

Difficulty and Diversity: The Context and Practice of Sex Education

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Type of Article: Qualitative Research Study

Intended Audience: Policy makers and school personnel.

Purpose: To provide a better understanding of the delivery of sex education and an appreciation of the context in which sex education teachers work.

Theoretical Perspective: The authors make no theoretical perspective clear. They seem to assume the following theory: sex education solves the problems of teenage pregnancy and STDs among youth.

Methods: In general: Qualitative research.

- Specifically:
- 1) In-depth interviews of 58 teachers from 25 schools in East Scotland.
 - a) Assistant Head Teachers (AHT), Personal and Social Education Teachers (PSE), and at least one other associated staff member interviewed at each site.
 - b) Teachers' student ranged in age from 13 to 16.
 - c) Topics covered included:
 - i) content and delivery of sex education
 - ii) the organization of Guidance and PSE within the school
 - iii) school ethos
 - iv) personal values
 - v) perceived effectiveness of sex education
 - vi) relationships within the guidance team
 - 2) Detailed field-notes based on site visits and classroom observations.
 - 3) Data from interviews cross referenced with observations as well as interviews and discussions with students and groups of students.
 - 4) Data analyzed with NUDIST, research software.

Findings/Conclusions:

- 1) Broad priorities of the senior management team shaped the amount of time devoted to sex education, the selection of teachers to provide it, and which students the teachers actually taught,
- 2) Most schools assigned curriculum development to one teacher whose motivations, views, values, and experiences were crucial in determining the nature of the curriculum.
- 3) Cohesiveness of the team delivering sex education varied considerably between schools and depended upon both the PSE coordinator and the degree of standardization of the curriculum.
- 4) Personal characteristics of the classroom teachers made a key impact on instructional delivery, especially where the guidance team was weak.

In order to improve sex education, teachers need the following support:

- 1) A standardized curriculum,
- 2) Their schools to take sex education seriously,
- 3) Staff development and training,
- 4) Support in dealing with social and cultural issues that surrounding matters relating to sexuality.