brad were noted by the researcher as being seated at the same table during the classroom observations and it was assumed by the researcher on the basis of previous student comments that this had been the case since the start of the year.

The students were also asked about the pamphlets and resources on the far wall of the classroom and if they ever looked at them. Brad said he had only just noticed they were there in the *"last couple of weeks"* with two other boys saying they did not make use of them at all. When asked why they didn't access them, the boys responded with

Brad	*Well you don't really want to like get into class and go like I'm just going to go and get a thing on sex… and everyone is like 'ohhhh he's reading a book about…*
Craig	*Gonorrhoea!*
Anthony	*Has he got it?!!!*

When Nadine and Kylie were asked if they ever read or looked at any of the resources Kylie responded *"nah I have never looked at them. We never get a chance. We are only in here for class."* Kylie was then asked by the researcher if she didn't look at them because everyone in the class would see her looking at them. She replied *"oh yeah people would be like 'look at what she is reading about eeewwww'."* Simon said that on occasion, often when he was bored with writing, he would get something from the display and read through it. This was easy for him to do during class without other students noticing as he sat at the table right next to the display unit. He continued to say *"yeah sometimes Felicity or something will pick one up and start reading it and I'll say 'show it to me please' and then I'll read it."*

From the other class Danni said they were "*not allowed to*" access the display material. These comments provide an interesting insight into the access students have to additional information about sex and sexuality. On the surface it appeared that the students in this research study had easy and unlimited access to resources by way of this display unit in the health education classroom. However, between the locked classroom and the display unit being located on the opposite side of the room to the entry/exit point, the students' ability to access the information was severely limited. Any attempt to access the display unit would necessitate most students having to walk past many of their classmates and once there they would be in full view of all members of the class and their actions under potential scrutiny.

The student comments indicate they would feel unsafe, embarrassed and exposed if they were to go to the display unit and access the material it contains. The students obviously did not feel comfortable with this arrangement, hence their non-utilisation of the resources. The students' concern that everyone would see if you tried to get something during class, was given as the main reason they did not access the material, and it appeared from the students' perspective that there was little point in the material being there. The reluctance of the students to access this material for fear of embarrassment and perhaps ridicule suggests a potential lack of emotional safety and will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

To summarise, the students in this research study indicated their desire for and enjoyment of classes that were focused on student-centred, cooperative and interactive teaching and learning processes typically found in the constructivist paradigm of health and sexuality education, as opposed to passive approaches such as note-taking more aligned with transmission approaches. Those students in Class B, whose seating plan had been organised by the teacher, indicated they would like the opportunity to work with a variety of students in the class. The majority of students expressed dissatisfaction with the physical classroom environment, with the timing of their classes in regard to placement during the week, as well as the lesson frequency and duration. The students also discussed their reluctance to access the supplementary material in the classroom saying they would be too embarrassed and concerned about other students seeing them.

4:4 Student Experience of Classroom Relationships

The students' experience of classroom relationships was interesting to analyse and explore. They were honest and open in expressing their thoughts and feelings about a variety of classroom interactions. They discussed their relationships with other students and their feelings about these interactions, and also shared their perspectives of the relationship between their sexuality education teachers and the class. In discussing their current teacher, some students reflected back on past teachers they had experienced in sexuality education.

4:4:1 Student Relationships

Participant comments about the other students in the class appeared to highlight some significant gender and emotional safety issues operating in the classroom. As previously discussed, students in Class A did not seem willing to move around and work with people outside their friendships groups. While the students in Class B were fed up with working with the same people all the time and said they wanted the opportunity to interact with others during classroom activities. It is worth noting that each class's seating arrangements were different. Class A were allowed to sit where they liked and in Class B seats had been allocated by the teacher and for the most part had not been altered since the beginning of the year.

The students from Class A indicated some anxiety around the relationships within their sexuality education class. Danni said she felt frustrated when *"people were laughing and stuff when you say something"* and *"then they take it out of class."* Jess elaborated by adding *"if you say something you are scared that they are gonna like you know tell their friends when they get out of class so most people don't put their hands up and say stuff cos of that."* When I asked if they ever had times in class when they wanted to say things or to ask questions but they didn't because they were too scared, all three girls replied *"yes."*

The students from Class B talked about the varying comfort levels of students in the classroom. Kylie said she had noticed that *"some people are quite closed up in class and don't say much."* The boys group from Class B elaborated further with Brad said he could *"tell the people in class who are uncomfortable"* and Simon commenting he didn't think the *"teachers would keep them in [the classroom] if they were uncomfortable."* Anthony suggested *"if you don't feel comfortable I don't think you should have to do it. We should get the option of whether we want to sit in the class and learn about this."* These comments indicate that the students recognise there is strong potential for embarrassment and discomfort as a result of their participation in sexuality education classes. They appeared to be keenly aware of the reactions of other students in their class and acknowledged that not all students were comfortable participating in the programme. It may also be worth considering that while the students appeared to be discussing 'other people' in their class, it is also be a possibility that they may have been referring to their own feelings of anxiety and/or insecurity around their sexuality education classes.

In the Class B interviews the conversation evolved into a discussion based around the differences between the boys and the girls. Brad said *"you could tell the guys are comfortable 'cos they are just joking around and like laughing about it."* I commented to the boys that I had noticed the girls were very quiet while the boys were the ones who asked and answered the questions. Simon responded by *saying "we are more open about it"* and Brad stated *"we don't really care what they (the girls) think. They might care what we think but we don't care what they think."*

The boys' comments were enlightening in that they tend to indicate that Brad in particular equated *"joking around"* and *"laughing"* during sexuality education classes as an indication of ease and relaxation around the subject. It may also be seen as a 'peer norm' to joke around in the classroom. Tasker (2002) found the boys in her study appeared to seek opportunities to draw attention to themselves during sexuality education classes and on occasion 'clowned around'. She concluded they behaved in this way in order to add humour to the classes and to perhaps create and contribute to a relaxed classroom atmosphere (Tasker, 2002). Another interpretation is that Brad and some other boys in the class were 'performing' in an attempt to mask with bravado personal feelings of awkwardness, insecurity and anxiety. Perhaps this display of courage and boldness may be associated with and/or an attempt to distract from their perceived lack of personal knowledge or experience.

When asked how they felt about having mixed gender classes for sexuality education, the student comments demonstrated a high degree of awareness of the other gender in the classroom. Both the boys and the girls were very conscious of one another and were forthcoming in sharing their ideas about what the other gender may have been thinking and feeling, and how they behaved during the sexuality education classes.

Anthony and Brad said they felt it was OK some of the time that their classes involved both boys and girls. Craig said he didn't care while Simon said he didn't like it because *"sometimes it can be bad when you want to say something that you don't want to say in front of the girls – just boys."* Brad agreed with this comment from Simon, in contrast to his perception about the boys not caring what the girls thought and Anthony added *"the stuff we are doing probably offends girls."*

I asked the girls from Class B, Nadine and Kylie, if they had noticed a difference between the behaviour of the boys and the girls in their class and Kylie responded by saying *"the boys can be a bit silly and make dumb comments. Like if someone mentions periods they go 'eeewwww' and the girls are like 'Oh whatever'."* Nadine added they are *"more distracted and immature but what can you expect from Year 10 boys?"* to which Kylie responded *"Yeah my brother reckons they are two years behind girls in the brain*." The dynamic in Class B seemed to be strongly gendered

with both the boys and the girls interviewed being keenly aware of the reactions and behaviour of the opposite gender during their classes. This gender dynamic was evident in my observation of the class and also within the analysis of the interview data.

Nadine and Kylie were vocal in their assessment of the boys in their class as *"immature"* and went to great lengths to distance themselves from them. They seemed to be assuming the role of responsible, mature and sensible students and were critical of the boys in their behaviour and attitudes. A comment from Kylie reinforces this assertion and perhaps sums up the situation when she said *"at the end of the day if they get a woman pregnant they can just leave."* Her comment indicates her perception that the boys weren't taking sexuality education classes as seriously as girls perhaps because the stakes are not as high for them in the event of an unexpected pregnancy. This may relate to the video about teenage pregnancy recently watched by Class B in which many of the boys/men had either abandoned their pregnant partners or had left not long after the birth of the child.

The girl group from Class A also expressed their frustrations with some of the boys in their sexuality education class. Jess said *"it is boring when the boys don't listen and they ask the same questions*." Megan added *"or they say something stupid."* Jess added

> *They laugh for ages and it is wasting our time cos we don't actually have long. When you add up all the time that Miss A spends standing there waiting for everyone to be quiet, it is actually quite a lot of time that you don't actually get of her teaching.*

Megan suggested they should have *"a girls-only classroom*" - an idea that was fully supported by both Danni and Jess. The girls went onto talk about their comfort levels in the classroom:

> *Megan: Even when the teacher is around it is scary… I just don't feel safe with the boys there.*
>
> *Jess: It would feel better if it were just the girls because I would feel better like knowing that the guys weren't here like hearing what you were saying.*

Interestingly this class were allowed to choose their seats each time they entered the sexuality education classroom and the girls indicated that they almost always end up sitting in gender groups. When asked if they thought it might be because of some of the issues they mentioned in the previous quotes i.e. *"I just don't feel safe with the boys there"*, Megan, Jess and Danni emphatically replied that it had *"a lot"* to do with it.

The boys' perception of the girls in the class provided insight about constructions of masculinity as well as femininity in the classroom. As mentioned earlier the boys appeared to be 'performing' with masculine bravado and confidence. This was evident in comments such as *"we don't care what the girls think"* and *"you can tell the guys are comfortable cos they are just joking around and like laughing about it."* The boys seemed to perceive the girls as being uncomfortable and/or disinterested in the sexuality education classes

Simon	*There are like these three or four girls in the class that will like openly say their answer and all the rest are like shy and don't want to say anything, don't want to be there, don't want to do anything.*
Anthony	*They just want to start chatting to their friends about what they…*
Brad	*That really annoys me!*

The student commentary on the opposing gender was both fascinating and enlightening in regard to the potency of the gender dynamics and relations at play in the classroom. Both the boys and the girls expressed their frustration with the attitudes and behaviour of the opposing gender. They often aligned with what could be regarded as traditional gender roles, as well as exposing attitudes aligning with essentialist philosophies. The fact that the focus group interviews ended up being organised into single-sexed groups may have contributed to this scenario in that they had an opportunity to discuss one another without the other being present. These intriguing gender dynamics will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

4:4:2 The Teacher

In the process of sharing their experience of their sexuality education classes, the students interviewed took the opportunity to share their thoughts about their

classroom teachers. In particular they discussed what qualities they thought an effective sexuality educator should have and how they felt a teacher of sexuality education should interact with their class. As the students shared these perceptions with me, in some instances, they also discussed the qualities previous sexuality education teachers they had experienced.

Miss A was described by Jess and Danni as *"doing a really good job."* Danni also thought that in order to teach sexuality education *"you have to be real brave"*, with Jess added she didn't think she would be able to do it. The girls went onto discuss the significance of the teacher's relationship with the class:

Jess	*I think it is important that the teacher who is teaching the class can get on well with the class so you actually feel like opening up to her.*
Danni	*Like you can talk to her.*
Jess	*Yeah. It is good if she has a sense of humour so she can make some jokes and make us feel better if we are in tricky situations.*
Megan	*Yeah.*

When I asked the students if they admired Miss A, all three students replied *"yes."* They went on to say they thought Miss A was doing a great job and they appreciated her openness and sense of humour. The students' admiration of Miss A appeared to contribute to a positive experience of sexuality education for the girls and was an aspect they obviously felt was important and appreciated. These findings reflect those from Tasker's (2002) study in which the students said they felt they could be very open with their teacher and that she often laughed along with them when something amusing happened in class. The girls also said sometimes Miss A could be "*grumpy*", with Danni adding that it was "*annoying*." The students didn't offer any insight as to why they felt Miss A might get grumpy on occasion, nor was clarification of these comments sought.

The girls from Class B also had some positive comments to make about their teacher Miss B. Nadine and Kylie both felt the teacher had significant influence over on the sexuality education classroom and thought Miss B was very good at eliciting

information and answers from them, and said she made them feel involved and valued as learners in the classroom.

Kylie	*You need to have a good teacher teaching this stuff not like some old crusty teacher. Miss B is really good. She like asks us questions all the time*
Nadine	*Yeah she doesn't just stand up the front and say this is how it is. She gets the answers from us.*
Kylie	*Yeah. She wants to hear what our ideas are.*

The comments made by the students about their teachers emphasised the important connection between the qualities of the teacher and the effectiveness of the sexuality education programme and appeared to be an important contributing factor to the girls' positive experience of sexuality education.

The boys from Class B were less specific in their feedback about Miss B and instead chose to predominantly discuss the teacher they had last year who happened to be Miss A (the teacher of Class A). The boys began by saying they felt comfortable to discuss issues in class and when asked if they felt they could ask Miss B questions, three of the boys were hesitant in their replies and one did not respond at all. The boys then diverted the conversation to talk about Miss A with Anthony saying she was *"real happy all the time and you could say anything*." Brad added *"you could tell her anything. I don't know why but Miss B just isn't"*. At this point he trailed off in an indecipherable mumble. Craig and Anthony also made comments that were unable to be understood. Simon said he thought it was because *"Miss A did lots of practical stuff and plays and all that kind of thing."* Brad and Simon's comments during this conversation indicated they felt the teacher had a significant role to play in the sexuality education classroom, while Anthony commented *"it can change how comfortable you are."*

Interestingly, the girls from Class A also made reference to Miss B in their interview. Danni said *"Everyone talks about this teacher in Health. She is not too open with the topic. She is pretty shy."* Although the name of the teacher was not openly discussed in the interview it was made clear to the me that the students were referring to Miss B, the teacher of the other Year 10 class participating in this research study.

In commenting on the positive attributes of last year's teacher Miss A, I inferred the boys were indirectly expressing their 'not so positive' or perhaps indifferent feelings about Miss B. It is interesting to compare the comments made about Miss B by the girls with those made by the boys. This pattern seems to align itself with the gender division among the students in Class B. The girls' relationship with Miss B was very positive and they appreciated the way in which she welcomed and encouraged their contributions during the class. However, in contrast the boys seemed to demonstrate a lack of connection and comfort with Miss B and when asked to talk about her diverted the conversation to their teacher (Miss A) from last year instead. They indicated they were more comfortable with Miss A last year and they appeared to have established a much stronger connection with her than they currently had with Miss B.

The reasons for this are likely to be mixed and student responses do not give a clear indication of these. However, observations of the classes and the pedagogical approaches of the different teachers could suggest that it may be in some way connected to each teachers' approach within the classroom in terms of behaviour management. In the classroom observations, it was apparent that Miss A was less strict with her students, while Miss B was very firm in her expectations of behaviour and took a no-nonsense approach, especially when it came to the boys' behaviour. There are a number of possible interpretations of this dynamic. Maybe the boys' preference for Miss A was because they felt they 'got away with more' the previous year when she was their teacher. Perhaps their issue with Miss B was because she was tougher on them in the classroom and they didn't like it. Another possible interpretation which relates to the comments about Miss B by the girls from Class A, is that perhaps the Miss B's perceived shyness and lack of openness as discussed by the students, impacted on the boys' willingness to be authentic, to open up and really 'invest' in her sexuality education classes. Perhaps the boys *"immature"* and *"joking around*" behaviour in the classroom, was their attempt to lighten the atmosphere as previously discussed in Tasker's (2002) research, and to assist in creating a relaxed atmosphere. Whatever the reason for the apparent lack of connection between Miss B and the boys in Class B, it appeared it may have created a barrier to genuine and authentic engagement for boys in the classroom. This assertion would tend to align

with Anthony's earlier comment that the teacher's comfort levels can affect how the students feel and react in the classroom. It is possible the boys' felt Miss B was somewhat less tolerant of them and their "*joking around*" and consequently they didn't feel she could have a laugh with them. Many studies have highlighted the importance students' place on their sexuality teaching having a sense of humour and a relaxed approach in the teaching of sexuality education (Allen, 2005; Hilton, 2003; Tasker 2002). It may also be the case that the boys' comments indicate a desire by them that their sexuality education teacher possess these qualities.

It is possible that the boys' lack of connection for whatever reason with Miss B, may contribute to the overall lack of emotional safety consistently mentioned by all the students of Class B in their interviews. However it also seems that the girls from Class A had issues around emotional safety in their classroom and as there were no boys interviewed from this class it is difficult to draw conclusions about particular reasons in relation to their relationship with the classroom teacher. Overall the data suggests the relationship students have with the teacher influenced student experiences and their attitudes towards sexuality education. It also demonstrates that emotional safety in the sexuality education classroom is a significant and extremely complex issue that most certainly warrants further exploration.

4:5 Student Experience Outside the Classroom

This theme encompasses the sources of information that impact on and influence the students and their perceptions of sex, sexuality and sexuality education, aside from those they are exposed to in the classroom. This is reflective of the philosophy of the Health Education curriculum as outlined in *The New Zealand Curriculum*(2007) that recognises the influence of societal factors on health and wellbeing and in this instance, a sexuality context, and the need to explore these factors in the classroom. These factors include media (internet, movies, TV show, music videos and magazines), parents/caregivers, friends and peers and adults in general.

4:5:1 Media

The most commonly referred to and discussed alternative source of information about sex, sexuality and relationships identified by the students was media. Magazines such

as Dolly, *Cosmo*, *FHM* and *Crème*, popular TV shows *Two and A Half Men* and *Shortland Street*, TV and print advertising, movies like James Bond and music videos such as those seen on the TV channel *C4* all served to provide students with information and ideas about sex, sexuality and relationships.

As far as magazines were concerned students reportedly used these to provide themselves with information about sex and sexuality. Two of the girls (one from each class) specifically mentioned the sealed sections in the *Cosmo* magazine, widely known to contain detailed and often explicit sexual material including images of body parts, with Jess describing that area of the magazine as being *"quite good."* Jess also mentioned the sections devoted to answering questions people had written in. When I asked if they found that section useful, Jess's group unanimously replied *"yeah."*

The boys group also found magazines worthwhile and all four students contributed the names of seven specific publications they referred to and found useful for information about sex and sexuality. Interestingly Simon commented that as boys *"they had to know what was happening*" and so that was why they sought out these particular magazines (generally accessing them from the school library). This seemed to hint at a sense of anxiety about the need to feel informed and educated on sex and sexuality issues. Craig said that magazines were *"usually quite funny*." When this comment was made the entire group began to laugh and it was interpreted from this reaction that the boys used these magazines not only as a source of much-needed and desired information around sex and sexuality but also as a form of entertainment and 'for a laugh'. The fact that both the boys and girls were accessing these magazines in the library for more explicit information about sex and sexuality may indicate that the sexuality education programme was not meeting student need to some extent and that these magazines were sought out by both genders as a way to supplement what was being taught in the classroom. Unlike other studies that have identified pornography as a source of information for young men, the boys in this study made no reference to it in their interview. It is always possible that they did in fact get information from this source, but didn't feel comfortable disclosing this information during the interview.

According to Craig most TV shows "*have sex in them*" and his opinion was corroborated by the other members of his group, with Brad in particular stating *"you see it heaps."* The popular sitcom *Two and Half Men* was identified by Anthony as being *"based around sex"* and when he mentioned the name of the lead character 'Charlie' all the boys laughed and shook their heads. This reaction, couple with non-verbal cues such a facial expression and eye contact between the boys, lead me to conclude it served as a collective acknowledgement and possibly approval and/or admiration from the boys of Charlie's promiscuous lifestyle.

The New Zealand produced programme *Shortland Street* was mentioned by Brad, with specific reference being made to the fact that you never see the characters using contraception when they are engaging in sexual activity. Simon also said this was also the case in many movies such as *James Bond*. He commented that

> *You always see a sex scene and all you see is ... them getting into it and then suddenly it is basically done like the next day and they are lying in bed together and its done and you are like OK..... Like on the movies they don't show them like putting on condoms or anything.*

Brad commented that *"they are not getting pregnant so why should I use it?"* in reference to his perception of the lack of contraceptive use in movies and television. These comments made by Simon and Brad about invisibility of contraceptive use depicted in TV and movies indicate that they have a strong sense of awareness around the disparity between the 'safer sex' messages they receive in the classroom and other sources and what they are exposed to via TV and movies.

The two other groups also referred to television and movies although not to the same extent as the boys. Comments made included the fact that they get information about sex from movies because *"you see it all the time"* (Kylie), *"it is everywhere"* (Nadine) and in Megan's opinion, sex and sexuality is not what *TV "makes it out to be."* When asked, the girls from Class A agreed that perhaps TV was a little misleading and did not really reflect real life.

Music videos also appeared to hold significant interest and entertainment value for students. Two of the groups discussed the images they have seen on TV channels

such as *C4*, particularly those in the rap and hip hop genre. Kylie said she would be interested to examine music videos because she would like to look at

> *...those rappers who have heaps of girls around them like saying it is OK for a guy to have lots of girls. And when it is a girl singer she is being all like provocative. I hope we cover some stuff on music videos. That would be really interesting.*

Nadine also indicated she would be keen to analyse music videos saying it *"would be cool.'*

The boys group also demonstrated their interest and enjoyment of music videos as viewers. Interestingly Craig was keen to share his thoughts on music videos. According to him there were *"some pretty nice chicks there"*, the *"images are interesting"* and that *"videos are good."* Brad stated *"that's all boys watch on TV like C4 and stuff"* while Simon said that he could not *"remember the last time I saw a girl on C4 that wasn't in a bra or a bikini."* When asked to consider the contrasting ways in which men and women were presented in music videos, Brad responded with comments such as *"like the guys are pimping them"* and *"the girls are always trying to impress the guys"*, while Simon stated *"why isn't it like the girls are like the singer and there is like guys just in boxers or something? You don't have that. Like the girls are always with the guys instead of the guys with the girls."*

In response to comments from Anthony describing hip hop singers and rappers as being *"cut like Greek gods"* and *"they've got money thrown around, the cars, the girls"*, Craig said he thought there was a *"real stereotype"* in the portrayal of men in hip hop and rap music videos. Brad commented that he thought it would be *"a pretty good life though*." These comments from the boys demonstrate their recognition of the unreality of these images and a critical awareness of the way in which opposing genders are presented in these videos. It is unclear how this awareness impacts on whether the boys aspire to this 'unreality' or if they are dismissive of it and simply look to music videos as a source of entertainment rather than influence.

The students showed genuine interest in exploring and critically analysing social media such as music videos in the interviews. Students picked up on contradictions between what they were being taught in their sexuality classes and what they saw in

terms of sex and relationships in the media. They specifically mentioned examples such as sex scenes with a total absence of contraception, acceptance of male promiscuity, double standards between genders in terms of promiscuity, the provocativeness of women, and misleading representations of sexual activity and relationships.

4:5:2 Parents/Caregivers and Friends/Peers

All three groups discussed their parents as a source of information about sex and sexuality education. While some students said they could easily communicate with their parents on this issue, others talked about the difficulties they experienced. Anthony said *"my parents try to talk to me about it but it is just weird"* and *"I can't really talk to my parents about this"*, while Craig stated that *"it was not that easy."* Brad commented that while his Mum and Dad have told him *"you can always talk to us"*, he found it preferable to talk to his *"mates."* Simon was concerned that it would be inappropriate to ask *"Oh Mum how do I do it? You don't want to ask that"* alluding to a potential anxiety about his lack of knowledge. Brad said he felt he couldn't ask his parents if they could buy him *"something."*

Only Kylie and Jess said they felt very comfortable discussing sex and sexuality with their parents, although Kylie categorically stated she could not talk to her Dad. She indicated that she and her mother were *"really open*" and her Mum has told her she can *"talk to her about anything."* When asked if they could talk to their parents, caregivers or whanau about sex and/or sexuality all the girls in the Class A group began to laugh and this was interpreted as a sign that it was not possible or easy to discuss these issues in their homes. This was corroborated by the specific comments made by each of the girls in the group. Megan said her Mum has told her that she would like to be able to discuss anything with her but Megan says this feels *"weird"* and she is not *"comfortable"* doing that. Danni said she couldn't talk to her Mum about sex and/or sexuality because *"it's my Mum."* Megan also commented that in her house there is never

> *a good time cos I have got like a brother and sister and they are like six and four so my Mum is always like with them and busy and yelling at them and so I never really get a chance to sit down and talk to her.*

Nadine said while she felt she could talk to her parents about sex, sexuality and relationships, she felt it was not necessary because she was not "*really into that stuff right now*."

None of the girls mentioned that they talk to their friends about sex and sexuality issues, although Nadine did state she thought *"people talked about it heaps"*. When asked to elaborate on this point, Kylie commented *"especially boys. They just go on about girls' bodies and stuff and sex and that. I just ignore them. They are just being dumb and immature."*

In the boys' group, reference was made to friends as a source of information several times throughout their interview. Brad said *"I just talk to my mates"* and Anthony felt it was better *"when your friends talk about it'* as opposed to your parents because that was *"weird"*. Simon said *"a lot of stuff we get like we just pick it up from just every day from like our age people talking."* The other three boys in the group agreed with Simon's statement, with Brad commenting it is *"just general talk."* The difference between the genders in this regard to open discussions with their friends and peers about sex and sexuality will be further examined in the next chapter.

4:5:3 Adult Ideas About Teenagers and Sex and Sexuality

When asked to consider what they felt adults' ideas were about teenagers and sex and sexuality, the students had some interesting comments to make. Jess said she felt adults thought *"if you have got a boyfriend most of them automatically think you are doing something; that they should be worried."* Nadine who was in a different group to Jess reinforced this idea by saying she felt adults thought *"all teenagers are 'doing it'"* and she also commented *"they think we don't know about consequences and stuff."* Kylie added *"they think that like drinking leads to sex. And it doesn't always for everyone, like only for some people… and they think we can't make good decisions and we can't be responsible."* Anthony's perception was that adults didn't think teenagers were *"mature enough to 'do it'"*. while Simon commented *"they think we don't know enough about it."*

These comments from the students tend to indicate their belief that adults don't trust them to make good decisions in regard to sex and sexuality and they appear to be frustrated with this assumption. They also tend to point to a preoccupation for both adults and the students themselves with the physical aspects of sexuality as opposed to the emotional and social risks associated with sexual activity. Interestingly Brad also expressed his assumptions about the older generation when he commented *"my Dad's alright with it, my Mum's alright with it. It's just my grandparents like 'you shouldn't be learning about that at your age' and all that… cos I think they discovered it when they were like older."*

The students' experiences of sexuality and sexuality education outside the classroom indicated they were influenced by other factors including their parents (generally their mothers) and various types of media. They recognised the fact that sex and sexuality permeated many aspects of life and appeared to recognise the existence of inconsistencies and mixed messages across these influences.

4:6 Summary

The analysis of the data has seen the following four themes emerge from the student experience of sexuality education: Content; Classroom Pedagogy and Organisation; Classroom Relationships and those had Outside the Classroom. Student experience of sexuality education largely reflected, and was influenced by a range of factors related to situated aspects of classroom programmes, as well as the social relationships in those settings.

Important findings alluded to, but not explored in detail in this chapter include gender and emotional safety. Student comments during the interviews indicated there were gender issues operating both within the classroom, and between and within each of the genders. The students' awareness and discussion of each other in gender terms became obvious during the focus group interviews and they talked at length about their perceptions of and relationships with other students, often along gender lines. The student articulation of these experiences provided valuable insight into the way in which gender relations influenced the individuals and groups operating within the sexuality education classroom. The differences in perceptions and behaviour between

the boys and the girls were pronounced, and in the focus group interviews there was strong evidence of performativity of traditional gender roles and in the case of the boys in particular, adherence to a heteronormative culture. Chapter Five will utilise gender theory to analyse and explore these relationships and behaviours.

Relating strongly to the gender relations in the classroom were the relationships between individuals, groups and also between the students and the teacher, and the influence these relationships had on the students' emotional safety in the classroom. Student concerns about their emotional safety was evident in many guises throughout the focus group interviews. The students alluded to it in numerous contexts and it appears to have a significant impact and influence on the student experience in the classroom, and therefore warrants further analysis and discussion in Chapter Five. The interrelationship between student emotional safety and gender relations in the classroom will also be examined in an attempt to ascertain what, if any, influence they had on one another.

Chapter Five: Further Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This chapter will further discuss findings emerging from the data. During the analysis of the data, it became apparent that there were two distinct, recurring and broader aspects overarching all four of the experience themes. These were Gender and Gender Relations and Emotional Safety. Both aspects appeared in different guises in many contexts and were consequently woven and embedded throughout the data. This chapter is devoted to the analysis of these broader themes drawing on the data analysis from Chapter Four, along with new data, which is then interpreted in light of relevant literature. A third theme, Discourses of Sexuality Education, will also be discussed in this chapter.

5:1 Gender and Gender Relations

According to theorists highlighted by Tasker (2002), learning about gender and learning about sexuality are inextricably linked within the formal and informal (hidden) school curriculum. It is therefore unsurprising that the concept and construction of gender should feature so strongly in the analysis and subsequent discussion of the data. In this section, I attempt to interpret what it means to be masculine and feminine in this classroom from the perspective of the students themselves.

5:1:1 Being a 'Boy'

When the boys were discussing their sexuality education experience in the classroom during the focus group interview, they were also providing insight into what it means to them to be masculine. This section explores their constructions and understandings of what it means to be male in both the classroom and interview setting.

In contrast to much of the literature explored, the boys interviewed in this study presented and described themselves as engaged and animated during sexuality education classes, and they indicated they felt the content being covered was as relevant to them as it was to the girls. It was noted during the classroom observation that the boys tended to dominate the classroom activities in terms of verbal

contributions and taking the lead in activities, however they were neither negative nor hostile in their interactions or participation. This finding is similar to that of Tasker (2002), who concluded in her study that although the boys were definitely noisier and more dominant than the girls in the classroom, they did not operate at levels of disruption reported in other studies. This is in contrast to conclusions by Hilton (2001) who suggested boys were alienated by the content of sexuality education programmes and also Lenderyou and Ray (1997) and Forrest (1992), who concluded that boys' disinterest and disruptive classroom behaviour was the result of curriculum content such as periods and pregnancy that were perceived as more relevant to women. In this study, the apparent active involvement of the boys in their sexuality education classes may have been the result of the broader programme they were being exposed to and also the socio-constructivist approach implemented by the teachers. It is possible that the boys' involvement was also attributable to the social dynamic among some boys, which tended to lend itself to the dominance of particular boys during classroom interactions and activities perhaps as a way of demonstrating their ease with and knowledge of the subject matter, thereby reinforcing their masculinity in the classroom setting. My speculations are somewhat limited by the fact that only one formal observation of Class B's sexuality education unit was undertaken during the research process, therefore, any interpretation of the situation must be tentative. In this instance it may not be appropriate to draw any conclusions from just one formal observation of the class.

The boys also indicated in the focus group interviews their interest in learning about more explicit and detailed physical information about sexual intercourse. This was clearly demonstrated by Anthony's comment that a "*how to*" class would be useful for him. The other three boys began to giggle when Anthony made this comment and when I asked Anthony if he meant a 'how to' class about sexual intercourse, Brad replied *"yeah!!!"*. More giggling by all three boys ensued. I then asked the boys if they were interested more in the physical side of things and again there was more giggling, with Brad suggesting it would *"be interesting"* and *"better than doing all this stuff in your book*". I interpreted these comments as a genuine desire on behalf of the boys, to be better informed about the physical act of sexual intercourse and that they wanted the content of their sexuality education to be more detailed in this regard.

This reaction and these comments by the boys relate strongly to a finding discussed by both Hilton (2007) and Allen (2006b) in their research around the desire and need of some boys to be informed of and even experienced in the physical aspects of sex and sexual intercourse. In this scenario, both authors contend that some boys demonstrate anxiety around being ill-informed and that the boys themselves believe there is an expectation that they should know what they are doing when it comes to the practicalities of sexual activity just simply by virtue of the fact that they are male. As with Hilton's and Allen's studies, the boys in this study showed a wish to be more fully or better informed about the physical aspects of sexual activity.

Anthony, Simon, Brad and Craig may have been demonstrating a genuine need and desire to learn about these more explicit aspects in view of their growing sexual maturity and their perception of gender expectations. Another possible explanation may be that Anthony's request for a *"how to"* class was a reaction to the clinical way in which the mechanics of sexual intercourse had been taught to him in the past, and this could be interpreted as a request and desire on Anthony's behalf for sexuality education to instead reflect aspects of desire and pleasure, as opposed to just the technicalities. This interpretation would align with a study by Allen (2006b) in which the apparent de-eroticisation of sexuality education was explored from the perspective of adolescent males. In her research with 16-19 year old males, Allen interpreted the young men's highly sexualised, and what may be regarded by some as inappropriate responses, to a survey about sexuality education as their "recognition of the incongruity in teaching a sexual subject in a way that de-sexualises it" (p. 70). Similarly, Hilton's (2007) work with males aged 16 and 17 indicated that boys were requesting a 'discourse of desire' and they specifically wanted information about sexual techniques and how to pleasure a woman.

In view of the in-depth conversation three of the four boys had about relationships, trust and love during the interview, they indicated that on occasion they were not always bound by or focused only on the physical aspects of sex. At times the boys appeared unconcerned about being perceived as sensitive or caring, as their discussion about feelings and their demonstration of these attitudes would tend to demonstrate.

In other words they did not seem to be aligning themselves with constructs of hegemonic masculinity as described Nayak and Kehily (1996) which deny a softer, caring masculinity and involves the enactment of a specific masculinity performed defensively against femininity. However, a sudden conversation shift occurred when Craig made his comment *"cos we are not looking for a major relationship yet"*. It was almost as though Craig was the marker of masculinity for the group and was consequently 'policing' the conversation. When it got too emotional and perhaps not masculine enough for him, he took the discussion in a different and more traditionally masculine direction. Both Brad and Simon, who up to that point had been very involved in the conversation about feelings, suddenly changed tack and appeared to align themselves with Craig's construct of masculinity. Anthony further reinforced his masculinity with his subsequent comment about wanting a "*how to"* class. This comment and the other three boys' reaction to it appeared to have been a collective reinforcement and performance of the hegemonic masculinity that had became apparent within the group as the interview progressed. This comment was made about halfway through the interview and directly after their conversation about love and relationships. It was as though the boundaries had to be re-established after that more emotionally-oriented conversation and all the boys felt compelled to and did conform to the hegemonic construct of masculinity.

There was another instance of the boys policing masculinity in the interview when Simon said sometimes he felt uncomfortable with girls in the class because there were things he wanted to say but wouldn't because they were present. Initially I interpreted this as a sign of his vulnerability and anxiety, however a different perspective was offered after Anthony's commented *"and the stuff we are doing probably offends girls"*. Simon immediately agreed with Anthony, again potentially demonstrating his willingness to align with the dominant masculinity in this setting. I concluded that Simon was initially expressing discomfort about having girls in the class because at times he did not feel safe asking questions or making comments. However, this quickly became an assertion that he was instead concerned with the sensitivity of the girls, in his attempt to align himself with the masculine ideals pervading the interview and being adhered to and reinforced by the other boys. In responding in this way Simon also confirmed his masculinity with his adherence to the notion that boys do

things that may be offensive to girls and also revealed his assumptions about what he believes offends girls.

A third instance of the policing of masculinity occurred in a conversation about music videos in which the boys were discussing the representations of gender and relationships. They talked about how differently men and women were portrayed and the messages about sexuality and gender associated with these images. During the course of this conversation the three boys, Anthony, Brad and Simon, were making thoughtful comments demonstrating their critical thinking skills. Craig in contrast was making what I perceived to be suggestive comments about the women in music videos such as "*…some pretty nice chicks in there*", "*the images are interesting*", "*videos are good*" and an emphatic and somewhat 'blokey' "*hell yeah*" when the boys were asked if they would be interested in analysing them. In this situation, Craig's continuous comments and attempts to police and reinforce a macho masculinity during this discussion did not appear to derail the others from their conversation and interestingly Craig's final comment was more aligned with the critical and thoughtful tone the others were engaging in. In regard to rappers, flash cars, money and bling he said it was "*a real stereotype*".

These three instances can be explained in relation to Butler's (1988) notion of gender performativity. Butler (1988) believes that people learn what are considered to be appropriate behaviours for masculinity and femininity through the process of socialisation and that gender is defined by interactions between people, by language and by the discourse of a culture. These stereotypes provide collective and organised meanings of gender and can become widely shared beliefs about who men and women innately 'are'. Individuals adopt these beliefs and consequently 'perform' in the roles they believe are appropriate for their gender. In the boys focus group interview the traditional constructs of heteronormative masculinity were evident and when the boys adhered to these constructs they were rewarded with what Butler (1988) would describe as the comfort and mental security of acting within the means of their gender's frame of reference. However, when Simon deviated, he was faced with a dissonance resulting from a disparity between his expected role, and the role that he performed. This was demonstrated in the interactions above between Simon

and the other boys in the interview. Simon was often 'dragged into line' by the other boys.

The boys also demonstrated normative heterosexuality when engaging in a conversation around alternative relationships other than those that are heterosexual. When asked if they had explored the topic of homosexuality and homophobia the following conversation ensued

> *Brad: Well I would start to be a wee bit like afraid that they will come onto you. I would start to feel a bit like hmmmm… but if they keep to themselves in their own time that's all right.*
>
> *Interviewer: Yip. But would you feel uncomfortable if a girl that you weren't too keen on was coming onto you?*
>
> *Brad: Oh shit man!*
>
> *Anthony: Hmmmm. Yeah.*
>
> *Interviewer: Oh so it doesn't matter who it is?*
>
> *Brad: Oh…*
>
> *Craig: Depends if she is good looking.*
>
> (All laughing)
>
> *Simon: Well maybe you don't mind as much, well maybe you don't mind, if um you are not going out with anyone or anything. But if you are going out with someone and you are in a relationship with someone and someone starts coming onto you, you have to tell them you are already in a relationship.*
>
> *Brad: But it is better than a guy coming onto you I feel.*
>
> *Craig: Well of course it is!*

In this exchange, their ideas about masculinity were on display with Brad reinforcing his heterosexuality as far as the other boys were concerned by referring to the anxiety he would feel if someone of the same sex tried to 'come onto him'. When asked if he would feel as uncomfortable if a girl he didn't like was trying to come onto him before he got a chance to respond, Craig intervened with a comment that reinforced his masculinity and his heterosexuality in his objectification of women when he said *"depends if she is good looking"*. At this point Simon tried to direct the conversation into a serious discussion around the boundaries of relationships, but again this was undermined (policed) by Brad and Craig, with Brad again reinforcing his

heterosexuality and Craig enthusiastically endorsing his remark, thereby clearly defining and highlighting the masculine and heterosexual boundaries and expectations for the group.

In light of the focus group interviews, it is interesting to look at the classroom observation of Class B and consider Craig's contributions during a particular whole class discussion. An activity undertaken in class asked the students to consider what might influence two teenagers (Ash and Jo) to engage in sexual activity together, Craig's responses were *"(Jo) likes Ash a lot*", "*pressure from friends"* and *"boost self-esteem in front of friends*". When asked to consider why Ash and Jo might refrain from sexual activity together, the contribution Craig made to the conversation was, *"she might think his penis is too small"*. These comments alone provided insight into the way in which Craig had constructed his own ideas about masculinity (they appeared to be based on physical features) and how these ideas influenced his attitudes towards sex, sexuality and relationships. He appeared to be concerned with the judgements of others and he made connections with a traditionally masculine ideal focused on physical attributes.

In the focus group interview the boys were also encouraged to consider if there may be some people in their class who didn't identify as heterosexual. Again this resulted in some interesting and enlightening comments predominantly from Brad relating to both gender and heteronormativity:

> *Brad: If I was like gay, I am not but if I was and like all you are talking about just boys and girls, you would be thinking that's not me.*
>
> *Interviewer: Yeah exactly.*
>
> *Brad: And then you are like I am not listening to this cos I am gay or I am bi.*
>
> *Interviewer: Yeah. And I guess too it is talking about how people are prejudiced against on the basis of their sexual orientation isn't it? Just because someone is a homosexual that they are treated differently.*
>
> *Brad: The teachers all say it is OK to be gay and all that but then it not really giving the person who is gay or bi… they are not going to come out to them.. 'cos kids are cruel.*

Interviewer: It would be a bit scary I would imagine.

Anthony: There is always at least one person.

Simon: Yeah.

Interviewer: So hopefully there would be lots of people who would actually support them….

Simon: If one of my friends was gay I wouldn't make fun of them… I don't think. Well not as much if it was like someone else who was gay…

Although Brad initially sought to clarify his position as heterosexual with his comment *"If I was like gay and I'm not but if I was…"*, he also expressed empathy and an understanding of the marginalisation of students in sexuality education who may not identify as heterosexual. He demonstrated an understanding that these students may not relate to or engage in a programme that is focused solely in a heterosexual context. Brad went on to highlighted the contradiction found in many schools that although sexuality education teachers and the sexuality education programme may advocate that it is OK to be gay, the wider school community does not reflect this. Ultimately, he understood that the school environment is not a safe place to identify as gay and that this prohibits many students from 'coming out'. This findings mirrors other studies such as those undertaken as discussed by Quinlivan (1994), that suggest that being openly gay at school is neither viewed as safe or desirable by students.

Simon's comment at the end of the conversation was full of contradiction. He began by expressing his willingness to accept homosexuality by saying he wouldn't make fun of his friend if he identified as gay, but then 'demonstrated' and reinforced his heterosexuality when he added he wouldn't make as much fun of them as he would if it was someone he didn't know. Interestingly this was right at the end of the 24 minute interview and quite likely reflects his acknowledgement, acceptance of and alignment to the dominant and heteronormative masculinity he had experienced throughout the interview. He didn't require the other boys to police him in this instance: he did it himself. In other words, Simon had renegotiated his own meaning of masculinity through this verbal exchange. Simon may have felt a strong sense of comfort and security in being part of a group, which is a phenomenon discussed in the

research of both Plummer (2001) and Tasker (2002), and was acting to conform and maintain a stance consistent with the heterosexual masculine norm of the group,

According to Measor et al. (2000), these conversations reflect the ways in which boys use aspects of school life to contribute to their constructions of gender, and more specifically masculinity. The heteronormative culture in most schools is very strong (Epstein & Johnson, 1998) and many students feel pressured to behave in stereotypical ways. It is difficult for them to take up alternative positions of masculinity and so they conform to the dominant discourse in order to 'fit in'. This notion is clearly demonstrated in the boys' conversations during the focus group interviews.

As Butler (1988), Connell (1989) and Epstein and Johnson (1998) contend, these student experiences and conversations support the assertion that schools provide a site for the production, articulation and contestation of masculinities, and consequently gender performativity. Hayward and Mac an Ghaill (1996) believe that curriculum in general provides an opportunity for boys to assert their masculinity and Hilton (2001) suggests this is particularly the case in sexuality education curriculum. The boys in this study appeared to use the sexuality education curriculum in order to assert and reinforce their masculinity through their response to content and reactions to other students. However, Simon, Anthony, Brad and Craig's behaviour also contradicted findings by Hilton (2001) who concluded that many boys assert their masculinity in sexuality education classes in a negative and disruptive fashion. None of the boys in this study could be described as negative or disruptive. Nonetheless, the observation of focus group dynamics coupled with an analysis of the dialogue in the boys' interview, has demonstrated some consistency with theories of gender conformity and performativity. There is some evidence that the boys interviewed were encouraged by their peers to conform to male stereotypic beliefs and behaviours, and that they often did, in fact, conform to and adopt these dominant masculine norms. Craig's comments about the women in music videos, Anthony's request for a "how to" class, Brad assertion that the boys in the class didn't care what the girls thought and Simon's comment that he wouldn't makes "*as much fun*" of a friend if he came out as gay as he would if it was someone he wasn't friends with, all served to support the finding

that the boys were subject to a hegemonic construction of masculinity and used the sexuality education curriculum and context to reinforce this construction. It could therefore be concluded that the boys' experience of sexuality education was one of sexuality classes as a site of gender performance and as a place where masculinity was sometimes challenged and was consistently asserted.

However, it must also be stated that on occasion during the interview the boys moved away from this traditional hegemonic masculine ideal and ventured into conversations and domains more aligned with a caring and thoughtful masculinity. I venture that this may be because the boys felt less inhibited during the focus group interviews and were therefore able to explore alternative positions. They may have felt safer to do this in the focus group interview environment for a number of reasons; perhaps because the safety guidelines including confidentiality and anonymity had been discussed and reinforced directly before the interview began or maybe they felt safer in a smaller group rather than in the class with some 20 or so other students; maybe they felt more secure because there were no girls in the focus group interview and therefore they didn't feel additional pressure to maintain and 'perform' their masculinity to females; perhaps as the interview progressed they felt more confident and safer with one another and with me. Whatever the reasons, there was evidence during the interviews that the boys were able to resist to some extent the dominant discourses of masculinity and to experience alternative ways of 'being a boy'.

5:1:2 Being a 'Girl'

More implicit but still evident in the focus group interview, was the construction of femininity. Without exception the girls distanced themselves from the boys in their classes and with what they regarded as the boys' undesirable and immature behaviour. The girls, particularly Nadine and Kylie in Class B, positioned themselves as more mature, responsible and sensible than the boys. They were vocal in their criticism of the boys and found them to be irritating to a large degree. Throughout the interview, Nadine and Kylie both displayed their role as the 'responsible girl'. They consistently demonstrated their perceived superiority and maturity to the boys during the interview as can be seen in the following conversation

Kylie: The boys can be a bit silly and make dumb comments. Like if someone mentions "periods" they go "ewwwhh" and the girls are just like "Oh whatever".

Nadine: Yeah and they are more distracted and immature but what can you expect from Year 10 boys?

Kylie: Yeah my brother reckons they are two years behind girls in the brain. And at the end of the day if they get a woman pregnant they can just leave.

Nadine: Yeah they don't have to deal with it.

It is obvious from this conversation that Nadine and Kylie felt the boys did not take sexuality education as seriously as the girls, and that perhaps it was because they felt the stakes were not as high for the boys as it was for the girls. As females they indicated their belief that in the event of an unplanned pregnancy, for example, the ultimate responsibility and cost was to them as women, and that males had a choice regarding their involvement and commitment. This belief perhaps contributes to Nadine and Kylie's interpretation of the boys' behaviour in class as being less invested, less committed and less serious than theirs.

It is tempting to create links between the girls' responses and the 'sexuality as victimisation' discourse, as discussed by Fine (1988) when considering Nadine and Kylie's attitude towards the boys. Fine (1988) portrays males as potential predators and females as victims and is focused on the female need to defend herself from being victimised or 'used'. It is characterised by activities such as 'saying no', discussing the social and emotional risks of sexual intimacy and listing the possible diseases associated with sexual intimacy (Fine, 1988), all of which were alluded to in some capacity in this sexuality education unit and discussed by the girls from Class B. It could be concluded that the girls positioning of themselves as responsible and risk-averse was largely reflective of this discourse and could have been somewhat attributable to their exposure to current and past programmes aligned to this approach. It is clear elements of this discourse were being implemented to some extent in this sexuality education unit and the student comments reflected this. An example of this was when Nadine and Kylie were asked what they learned in their sexuality education programme. They replied

Kylie: Like the consequences of having sex. Like pregnancy and STIs and all that.

Nadine: And people like thinking it is going to be real brilliant but it's not actually and how many people regret it afterwards.

The Class B girls' responses suggested there was a significant emphasis on danger, risk and the negative consequences of sexual intimacy, such as STI transmission, unplanned pregnancy, being pressured into sex and the judgement of others in the sexuality education unit. This alignment with a 'sexuality as victimisation' discourse may have in turn influenced the way in which the girls interacted and perceived the boys in the classroom, thereby exacerbating the 'us and them' dynamic that appeared to be evident. However, the girls acknowledged the realities of teenage sexual behaviour in the teaching of contraception and influences of sexual behaviour in the programme. This suggests that although it was emphasised strongly, a 'sexuality as victimisation' discourse was not the only focus of their sexuality education programme.

It is illuminating to consider the girls' perceptions of the boys in their class in view of what I saw occurring in the classroom during observations. Admittedly only one formal observation was made of Class B (although I was in each class on four separate occasions), however the conclusion I drew from my limited observations, was that the boys were engaged and committed to the classroom activities. I noted they were significantly more vocal than girls during whole class discussions and accounted for more than two thirds of the responses even though the gender split was close to 50/50. The majority of girls in both classrooms were very quiet and in many instances, any contribution from them was prompted by the teacher. During group work many of the girls also appeared to be slightly detached with the boys tending to dominate conversations and physical tasks such as writing.

Perhaps the girls' apparent lack of involvement in the classes, as perceived by both the boys and myself, may connect with Fine's (1988) discourse of 'individual morality' in which girls are the 'gatekeepers' of their sexuality and to be restrained in their approach to all things sexual. Aligning with traditional hegemonic notions of femininity, perhaps the girls in these classes were driven by a desire not to appear 'too

keen' on the 'whole sex thing' in front of the boys and therefore risk being labelled a 'slut' by both the boys and the other girls. This conceptualisation of femininity is corroborated by Hird and Jackson's (2001) research which concluded that young women have to negotiate complex and contradictory discourses that position them either as 'sluts' or 'angels'. In contrast to this, during the interview the girls indicated they sought out explicit sexual information from such places as magazines. This contradiction appeared to demonstrate the different ways in which the girls operated in different contexts. Perhaps in their friendship groups and outside the classroom, they felt less inhibited and more empowered to engage with sexual matters, while in the classroom they felt too vulnerable and too self-conscious. This was interesting too, when reflecting on the alternative sources of sexuality information disclosed by each of the genders. The boys said they got much of their information from their peers but not one girl said the same. I also noticed the lack of discussion around explicit sex topics in comparison to what I knew the boys discussed (often in front of the girls). There was an exchange between the girls in Class A during the interview that provided an illuminating moment and may also reinforce this construct of femininity

> *Interviewer: So what do you think would help, what could be done to make it more comfortable do you think?*
>
> *Danni: Probably like one on one with the teacher.*
>
> *Megan: I think if there was only girls in the classroom.*
>
> *Jess: Yeah (ind)*
>
> *Interviewer: OK so the idea of having some classes that are just boys' classes and just girls' classes might help?*
>
> *Megan and Jess: Yeah.*
>
> *Danni: Mmmmm.*
>
> *Interviewer: Ok so you think that would help? Because I have noticed, it has been interesting when I have been in looking that a lot of the comments are being made by boys and the girls are very quiet.*
>
> (All laughing)
>
> *Jess: Except for one of them!*

My statement about the perceived difference I saw between the girls and the boys in the classroom elicited an interesting comment from Jess, who indicated that she felt there was one girl in the class who was more actively involved that the other girls. The tone of this comment along with other non-verbal cues such as her facial expression, led me to believe that Jess was expressing her disapproval of the way in which this girl engaged and behaved in the classroom and this may have been because she was appearing 'too keen' Unfortunately I did not ask Jess to elaborate on this comment so can only speculate on this interpretation. If my interpretation of this comment is accurate, it highlights issues raised by Allen (2003), in which she discusses dominant discourses of female sexuality that conceptualise women as sexually passive and disinterested in all things sexual. Jess's comment tends to align itself with this traditional notion and conceptualisation of female sexuality and also her recognition and acknowledgement of the other student's deviation from this social norm. Connections can also be made to Jess's position and Butler's (1988) previously discussed theories about gender performativity. Jess's comment demonstrates her alignment to a particular construct of femininity, that of the passive female who does not want to appear too interested in sexual matters, and this is demonstrated by her apparent judgement and disapproval of the 'keen' girl in her sexuality education classes.

In light of the focus group interviews and the classroom observations it could be concluded that although it may have been a little more implicit, gender performativity was as much a factor for the girls as it was for the boys. The girls tended to perform in the traditional feminine gender roles discussed by Allen (2003) and Fine (1988) and they appear to be influenced by constructions of female sexuality that were largely passive and risk-focused. Any deviation from this was recognised and acknowledged by the other students.

5:2 Emotional Safety in the Sexuality Education Classroom

A key issue that revealed itself in many ways in the research process and across themes was the significance of emotional safety within the sexuality education classroom. While some students explicitly expressed their feelings of unease and

discomfort, other students were less obvious in their disclosure and tended to talk about it in the context of their observations of other students. The issues of emotional safety often seemed to align itself according to gender, with the girls calling for separate classes from boys. Megan, Danni and Jess from Class A were in favour of single sex classes claiming they felt *"unsafe"* and "*scared"* about being in a sexuality education class with boys. When questioned further, two of the boys also demonstrated unease with having girls present in the classroom.

Megan, Danni and Jess from Class A also discussed their fears about a lack of confidentiality and trust with the possibility that their classroom comments could be discussed and shared by classmates to others outside the classroom. Interestingly, these comments were not tagged to a particular gender allowing the conclusion to be drawn that their concern was with the potential indiscretion of either the boys or girls in the class. These fears triggered a discussion about having an anonymous question box in the classroom and were echoed by the other girls from Class B. The girls obviously had questions they wanted answers to, but given the classroom climate as they perceived it, chose not to voice them in front of the other students. The girls therefore felt a question box would potentially provide a safe and anonymous way for them to raise an issue they were curious about. The students' desire to establish and utilise a question box indicates they had questions they wanted answered, but did not feel comfortable raising them during normal classroom interactions. Therefore these questions were potentially going unasked and unanswered.

The students may also be influenced by the social relationships within this class and that continued away from the sexuality education classroom, and are therefore beyond the control of either Miss A or Miss B. It is my understanding that these students experienced other core subjects as a class group, and therefore spent a significant period of time with one another during a typical school week. The dynamics of these two classes of students were subject to many different factors, different teachers, different subjects and the sexuality education classroom was only one context in which they were together as a class. It is also possible that the timing of classes was also influencing the emotional safety of students in the class. The fact that the class

only met once per week to engage in health education, and therefore sexuality education, may have been influential.

The relationship the teacher had with the class was a topic discussed either explicitly or implicitly by all three of the groups at some stage in their interviews. The students indicated they felt the way the teacher interacted with students influenced students' emotional safety in the sexuality education classroom. Anthony from Class B felt the relationship with the teacher had an influence on how comfortable students felt, while Jess from Class A said it was important that the teacher who was teaching the class got on well with the students and that this would enable students to open up to the teacher. The girls from Class B appeared to have a good connection with Miss B and enjoyed the way in which she taught the class saying she made them feel involved and valued, and indicated they felt emotionally safe in her classroom. In contrast, the boys from Class B seemed to demonstrate a lack of connection with Miss B. The reason for this lack of connection can only be speculated, but the boys commented that unlike their teacher last year, Miss A, they didn't feel they could tell Miss B anything, she didn't do as many practical activities and wasn't as happy. Whatever the reason for this lack of connection, it may have had an influenced their levels of emotional safety within the classroom and may also relate to their conversation about 'other students' in the class they felt were uncomfortable learning about sexuality education.

The girls from Class A who appeared to be the most affected and the most concerned with their emotional safety in sexuality education, indicated their concerns were more related to the other students than with Miss A. This was demonstrated when I asked the girls what could be done to make them feel more comfortable, Danni suggested a "one on one with the teacher". Given the other girls' positive comments about Miss A, this would tend to indicate that the girls felt safe in their connection with Miss A and therefore, it was factors relating to other students that were making them feel, at times, uneasy and anxious in the sexuality education classroom. The feelings of anxiety and discomfort expressed by the girls in Class A contrasts with the findings of Tasker (2002), whose students expressed feelings of trust, acceptance and belonging in their sexuality education programme. According to Tasker (2002), the teacher established "an environment of emotional safety, an atmosphere of trust and

confidentiality subsequently freeing students from inhibitions and anxieties" (p. 170) and consequently the students indicated they felt safe and comfortable in that classroom. The students in my study, particularly the girls from Class A, indicated at times they experienced frustration, a sense of vulnerability, anxiety and discomfort in their sexuality education classroom. In many instances, this lack of emotional safety in this classroom tended to be directed at the boys in the class. The interactions between the boys and the girls in both classes appeared to be a significant factor on student feelings of emotional safety, and were an integral part of their experience of sexuality education classes.

Both groups from Class B made comments relating to other students who were reluctant to contribute during sexuality education. Anthony and Brad said they had noticed other students in the class who they felt were uncomfortable about participating in sexuality education. Both boys felt students should have a choice about whether they wanted to stay in classes or not. The fact that both Brad and Anthony openly discussed their concerns about the discomfort of others in their class was interesting. They were aware of the feelings of others and also recognised that for some students, sexuality education could be overwhelming and a sensitive issue. Interestingly, the boys then went onto discuss that they themselves were very open about sexuality and they did not care what others thought about them during classes. It appeared as though they were distancing themselves from the less comfortable students they had just been talking about. It is interesting to note that the girls from Class A discussed their own concerns and anxieties about sexuality education classes, but the boys from Class B talked about them in relation to what other people might feel.

Overall, in terms of emotional safety, the students indicated there were some issues in this classroom that were affecting their participation in their sexuality education classroom. Most of the students appeared to be comfortable with the nature of the subject itself and with their exposure to it in the school setting, but some had anxieties in relation to other students. The girls in Class A were quite concerned about levels of confidentiality and also about the boys in their class. From this perspective, it is unfortunate that no boys were interviewed from Class A, as this would have provided

additional perspectives. The girls from Class B were less concerned about the boys from an emotional safety perspective and were instead more frustrated with what they regarded as their "*immature*" and "*silly*" behaviour. The boys from Class B were somewhat more contradictory in their discussions around emotional safety in the classroom. There was some indication that they were uncomfortable at times with girls being present in the class, but on the other hand they felt they were more open than the girls during classes and didn't care what the girls thought so felt they could say anything. Two of the three groups requested the regular use of an anonymous question box to ensure questions that they did not want to openly ask could be addressed and answered by the teacher.

All these findings illustrate that different students experience and perceive the same situation in different ways and the issue of emotional safety in the sexuality education classroom is highly complex and subject to many influences, some beyond the control of the classroom teacher.

5:3 Discourses of Sexuality Education

Analysis suggests that students experience sexuality education as multiple discourses and the analysis of this sexuality education programme through a discourse lens provides insight into the 'hidden curriculum', and the messages and meaning students attached to the content being taught.

When asked what they had learnt thus far, student responses were overwhelmingly related to risk. Students had learned how to protect themselves in sexual relationships, both physically and emotionally including how to say 'no' and other assertiveness strategies, about contraception and STIs, and the negative consequences of teenage pregnancy. The students also said they had learned about healthy and unhealthy relationships and influences on teenage sexual behaviour. Given this focus I concluded that the unit of work up to that point had been largely focused on risk and consequences of sexual activity, and the avoidance and minimisation of those risks. It is also possible that past programmes may also have shared this focus. This focus reflects the thoughts of sexuality education theorists and researchers (see Fine, 1988; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Morris, 1994; Tolman, 1999; Whatley, 1994) who claim that

many sexuality education programmes are saturated with risk, fear- and morality-based messages.

A programme of work largely focused on a traditional 'sexuality as victimisation' discourse may serve to reinforce both traditional hegemonic notions of femininity and masculinity, and the maintenance of a heteronormative classroom culture. This may also contribute to the student construction and understanding of gender within the sexuality education context and classroom. Tasker (2002) maintains that such a programme may prohibit students from critically examining the ways in which gender and sexuality are socially constructed via the complex interplay between socio-political cultural and environmental factors.

This victim-focused discourse may also contribute to the issues of emotional safety identified by the students and to the apparent division between the genders. It may too, be exacerbating the 'us and them' dynamic in the classroom as described by the students, and also apparent in the focus group interviews. Some students may not have felt fully comfortable and safe in the classes, which may have precluded them from being able to take up alternative positions and to challenge these dominant discourses and gender expectations. In instances where students demonstrated disparity or deviation away from the expected norm, it was commented and/or policed by the other students.

The student responses during the interviews also indicated that they were experiencing a programme focused on the technicalities of sexuality and sexual activity, that was largely devoid of desire and pleasure. This interpretation draws on the thoughts of researchers such as Allen (2001, 2004, 2006b, 2008a; 2008b), Elliot et al (1998) and Fine (1988) who maintain that many sexuality education programmes are delivered to students via a de-eroticised approach in which pleasure and desire are essentially invisible. Between the boys' request for a *"how to"* class and admissions from both the boys and girls that they seek out alternative sources of information in order to access explicit detail about sex and sexuality it would seem as though there are some student needs that the sexuality education classes are not meeting. They experienced and expressed mixed satisfaction with programme content and focus.

The student responses in this study indicate their sexuality education programme was largely focused on the risks and technicalities of sexuality and sexual activity. Discourses of 'risk' and 'technicalities' sexuality education significantly influence what content is taught to students and they way in which it is taught, and are an integral part of the students' experiences of sexuality education. This approach and programme focus may have contributed to the reinforcement and maintenance of hegemonic constructs within the classroom. Student comments indicate that, to some extent, this approach was not meeting the needs of some students to access explicit information about sex and sexuality.

5:4 Summary

The significance of both gender relations and emotional safety in these sexuality education classrooms was evident and appeared to be strongly interrelated. The discussion of the findings in relation to these themes indicated that gender relations and feelings of emotional safety strongly influenced the way in which the students' participated, perceived and experienced their classes. Most of the student participants in this study demonstrated they were influenced by traditional hegemonic gender roles and to some extent experienced a heteronormative classroom culture.

Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusions

Chapter Six outlines the key findings of this study and their implications for practice. The strengths and limitations of the research process will be identified and discussed, as will questions for further research. I will also discuss what I learnt as a beginning researcher throughout the research process, particularly in relation to the use of focus group interviews as a data-gathering tool.

6:1 Student Voices in Sexuality Education

The purpose of this research study was to hear the 'voices' of nine Year 10 students from two classes by investigating their experiences of their sexuality education programme in a co-educational secondary school. Student perceptions and experience of sexuality education were explored, analysed and conclusions have been drawn about the way in which these students experienced and made sense of the programme they were exposed to.

6:1:1 Student Experience of Sexuality Education

In this study, the student participants' experience of a sexuality education programme can be described in relation to the student experience of content, pedagogy and classroom organisation, classroom relationships and their experience of sexuality and sexuality education outside the classroom. The students' experience of their sexuality education classes were generally positive with emphasis on their enjoyment of active and practical learning activities. This finding is consistent with similar findings by Allen (2005), Hilton (2001, 2003) and Tasker (2002). The students identified their sexuality education needs as being strongly focused on risk minimisation and avoidance, and given their comments, a conclusion can be drawn that the programme was largely addressing these perceived needs. However, students also indicated that there were topics they still wanted to address and explore during the sexuality education unit and they hoped their teacher would cover these aspects. These included more information about particular contraceptive options and broader aspects of sexuality education such as the critical analysis of wider societal influences on sexuality and relationships. Students made constructive suggestions for improvement

to both the sexuality education programme and the classroom itself. These suggestions were often strongly related to issues associated with the gender dynamics within the classroom and the emotional safety of students. Gender relations and issues of emotional safety were revealed to be key influences and defining features of students' experiences of their sexuality education programme.

According to the data analysis, gender issues in these sexuality education classrooms were significant. Many of the issues raised in this research study related to the dynamics between the boys and the girls and indicated the students were subject to and acted to sustain traditional constructs of masculinity and femininity, and also of a heteronormative culture. The student comments and conversations during the interviews showed that the students generally aligned themselves with these hegemonic constructs and that the boys in particular, often conformed to a established heteronormative culture such as that discussed by Epstein and Johnson (1998), Mac an Ghaill (1996), Nairn and Smith (2003), Quinlivan, (2006) and Tasker, (2002). Student experienced processes of heteronormative conformity while at the same time being invited to challenge heteronormative ideas in the programme content.

Emotional safety in the classroom was discussed in some form or another by all three of the focus groups. Research relating broadly to classroom climate indicates that emotional safety is an important factor in the classroom and is highly influential over student learning (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Buston & Wight, 2004; Hargreaves, 2001; Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, 1996; Harvey and Evans, 2003; Hattie, 2003; Noddings, 1992; Tasker, 2002). Given the nature of the subject, it is hardly surprising that emotional safety was such a feature in this study. Students indicated they had issues with other students in the classroom in terms of trust and confidentiality, and that this affected their levels of participation. From the perspective of students, it also appeared the ways in which the teacher interacted with the class was also a factor in determining the climate of each of the sexuality education classrooms. Student comments about teacher qualities demonstrated their desire to be taught sexuality education by someone who was open and relaxed in their approach, had a sense of humour and consequently the ability to make the students feel comfortable during

classes and is consistent with the other research studies (Allen, 2005; Buston & Wight, 2004; Hilton, 2003; Tasker, 2002).

6:2 Implications for Practice

The implications for practice are outlined below. Initially, implications related to programme organisation and pedagogical practices are addressed, followed by the teaching implications in regard to gender, emotional safety and discourses of sexuality education. These implications relate to the particular context of the research and to sexuality education programmes and classes more broadly, where these might be organised and focused in similar ways to that described in this study.

6:2:1 Programme Organisation and Pedagogy

The students in this study both desired and required their sexuality education to be more frequent than one period per week and wanted the time devoted to it to be efficiently and effectively utilised. They expressed their frustration with the repetition of content they felt occurred week to week and also between year levels mirroring the findings of other New Zealand based research studies (Abel & Fitzgerald, 2006; Allen, 2005; Elliot et al, 1998).

Issues relating to repetition of content highlight the very real challenge and complexities faced by sexuality education teachers in ensuring classes are both pitched and paced in order to address the needs of all students. Any given class will be diverse in regard to culture, experience, knowledge, awareness and readiness for sexuality education information. It is also difficult for teachers to maintain momentum when classes only occur once each week, as was the case in this research setting. Some students may have difficulty 'connnecting' with what was covered in the previous session so may need reminding, while other students become frustrated because they would rather be learning new information. If the sexuality education class occurs only once per week careful consideration must be given to the placement of that one session to provide the greatest benefit to the students. For example, it might be preferable that the class be scheduled midweek and early in the day, so as to minimise the number of days lost to long weekend, and to have students engaged in thoughtful discussion and active participation when they are fresh and not tired at the

end of the day. In order to address issues of repetition, a variety of meaningful contexts can be utilised. Sexuality education lends itself to re-visiting information, skills and concepts in view of the students' increasing social, emotional and physical maturity, and their ongoing life experiences. A topic that may have been covered in Year 9 but not resonated, may become extremely meaningful for the same student in Year 10. In order to ensure material is not regarded as boring and/or repetitive for students, teachers need to ensure the contexts are changed to encourage and facilitate student engagement.

Student frustration at what they saw as unnecessary repetition or excessive recapping of ideas and information in sexuality education classes also draws attention to the importance and value of teachers spending time to ascertain students' prior knowledge and experience of sexuality education before embarking on a unit, as well as gathering ongoing information about student learning. The drawing of this implication from this study reflects the opinions of other sexuality education researchers (Abel & Fitzgerald, 2006; Aggleton & Campbell, 2000; Fine, 1988; Tasker, 2005). When this information is obtained, it can be combined with other identified student needs, to support a programme of work that is effective, efficient, meaningful and valuable for the vast majority, if not all students. Given that no mention was made of a pre-test by either the teachers or the students, and no reference is made to one in the unit plan, one could assume that there was no planned attempt to gather information to determine student prior knowledge and/or their current sexuality education needs. This information could have been gathered by way of a short questionnaire given to individual students prior to the start of the unit, which could then be analysed by the teacher to determine both individual and collective needs within the classes.

Alternatively, teachers could also consider using a cooperative learning process such as a postbox activity, in which questions designed to explore student's existing knowledge and perceived needs are posed and are then analysed, summarised and reported back to the entire class by the students themselves. This approach aligns with the thoughts of Allen (2005), who suggests that students should be involved in the designing and evaluation of sexuality education programmes. The girls' requests for

an anonymous question box to be regularly used is another way teachers could gather ongoing information about student learning as the sexuality education unit progressed.

The students in this study showed genuine enjoyment and interest in exploring and critically analysing broader aspects of sexuality education such as social media. This demonstrates the value and importance of undertaking activities in sexuality education that enable students to share their ideas and develop critical thinking skills in meaningful contexts. Students recognised contradictions between what they were being taught in their sexuality programme and what they saw in terms of sex and relationships in the media, such as sex scenes on TV and in movies with a total absence of contraception, the acceptance of male promiscuity, double standards between genders in terms of promiscuity, the provocativeness of women and misleading representations of sexual activity and relationships. It would be interesting to investigate further the disparity between reality and images portrayed in media from students' perspectives and to consider if students believe these sources in any way impact on their attitudes and behaviours or those of other teenagers. This critical thinking approach could also be used to explore and challenge hegemonic constructions of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity creating a multi-layered level of analysis within the classroom.

6:2:2 Fostering Emotional Safety and Positive Relationships in Sexuality Education

Given that emotional safety appeared to be such a critical factor in these sexuality education classrooms, it is important that safety guidelines are created and maintained throughout the programme and that teaching approaches are used that facilitate positive and meaningful relationships within the classroom, between the students and also between the teacher and students. Previously discussed research by Hargreaves (2001) has highlighted that in order to establish meaningful relationships and a safe and functional emotional environment within the classroom, frequent and regular contact is required between classroom teachers and their students and also between the students themselves. This may also give weight to a previous finding that meeting only once a week in a sexuality education context is not sufficient in order to create an

emotionally safe atmosphere, particularly in light of the sensitive and personal nature of the subject area itself.

In view of the emotional safety issues and related gender dynamics raised by the students in this study, the concept of separate classes for boys and girls may have been beneficial for these students. Various research studies in sexuality education programmes have reported great variety in students' ideas about the gender composition of their classes (Allen, 2005; Byers, et al, 2003; Hilton, 2003; Measor et al., 2000; Newby, et al., 2012; Tasker, 2002). For example, Tasker (2002) found that it was not necessary to separate genders in sexuality education in order to create an emotionally safe classroom environment. Her research identified an initial desire among a co-educational class for separate gendered classes, however once the teacher implemented a pedagogical programme based on social-constructivist approaches designed to create a safe and supportive classroom environment, the students were more than happy to remain in the same class. In contrast, Newby et al. (2012) and Hilton (2003) established that many students would prefer single sex classes. Interestingly, when outlining their preference for single sex classes, the boys in Hilton's (2003) study acknowledged it was better practice in sexuality education to have both sexes present during classes. Measor et al. (2000) suggests that sexuality education programmes could initially be delivered in single sex classes and then progress to involved mixed gender groups. It must be noted however, that organising sexuality education classes so they are single sex would not necessarily guarantee greater emotional safety. Single sex classes may also contain dominant groups who could influence the emotional safety of other students, and therefore affect the overall classroom climate.

Tasker's (2002) study also demonstrated that the successful implementation of a social constructivist approach and the resultant enhancement of the classroom climate assisted in facilitating challenges to traditional hegemonic constructs, resulting in attitudinal changes and in students being able to consider and take on alternative positions to dominant gender stereotypes. Therefore, male and female students do not need to be separated in order to create and maintain an emotionally safe classroom environment or to create a climate in which traditional hegemonic constructions can

be challenged in sexuality education. Whatever the nature of classes (mixed or single sex), the findings of this study and the broader literature suggest that teachers' pedagogical practice is an important factor in constructing emotionally safe environments in sexuality education classrooms.

Another finding of this study is that the physical space in which the programme was delivered has influenced the teaching programme. The classroom space needs to be conducive to the effective and consistent implementation of social-constructive teaching approaches, and that this approach if consistently and successfully used, this may promote and support the creation of an emotionally safe classroom environment. Lusk (1999) suggests that a carpeted room with plenty of space for students to move around is essential for high quality and effective sexuality education and argues that it is difficult to effectively implement student-centred, cooperative learning strategies in a room full of desks and chairs, as was the physical classroom arrangement in this study. She advocates for an open space in which chairs can be arranged into a horseshoe shape and then rearranged during group work (Lusk, 1999).

Student comments relating to their reluctance to access the supplementary material available to them in the classroom were related to emotional safety and may also be addressed by the implementation of social constructivist activities that involved students regularly moving around the room, therefore giving them a chance to obtain material without the entire class seeing them. Other solutions could be the relocation of the display unit to the side of the room on which the students enter and exit, so they could help themselves on the way out the door at the end of lessons or locating the display unit outside the classroom in a common area that is not locked and that students are able to access at any time during the school day. Perhaps teachers could give the material out to all students during class and the students could then decide if they want to make use of it or not. Any of these options could ensure that the students' are able to access to this resource. The particular location of the display unit meant that accessing supplementary material was prohibitive for most students with the exception of those who were seated right next to it during classes and represented a lost opportunity to reinforce classroom learning. Allen (2005) maintains that the provision of additional pamphlets and booklets that can be taken home in order to

learn about sexuality in private and therefore provide students with an opportunity to consolidate information learned at school, improves the effectiveness of sexuality education programmes.

Emotional safety and the creation of positive relationships in the sexuality education classroom is a complex and challenging issue. It is linked to gender relations in the classroom. If students are to benefit fully from their participation in classes and develop healthy and positive sexual attitudes, the effective implementation of processes and practices that will facilitate and encourage an emotionally safe classroom climate and that challenge hegemonic constructs of masculinity and femininity need to be addressed. Students in this study showed conformity to and self-policing of these norms, while at the same time individuals were conscious of gender stereotypes and sensitively reflected on these. As other studies have demonstrated, it would appear the influence of a positive classroom environment is a significant factor on student levels of engagement and learning outcomes in the sexuality education classroom (Buston & Wight, 2004; Hattie, 2003; Tasker, 2002; Thompson & Wheeler, 2008).

6:2:3 Discourses of Sexuality Education

The analysis of student data about what they had learned during their sexuality education programme and the planned curriculum as provided by the teachers, showed that to a large degree the unit of work had a focus aligned with a discourse of victimsation as described by Fine (1988). According to a number of theorists, sexuality education programmes have historically often been underpinned by deficit discourses and therefore been risk-focused in their approach (Fine, 1988; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Morris, 1994; Sears, 1992; Tolman, 1999; Whatley, 1994). This is likely to be partly attributable to public health sector goals pre-occupied with attempting to reduce unplanned pregnancy and rates of STI transmission (Tasker, 2002, 2004b) and may also be influenced by the desire of schools to remain uncontroversial in their approach to sexuality education (Allen, 2006b; Fine, 1988) and to teacher comfort levels (Elliot et al, 1998). Sexuality education as outlined in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) has been

repositioned to a strength-based and wellness paradigm and that classrooms are expected to reflect this shift. Programmes that continue to be focused on deficit approaches may not contribute to the development of positive and responsible sexual attitudes among young people as intended by the current curriculum documents.

Both Fine (1988) and Sears (1992) argue that risk-focused approaches do nothing to develop healthy sexual attitudes and responsible sexual behaviours in adolescents. Fine also suggests when a discourse such as 'sexuality as victimisation' is utilised, it results in the suppression of female desire, in girls and women being positioned as vulnerable and potential victims, and in privileged heterosexuality. Sexuality education classrooms in which this discourse operates reinforce and enhance traditional hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity and heteronormativity. Fine (1988) maintains that students must be acknowledged as sexual beings and that the implementation of a genuine discourse of desire would release female students, in particular, from positions of traditional, hegemonic passivity and receptivity and may enable them to re-position as sexual negotiators and initiators.

The analysis of student experience in this study supports the findings from literature about the typically de-eroticised nature of sexuality education programmes (see Allen, 2001, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a; 2008b; Elliot et al, 1998; Fine, 1988). From student perspectives, the programme is they experienced is lacking in explicit and detailed sexual information they would like to know about and that they are attempting to access this information from other sources. All the students showed conformity to heternormative idelas, and it appears that both the content and predominant risk-focused discourses may be contributing to this phenomenon. It appears, from the student descriptions of their experience, that a significant proportion of this programme had been designed in a way that may have de-sexualised the content and reinforced traditional gender roles such as female passivity and male aggressiveness, as well as privileging heterosexuality above all other sexual orientations.

In light of the experiences of students in this study, as communicated by them, I contend that the utilisation of a positive sexuality discourse such as a discourse of desire, along with the creation and maintenance of safety guidelines and the effective

implementation of social constructivist pedagogy may go some way to addressing issues of emotional safety for these students in their sexuality education classes. I recognise that achieving high levels of emotional safety for all students may be difficult, in light of the other significant factors outside the classroom that will influence them and their ideas about sex, sexuality and sexuality education. However, it remains a desirable goal.

The creation of a safe and functional sexuality education classroom would also serve to facilitate and promote the development of positive sexual attitudes among students by providing them with a setting in which their sexual needs, questions and concerns can be raised and hopefully met.

6:3 Strengths, Limitations and Learning From the Study

As with any research study there were strengths and limitations within and throughout the process. Initially the strengths of the study will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the limitations. The strengths and limitations of the focus group interviews will be discussed separately.

6:3:1 Strengths of the Study

The key strength of this research study is the strong and consistent presence of student voice throughout the process. From the outset it was crucial to the aims and purpose of this study that student ideas remained central in every aspect of the research process. The student interviews provided the participants with an opportunity to share in their own words, their perspectives and experiences of their sexuality education classes and they provided me with a 'ringside seat' to watch them construct, reconstruct and negotiate meaning for themselves. I observed that the students were keen to participate in discussions and expressed their ideas in a relaxed fashion throughout the interviews. The focus group conversations in which the students engaged, were rich, detailed and provided me with significant data to analyse and to therefore gain insight into the way in which students were experiencing and making sense of their sexuality education classes.

I went to great lengths to ensure the students understood issues relating to confidentiality and anonymity and to create an environment that was relaxed and friendly. Given their demeanour, I believe the students felt safe and comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions during the focus group interviews. The interviews took place in the familiar context of their sexuality education classroom and I am certain the food provided for them to snack on during the interviews added to the informal and relaxed atmosphere. It was as though we were having a casual lunchtime conversation. The students appeared to trust me and seemed confident of their personal and collective safety. The research design and interview protocols supported this level of student participation and I believe resulted in useful and meaningful student data.

Another strength of this study was the fact that the participating students were aged 14-15 years old. In view of both international and New Zealand based research this was unusual. Most other research studies that focused on exploring the experiences and reactions of students to their sexuality education, have involved participants who were over the age of 16 and therefore beyond compulsory school-based sexuality education. This study therefore, provided insight into the experiences of junior secondary school students while they participated in their last year of compulsory sexuality education classes. This may be important in light of sexual health research such as the *Youth 2000* (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003) and *Youth '07* (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2008), which demonstrated the significant increase in those becoming sexually active between the ages of 14 years and 15 years of age.

6:3:2 Limitations of the Study

Time was a significant limiting factor in this research study. Ideally it would have been desirable to have engaged in observations and interviews over an extended time period and it would have been particularly useful to have undertaken a second focus group interview at the conclusion of the sexuality education unit. However, this was not possible because the programme started later than was originally intended and was then interrupted for a variety of reasons.

Only nine students participated in this research study. It would have been useful to have interviewed more students and to therefore have gathered feedback from a greater number of students. This may have provided a broader picture student experience of the sexuality education programme across both classes. Given that participation in the interviews was voluntary, it could be also concluded that the students who chose to participate in the interviews were those who were more comfortable with and enthusiastic about sexuality education, and who were consequently keen and confident to share their ideas and experiences. With one or two exceptions, the students in the interviews were also those students whom I observed were seen to be the most vocal and engaged during both the formal and informal classroom observations.

The main data collection method was the focus group interviews and these were supported by informal and formal classroom observations. Two written questionnaires were also given to students, one at the start of the unit to all students and the other at the end of the unit given only to those students who participated in the interview. During the data analysis phase, I decided that the student responses to these questionnaires did not add anything new to the interview data, so consequently these were not directly used in the analysis process. However, they were used to provide context and to corroborate some findings. It could be argued that not making greater use of this data may have compromised the data triangulation procedure of this study. However, I concluded that the interviews themselves had provided significant, rich and meaningful data with which to work, and the direct addition of material from these questionnaires was unnecessary. Both the informal conversations I had with the teachers throughout the research process and the classroom observations (both formal and informal), supported and reinforced many of the findings that emerged from the analysis of the student interviews, and therefore contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the data and the research study as a whole.

Not withstanding these limitations, the feasibility of these actions must be considered in light of the parameters and practicalities of a Masters thesis. This thesis was a stand-alone study conducted by a solo researcher. It was and needs to be viewed as a unique case and as an exploratory study relating to students' experiences of a

sexuality education programme in a specific context, and which might present implications relating to other similar classroom contexts.

6:3:3 Learning About Focus Group Interviews

As a novice researcher I learned a significant amount relating to focus group interviewing as a research tool. The focus group interviews in this study were challenging and at times daunting, both in terms of implementation and analysis. I continually asked myself throughout the data analysis process, were the focus group interviews an effective way to elicit meaningful student responses about their experiences of the sexuality education programme? I questioned whether the student responses were authentic or if they were being influenced by the responses and reactions of others in the focus group. If the students had been interviewed individually, would they have responded in the same way? In the boys' interview, in particular, there were instances when they appeared to contradict themselves. I wonder whether they were simply renegotiating meaning for themselves as the interview progressed or whether they were conforming to the dominant discourse prevalent in the interview or whether they were doing both.

This issue of student authenticity was one that initially preoccupied me. I was concerned that the students would not be entirely truthful and honest in their responses to my questions for a variety of reasons and could be influenced by other group members to respond in certain ways. This has been discussed by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) who suggest that group discussions can sometimes lead to a superficial group consensus in which some members defer to those who are most outspoken. The students may have felt inhibited during the group interview and may have remained silent due to the presence of other students when discussing particular topics. In the case of the boys' interview, in particular, the boy whom I perceived as the most dominant was not the most outspoken. In fact he probably said the least in the interview of all four boys. During the data analysis phase, I identified him as the marker for masculinity in the group primarily because when he spoke he generally had immediate and significant impact on the direction and tone of the conversation. He consistently policed the construction of masculinity throughout the interview and examples of this have been analysed and discussed in previous chapters. So in effect,

my fears appeared to have been realised. The boys' were influencing one another's ideas and opinions during the interview.

It is also possible that the gender and the perceived 'authority' of the researcher may have impacted on the boys' reactions to the questions being asked and to the discussions undertaken. As the data analysis process progressed, I came to recognise that these interactions and relationships were giving me rich data regarding the constructions of masculinity for these boys. Essentially they were 'performing' the construction of their gender right in front of my eyes and therefore reinforcing my belief that gender is largely socially constructed and is something that is continually negotiated and understood through daily interactions. The boys' interactions clearly demonstrated that gender may be performed differently in different situations and in particular contexts. The focus group interviews provided a setting in which these constructions and negotiations were highly visible. If these things did occur they were part of the sexuality education experience of these students and were therefore part of the research. Instead of undermining the study, these phenomena provided further insight into student reality, both in terms of the dynamics between the students and also into their personal experiences of sexuality education in these classrooms. The conclusion I drew as the analysis process unfolded was that the focus group interviews were a social phenomenon in their own right. They provided an opportunity for me to observe groups of adolescents interacting with one another, the process of making sense of their experiences, and the construction and negotiation of individual and collective understandings about different issues and contexts.

The gendered nature of the focus group interviews was also an interesting phenomenon in this research study. The groups were originally intended and organised to be of mixed genders, but the students themselves, whether consciously or not, engineered it so they became single sexed. This may also be considered as a limitation of the study, yet may also have been 'deliberate' on behalf of the students and was perhaps reflective of the emotional classroom environment and representative of the apparent gender differences evident in the student comments. The girls in particular, had strongly indicated their concerns about the emotional safety in the classroom and that this was associated with gender relations and dynamics, so it

would not be surprising if they did not want to participate in focus group interviews with the boys. In hindsight, it would have been desirable to have interviewed boys from both the sexuality education classes. Unfortunately only one group was interviewed from Class A and this group contained only girls. To have heard from the boys in Class A would have been extremely valuable for drawing stronger conclusions about the boys' experience of sexuality education across classes.

The role of the researcher in the focus interview setting is an aspect that must be taken into account when analysing student responses and conversations. In the analysis of the full transcripts it is evident that there are times where I may have influenced the students' comments, 'planted ideas' and perhaps put words into the mouths of the students. This was possibly the case during the discussion around homosexuality during the boys interview. In this conversation I appeared to slip into 'teacher mode', did not let the students control the flow of the conversation and instead pushed the discussion in particular directions. There were also times when I failed to pursue an idea or comment made by a student that, on review appeared to be 'begging' for expansion, exploration or clarification. Asking the students to further clarify or explore an idea may have lead to richer data and could also have provided further insight into particular aspects of the students' experiences.

The focus group interviews were challenging to transcribe. Mutch (2005) comments that they can be difficult and this was the case in some instances in this study. At times the student responses were indecipherable due to mumbling and/or more than one student talking at a time, so there were instances when I had to have a 'best guess' at what had been said by whom. There were also times when the non-verbal behaviours by the students were of as much or even more significance to the meaning of what was said than the actual words they had used. These instances needed to be and were carefully noted and analysed. An excerpt from one of the focus group interview transcriptions can be found in Appendix 6.

Overall I believe the focus group interviews provided me with rich and detailed data to analyse and it was the most effective and meaningful way in which to explore

students' experiences of the sexuality programme. Gathering data in this way ensured the student voices were at the fore of the research study.

6:4 Questions for Further Research

This research study has highlighted many areas ripe for further research in secondary sexuality education programmes in New Zealand schools.

It would be useful to further explore the impact of issues beyond the control of the teacher (physical classroom environment, timetabling of health education) on his/her ability to deliver a high quality and effective sexuality education programmes based on social-constructivist teaching approaches. In-depth research into the link between these teaching approaches and the creation and maintenance of a supportive classroom environment conducive to the emotional safety of students is also an area that is begging for further investigation. In view of Thompson and Wheeler's (2008) research in order for students to participate fully in the educational process they need to feel emotionally safe. The finding that emotional safety is an important feature in students' experiences of sexuality education programmes in two separate classes suggests that this aspect of the student experience could be further researched in different contexts and over an extended timeframe. Contexts for further investigation could include how emotional safety influences the students' ability to have their needs met by school-based sexuality education, its impact on student achievement of intended learning outcomes and the role student emotional safety plays in facilitating or limiting challenges to hegemonic constructs both within and outside the classroom setting. Further exploration into the role of social constructivist teaching strategies in challenging these traditional constructions of masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity in sexuality education classrooms would also be valuable.

Classroom-based research exploring the effect of the implementation of a genuine discourse of desire would be of great benefit to sexuality educators. It would be useful to establish if and how the delivery of this discourse would meet student need, how it may influence student ideas, attitudes and behaviours, and also how it may contribute to the development and maintenance of healthy and positive student attitudes towards sexuality and sexual activity.

6:5 Concluding Remarks

The research question of this study, 'how is sexuality education experienced by Year 10 students?' was explored in the context of a particular sexuality education programme in a New Zealand secondary school. The study emphasised and drew on student voices and captured student ideas about their experiences of their school-based sexuality education programme. While the context was specific, the findings may have broader applicability to other sexuality education contexts similar to that described in this study.

This research study found that students' experience of sexuality education is extremely complex and is characterised and influenced by a range of factors that relate to particular programmes of study and to factors outside the classroom such as peer, cultural and media influences, and also broader social relations including those pertaining to gender. All these aspects raise questions for sexuality educators, suggesting that what we do is an important part of the picture, but does not constitute the whole picture of student experiences and learning about sexuality and sexuality education.

The findings suggest that as sexuality education teachers, we may need to consider the way in which our classrooms are organised, as well as the pedagogical approaches we use, as it appears these aspects have significant influence on the emotional safety of students, on relationships within the classroom and on the student experience of sexuality education as a whole.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Student Questionnaires

Sexuality Education - Student Questionnaire

I would be very grateful to you if you could spend some time answering the following questions.

If you do not want to answer any of the questions, you may leave it blank.

1. What have you already experienced in sexuality education? What do you remember or recall from past programmes?

2. What do you think this sexuality education unit will be about? What kind of topics do you think will be covered? List as many as you can think of.

3. What do you think people of you age NEED to know about in sexuality education?

4. What do you personally NEED to learn about in this sexuality education?

Thanks heaps!
Melissa

✂_____

Would you be willing to participate in two focus group interviews involving 2 or 3 other students from your class?

YES / NO (please circle) If YES, please write down your full name:

_____

Student Feedback – Sexuality Education

1. What have you **learnt** during this unit?

2. What have you **enjoyed** the most during this unit?

3. What have you found **most useful/interesting**?

4. What did you find the **least useful/interesting**?

5. Were there any aspects of the unit that you did **NOT enjoy**? **YES / NO** *(please circle)*

   What were they?

   Why did you not enjoy them?

6. Is there anything that has **NOT** been covered that you wish had been?

7. If you could offer any advice to your teacher about the unit for next years' classes, what would you say? *(positive and/or negative)*

8. Overall what rating would you give the sexuality education programme? *(please circle)*

   very useful *useful* *somewhat useful* *not useful at all*

Thanks very much. I have really appreciated your time and input.

Melissa

Appendix 2: Guided Focus Group Interview Questions

Tell me what has been happening in class up until now.

What do you remember from the classes you have done so far in this unit?
What have you been learning about?
What have you learnt?
Is there anything that has confused you?

What are you enjoying about your sexuality education classes at the moment?

What are you finding useful?
Is it relevant to both boys and girls or more to one group than the other? Are you covering what you thought/hoped you would?
What else are you hoping will be covered?

What do you think Miss _____ wanted you to learn from Lesson ___?
What did you learn?
Which activities do you most enjoy?

Do you think there is a difference between the way boys are in class and the way the girls are?
How do people interact in the classroom?
Do you feel comfortable and safe enough in the classroom to ask questions you need answers to?

Where do you think kids your age get their information about sex and sexuality?
Do you talk to your parents/caregivers/whanau about sexuality issues?
Who else do you talk to?
Do you think school is a good place to learn about this kind of stuff? Why/why not?
Do you ever talk about the things that you do in class outside the classroom?
Do you ever talk to your parents/caregivers about the things that you do in class outside the classroom?

Appendix 3: Selected Letters of Information and Consent

Covering Letter to Students

Hi _____

Thank you so much for offering to participate in the group interviews. I really appreciate it!

Can you please have a read of the letter attached to this? It has some information for you about the research I am doing in your classroom and the interviews you have volunteered for.

There is also another letter for you to take home to you parent/caregiver. Can you please ask them to read it so they know what it is you have volunteered to participate in.

You will also notice that there is a consent form in this envelope. This is for you to sign to say you agree to participate in the interviews and there is a space for your parent/caregiver to sign. This is because you are under the age of 16 and we must have your parent/caregiver's permission for you to be involved.

Can you please take this consent form home and if both you and your parent/caregiver are happy for you to participate in the interviews, sign it and return it to your health education teacher as soon as possible. As soon as this is done we can get organised and start the interviews!!!

Thanks again,
Melissa

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

8th August 2007

Information for Students

My name is Melissa Fenton and I am currently working towards a Masters of Teaching and Learning at the College. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Jane McChesney and Dr Jane Abbiss, both of whom are senior lecturers at the UC College of Education. My project is called: "*The experiences of Year 10 students' in a sexuality education programme*".

What is the aim of the project?
It has been suggested that effective sexuality education programmes can only be achieved if we know more about the attitudes and requirements of young people for a sexuality education programme. This research project is a direct attempt to address this issue. I thought that perhaps we should be asking people like ***you*** about what teenagers want and gain from sexuality education programmes!!!

What types of participants are being sought?
I am looking for Year 10 students aged approximately 14-15 years.

What will you be asked to do?
You will have already been asked to fill out a questionnaire that asks what you think sexuality education is about, what you recall from previous sexuality education programmes and what you think teenagers' sexuality education needs are.

The project also involves focus group interviews with groups of volunteers giving them the opportunity to verbally express their ideas and opinions about their experience of the sexuality education programme they undertake as part of Year 10 health education and if they believe their needs have been met by the programme. You have volunteered to participate in these interviews and this letter is to give you a bit more detail about the research project.

How long will it take to complete the interviews?
The two focus group interviews you have volunteered to participate in will be undertaken during lunchtimes or at a time suitable to you, the other participants and your health education teacher. I anticipate the interviews would not take any longer than 30 minutes.

Are there potential risks involved and how will they be managed?

It is possible that some of you might find sharing your ideas and opinions about sexuality education a little threatening. However, participation in the research is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. If you should become uncomfortable while completing the either the questionnaire or during a focus group interview, you will be able to discontinue and will be encouraged to discuss the issue with a previously identified "safe" person i.e. parent or trusted teacher, etc.

Will anyone be able to find out your answers?
No finding which could identify any individual participant will be published. Your anonymity will be protected because names do not appear on any of the questionnaires. The focus group interviews will be audio-recorded. Only my supervisors, the person transcribing and I will have access to this data which will be stored for at least five years and then destroyed as prescribed by the College regulations.

Do you have to participate in this study?
No. Participation is voluntary.

If you choose to participate, can you change your mind and withdraw from the study?
As participants in the focus group interviews, you can withdraw your consent at any time. (Your parents may also remove you from the study at any time during the duration of the research project). If you want to discontinue you can do this by notifying me by phone or in writing. You can withdraw from focus group interviews by simply not turning up at the agreed time. Not participating in the research will not disadvantage you in any way.

The UC College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.
Complaints Procedure
The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
UC College of Education
P O Box 31-065, Christchurch
Phone: (03) 345 8390

Please contact me if you have any other queries or concerns about the project or would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding. I can be reached by phone on: 03 348 2059 ext 44441 or by email: melissa.fenton@canterbury.ac.nz

Thank you.

Melissa Fenton

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

8th August 2007

Information for Participants' Parents/Caregivers

My name is Melissa Fenton and I am currently working towards a Masters of Teaching and Learning at the College. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Dr Jane McChesney and Dr Jane Abbiss, both of whom are senior lecturers at the UC College of Education. My project is called: "*The experiences of Year 10 students' in a sexuality education programme*".

What is the aim of the project?
It has been suggested that effective sexuality education programmes can only be achieved if we know more about the attitudes and requirements of young people for a sexuality education programme. This research project is a direct attempt to address this issue.

What types of participants are being sought?
I am looking for Year 10 students aged approximately 14-15 years.

What will participants be asked to do?
Students will have already been asked to fill out a questionnaire that asks what they think sexuality education is about, what they recall from previous sexuality education programmes and what they think the sexuality education needs are of New Zealand teenagers today.

The project also involves focus group interviews with groups of volunteers giving them the opportunity to verbally express their ideas and opinions about their experience of the sexuality education programme they undertake as part of Year 10 health education and if they believe their needs have been met by the programme. Your child has volunteered to participate in these interviews and this letter is to inform you of the research project and also to specifically request your consent for your child to participate in the interviews.

How long will it take to complete the interviews?
The two focus group interviews your child has volunteered to participate in will be undertaken during lunchtimes or at a time suitable to both the students and the health education teacher. I anticipate the interviews would not take any longer than 30 minutes.

Are there potential risks involved and how will they be managed?
It is possible that some students may find sharing their ideas and opinions about sexuality education a little threatening. However, participation in the research is

voluntary and students have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Should a student become uncomfortable while completing the either the questionnaire or during a focus group interview, s/he will be able to discontinue and will be encouraged to discuss the issue with a previously identified "safe" person i.e. parent or trusted teacher, etc.

Will anyone be able to find out participants' answers?
No finding which could identify any individual participant will be published. Your child's anonymity will be protected because names do not appear on any of the questionnaires. The focus group interviews will be audio-recorded. Only my supervisors, the person transcribing and I will have access to this data which will be stored for at least five years and then destroyed as prescribed by the College regulations.

Do students have to participate in this study?
No. Participation is voluntary.

If the student chooses to participate, can they change their mind and withdraw from the study?
Participants in the focus group interviews, they may withdraw their consent at any time. You may also remove your child from the study at any time during the duration of the research project. You may do this by notifying me by phone or in writing. Students may withdraw from focus group interviews by simply not turning up at the agreed time. Not participating in the research will not disadvantage your child in any way.

The UC College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Complaints Procedure
The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
UC College of Education
P O Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone: (03) 345 8390

Please contact me if you have any other queries or concerns about the project or would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding. I can be reached by phone on: 03 348 2059 ext 44441 or by email: melissa.fenton@canterbury.ac.nz.

Thank you.

Melissa Fenton

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Declaration of Consent

Participant

I consent to participate in the project, *The experiences of Year 10 students' in a sexuality education programme*.

I have understood the information provided to me about the research project and what will be required of me if I participate in the project.

I understand that the information I provide to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that no findings that could identify either me or my school will be published.

I understand that my participation in the project is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature: _____

Parent/Guardian

I give permission for _____ to participate in the project, *The experiences of Year 10 students' in a sexuality education programme*.

I have read and understood the information provided to me concerning the research project and what will be required of participants.

I am satisfied that _____ understands what will be required of participants in the project.

I understand that the information participants provide to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that no findings that could identify either them or their school will be published.

I understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that either I or the participant may choose to withdraw from the project at any time without incurring any penalty.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 4: Informal Discussions With Sexuality Education Teachers

Discussion with Miss B – 3 August 2007

In relation to sexuality education ERO review being released….

- Frustration with lack of time/ one period per week – how can it be taught properly?
- How do you assess? Is it fair to the students to assess a class that happens once a week?
- Defining what we mean by 'sexually active'.

Discussion with Mr C – August 2007

Loves teaching this topic but frustrated with lack of time and status.
Perceives that the students really enjoy sexuality education.
Frustrated also with classroom space.
Would like to teach more critical thinking activities like music video analysis and advertising.

Discussion with Miss B – 24 August 2007

Conversation had at the end of observation class:
Her concerns around how you make it relevant to both boys and girls in the same class.

Discussion with Miss A – 6 September 2007

Difficulty knowing where to pitch classes

- Some students really naïve
- Some really need information
- She sometimes feels as though she is not addressing the needs of some students – their issues and questions

Discussion with Miss A – 10 September 2007

Some students just don't want to talk about this.

Appendix 5: Excerpt of the Planned Curriculum

Sexuality

Year 10 Health [redacted] High School

Achievement Objectives: Students will…

- 5A1- Describe physical, social, mental and emotional and spiritual growth and relate these to effective self management strategies in relation to sexual behaviour and activity.
- 5A3-Investiage safety procedures and strategies to minimise risk and manage risk situations involving sexual activity/behaviour, peer pressure and decision making.
- 5A4-Investiage and describe ways in which people define their own identify and self worth and the ways they describe other people in relation to sexual attractiveness and the mixed messages about sexually activity and young males and females.
- 5C1-Identify issues associated with relationships and describe possible options to achieve health enhancing outcomes when making decisions about physical intimacy.
- 5C2-Demosntrate an understanding of how attitudes and values relating to sexual activity/behaviour in males and females influence their own safety and that of other people.
- 5C3-Demosntrate a range of interpersonal skills and processes that help them make safe choices for themselves and other people in relation to relationships, physical intimacy and health enhancing decision making.
- 5D1-Investigate societal influences on the wellbeing of student communities in relation to the media and other societal groups sending mixed messages about sexual activity and behaviour in young people.
- 5D2-Investigate community services that support and promote the sexual health and wellbeing of young people i[redacted]

Lesson One:"Relationships" – What's it all about? wk 3 -2/3 Aug	**Lesson Two: "Mixed Messages"** wk 4 - 9/10 Aug
AO's: 5A1, 5C1 By the end of this lesson students will be able to: ➢ Identify qualities of healthy relationships and the similarities/differences between friendships and relationships ➢ Identify ways of being physically intimate and describe how individuals have the right to decide how intimate they want to be. **Activity: Introduction** Q. What is it you think you will learn? Discuss in small groups then place up on the whiteboard. **Activity: The Qualities** In small groups students brainstorm the qualities of a good friendship then the qualities of a good relationship. Collate on the board and discuss the similarities and differences. Q. Does sexual activity have to be part of a relationship? **Activity: Physical Intimacy** In small groups students need to brainstorm all the ways of being close to someone ranging	AO's: 5A4, 5C1, 5C2, 5D1 By the end of this lesson students will be able to: ➢ Define relationships and discuss their own and others views on what love is. ➢ Identify people they could talk too about sexual health. ➢ Identify and display an understanding of the double standards which exist between sexually active men and women and the associated pressures. ➢ Describe messages different parts of society portray about sexual activity and which are the most influential for teenagers and why. **Activity: What it is?** What is a relationship? What might be some ways of telling whether your relationship is healthy/unhealthy? What is love? **Activity: Talk?** If you had to talk to someone about anything to do with sex who could you talk too? Students who feel comfortable might like to share with the class. **Activity: Double Standards**

n sitting near, exchanging glances to iving sex. Collate these on the whiteboard hen write then give students cards to write on and allocate activities for each person to write down. **Activity: Your say** Students then come together with their cards and one at time rank their cards on a physical intimacy continuum (Least intimate – Most intimate). Q. Where are the steps? Discussion Questions: *Q. Does every person have the right to decide where their limit is within any given relationship? Why/why not? Q. What happens when two people are at different places on the continuum? Q. Should they compromise? Why/why not?* **Activity: Influences** In small groups students discuss what/who would influence someone's decision on how far to go? How do people decide how far they want to go?	In small groups or as a class, brainstorm what words describe sexually active women. Collate on the board then look at which of these words are positive? THEN get students to draw up a list of words relating to sexually active men. How many of these are positive? **Discussion...** *Q. What types of outcomes might this have for young women and men? (the effects and possible consequences)* *Q. What pressures does it place on young males/females? Where do these pressures come from?* **Activity: Societal groups – what they say!** Allocate each group a societal group and they need to brainstorm and discuss the messages that group promotes about sexual activity and teenagers. E.g. What warnings does your group of society give? What is acceptable sexual activity portrayed in your group? What are the students in your groups reaction to it? (i.e. how do they feel about these messages)? Discuss and share as a class. **Activity: Mixed messages** Brainstorm these then give students the handout or get them to write them down from the board into their books. *Q. Out of all the messages which are the most powerful ones? Which ones have the most effect? Why?* **Homework:** Watch a drama (i.e. the war at home, shortland street, home and away etc.) and note down the messages it sends about sex. You will need to bring this to your next class.
Lesson Three: "To have or not to have?"- The reasons. WK 8 - 16/17 AUG AO's: 5D1, 5A3, 5C1, 5C3 23/24 AUG By the end of this lesson students will be able to: ➢ Identify messages tv shows display about sexual activity/behaviour ➢ Describe reasons why people may choose or not choose to be sexually active ➢ Identify and discuss strategies for saying no. not covered by Hayley or Laurie **Activity: Drama share** Students report back on the dramas they watched and collate the messages they sent about sex on the whiteboard and discuss. Could possibly watch a short clip from a drama and pull the messages out of that. **Activity: Sam & Jenna**	**Lesson Four: "Saying No"** AO's: 5A3, 5C1, 5C3 WK 8 - 30/31 AUG By the end of this lesson students will be able to: ➢ Describe and display assertiveness skills when dealing with pressure scenarios involving sexual decision making ➢ Identify the ways and skills of saying no and meaning it **Activity: Assertive Behaviours** Recap behaviours from last year. Role play for students or get them to identify it after giving examples. **Activity: The skills** In groups students brainstorm all the skills of persuasion people use then all the skills of saying no people can use. Collate these up on the board. Q. How can we strengthen the

Appendix 6: Excerpt from Interview Transcript

Class B – Boys Interview

Interviewer: Has there been anything else that has annoyed you or frustrated you about anything that has gone on in the classroom? So it could be um, I don't know the way that, the activities you have done…

Brad: Oh…

Interviewer: …or the way the room is organised. Anything?

Brad: Aaahhh, there was this one trust thing didn't we? Like this paper sheet. I found that real boring cos like we'd just been talking about it for like the last four weeks and we are still going on and on about trust and all that.

Interviewer: So you think there are other things that you would like to be doing?

Craig: Mmmm mmmm.

Brad: Instead of just trust and that cos…

Craig: I mean trust is big part but we really don't care about that yet.

(Giggling)

Brad: Yeah.

Craig: (*indecipherable)*……for the future

Simon: Cos were not looking for a major relationship just yet.

Interviewer: OK so what would you prefer to be doing?

Craig: Activities…

Interviewer: Like what?

Simon: Practical stuff.

Interviewer: Like what, about what?

Anthony: Sort of a 'how to' class, that teaches you 'how to' do stuff.

(Giggling)

Interviewer: Ah ha. So are you like interested in more the physical side of things in terms of …???

Brad: Yeah

Interviewer: …sexual intercourse? Would that be interesting?

(Giggling)

Brad: Yeah that would be interesting. It's better that doing all this stuff in your book.

Interviewer: Ok so you do a bit of writing in your book but you like doing the activities?

Brad: Yeah.

Interviewer: Group work type stuff?

Anthony: Yeah.

Craig: Yeah more play like acted out role-play type things.

Anthony: Yeah, role-plays.

Simon: Yeah like we had a sheet it said something on it like 'What's the matter are you frigid or something?' and then you gotta make up like an answer for that and like do it as a play.

Brad: And it was real funny cos like personally I got this one that said um 'You make me really horny I just can't help it'. You come up with a real serious thing and it's real hard but it makes you think that you are in that situation.

Interviewer: Mmmm hmmm.

Simon: It is good doing practicals. Yeah.

Interviewer: OK so that makes it interesting?

Brad: I think boys learn more from the practicals than just writing it down.

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