

RUNNING HEAD: Examining how teachers formulate and justify their SRE approach

Abstract

UK Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and its overall “damage limitation” approach (Martinez and Emmerson 2008) has been criticised numerous times, but there is little focus on how teachers formulate their provision, especially given their crucial role in the nature and scope of what has been taught in the classroom. Whilst current policy suggests that their provision should be inclusive of sexual diversity, it simultaneously gives educators the scope to determine all aspects of this. This is an issue given the substantial impact that teachers’ views and discourses have on what is taught within the classroom, particularly as it often upholds the heterosexist nature of provision. Using a discourse analytical framework, this study sought to examine how SRE teachers formulate and account for their provision, with particular focus on how their assumptions about young people’s sexual health needs underpin this. Initially teachers sought to formulate their (often health promotion) provision as part of an overall ethos and establish focal elements within it. As part of this, teachers’ accounts worked to establish certain SRE imperatives in line with these focal elements. This was achieved by constructing young people (particularly young women and individuals from certain ‘at risk’ communities) as particularly vulnerable.

Introduction

The struggles faced with UK secondary school Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) have been widely documented in the literature (Martinez and Emmerson 2008; Measor, Tiffin, and Miller 2000), particularly those related to the aims of SRE (Thomson 1994). These aims typically focus on the reduction of young people's early sexual activity and associated negative outcomes (Martinez and Emmerson 2008; Aldred and David, 2007) such as Sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs) and underage pregnancy. This biologically based focus on physical (as opposed to mental or emotional) health is commonly referred to as a "health promotion" or "health oriented" approach, in contrast to more traditional approaches that promote sexual abstinence. The former approaches are typically aligned with political agendas such as the 1999 teenage pregnancy strategy to half conception rates of under 18s by 2010 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). As such, they commonly focus on the teaching of biological aspects of sexuality (reflecting outcomes on the current UK national curriculum) as opposed to a more comprehensive focus on issues related to sexuality, relationships and sexual diversity, as prescribed by Legislation (Equality Act, 2010) and current SRE guidance produced by the Department for Education and Employment: DfEE (2000). Importantly, this guidance is a non-statutory, largely public-health based framework with which to deliver SRE alongside the National Science Curriculum.

The (narrowly focused) primary role of SRE to address public health concerns rather than more being more comprehensive (Thomson 1994; Abbott, Ellis, and Abbott 2015) is underpinned by the socio-political context within the UK. Whilst the aforementioned UK SRE guidance highlights the importance of more progressive content, it is still somewhat tailored towards public health concerns. This is still the case, despite the fact that recent research (Sundaram and Sauntson, 2015) highlights a lack of revision to the guidance despite a review in 2014. In contrast to these initial expectations of a more extensive SRE guidance that is underpinned by legislation, UK schools are thus currently only required to deliver information regarding avoidance of STIs and unwanted pregnancy, which are underpinned by the National science curriculum. Delivery of additional content, from the SRE guidance for example,

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remains at the discretion of individual teachers in conjunction with head teachers and school governors (e.g. DfEE 2000). Thus gives them a considerable amount of freedom in determining the content and of SRE and often results in substandard and varied provision (Ofsted, 2013). As such, the discourses utilised by teachers within the classroom are of equal importance to more formal elements such as policy and guidance.

As outlined by (Abbott, Ellis, and Abbott 2015), in some cases this freedom of choice results in delivery of abstinence approaches based on traditional sexual values, that are underpinned by a moral rhetoric. This type of provision ultimately serves key interest groups (parents, governors, religious groups) as opposed to the young people themselves. More importantly, whilst the teachers delivering the content are suggested to be influential in the formation of young people's identities (Mayo 2013), research has shown that they face a number of barriers in the delivery of their SRE (Atkinson 2002). Based on their central roles in determining SRE content and practice and the aforementioned barriers, (Abbott, Ellis, and Abbott 2015) examined teachers' talk under the broadly constructionist approach of discursive psychology (Edwards 2005; Potter 1998). Although scarcely utilised for the examination of SRE within schools prior to this article, discursive psychology is useful for the way it can detect the more subtle and/or implicit impact that is achieved through the use of language. For example, recent research has highlighted how SRE constructs sex as risky and dangerous, especially for young women (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2015). Also, teachers often prescribe gender-specific treatment of sexual morality that assigns young women greater responsibilities for their sexual activities than young men (Tincknell, Loon, and Chambers 2004). Research using discursive analyses to highlight the way meanings held by teachers around SRE, shape practice, also highlights the way teachers implicitly reinforce heteronormativity within the classroom, when making strong claims that their provision is inclusive (Abbott, Ellis, and Abbott 2015). This research highlights the way teachers discourse contributes towards reinforces a hetero/homo binary and promotes fixity of sexual identity (as opposed to acknowledging variability in sexual identities and practices) (Dempsey, Hillier, and Harrison 2001; Diamond and Butterworth 2008; Preston, 2015).

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The meanings and priorities teachers ascribed to SRE then remain a contributory factor in preventing the expansion of SRE provision, specifically in terms of it becoming more comprehensive and inclusive of young people's sexual health needs and their sexual diversities. While the scope of provision is often shaped by teachers' discourse as a result of policy forces and public health imperatives, it is more unknowingly perpetuated as a result of teachers' own personal beliefs (Buston and Hart, 2001) and understandings around what is appropriate in the classroom, in addition to what they feel comfortable delivering (Walker & Milton, 2006; Kehily 2002; Warwick and Aggleton 2004). In spite of having the freedom to determine all aspects of their provision, teachers often leave many topics such as pleasure and desire untouched (Allen and Carmondy, 2012; Ingham, 2006; Cameron-Lewis and Allen, 2013). As only recommended principles of practice, as opposed to statutory aspects of SRE, the use and knowledge of such resources remain at the mercy of educator discretion and autonomy.

It has also been noted that such "whole-school" approaches, in which topics such as sexual health are part of the formal and informal curriculum, are being increasingly delivered in the UK and need to be supported by a supportive policy framework, good quality teaching and more detailed understandings of the impact of teachers' attitudes on the delivery of SRE (Thomas & Aggleton, 2015). Whilst research has focused on highlighting how SRE documentation and policy affects the content and practice of SRE (Corteen, 2007; Sundaram and Sauntson, 2015; Spencer, Maxwell and Aggleton, 2008), along with teachers' attitudes towards SRE, in addition to their knowledge related to sexual health and policy requirements (Westwood and Mullan, 2007) the manner in which teachers conceptualise their SRE practice discursively has been underexplored. This type of examination provides a crucial insight into the meanings SRE holds for these key stakeholders, based on their central role in the shaping of provision (and the impact of their discourses on this) in light of a guidance that only briefly suggests progressive outcomes and allow teachers to select what SRE content is delivered in the classroom, often in line with their own beliefs.

The present study aims to expand on previous research (Abbott, Ellis, and Abbott 2015) that highlights how teachers' discourses (and the assumptions that underpin

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them) influence the nature and scope of their SRE provision. As opposed to solely focusing on heteronormativity, it will examine how teachers' assumptions and discourses underpin their justifications of their sexual health provision. This focus at the level of the individual teacher complements previous research that examines the impact of the SRE guidance (or more specifically, lack thereof, due to its non-statutory nature) at the pupil level (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2015). Together, this body of research will provide detailed examination for an area of policy that requires more formal evaluation.

Method

The analysis presented in this paper is drawn from a broader study exploring how young people's sexuality is constructed in SRE. The research took place within 9 secondary schools from a potential 82 initially contacted in South Yorkshire, England. All schools are co-educational public schools (89%), with the exception of one independent single sex school (11%). All schools serve a broad ethnic and socio-economic population. No schools were excluded on the basis of its characteristics. Schools were sampled from a single district given that such catchment areas often work under the same policy contexts (local Government) and shared resources (funding, SRE advisors).

The data presented in this paper presents one-to-one, semi structured interview data. Interviews were selected based on their interactional nature, as highlighted in many prominent discursive studies (e.g. Potter and Mulkay, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1995). The interactive and directive nature of the interview allowed the researcher to focus on the discursive practices and interpretive resources used by teachers as they produced their accounts in response to the researcher's questions. In light of the often controversial and political nature of SRE, it was felt the interview method allowed the researcher to focus on the inherently ideological and rhetorical nature of teachers talk. The interviews were carried out on school premises and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. The excerpts are taken from 6 teachers and were selected

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for the way they highlight the analytical claims; specifically the way they represent the way teachers across the sample set about formulating and accounting for their provision.

Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions, a system commonly used for discursive analyses which includes additional features that are analytically important such as pauses, emphasis and intonation (see Heritage and Atkinson 1984). An interview schedule broadly specified topics to be discussed. Examples of the topic areas included approach to and content of SRE, in addition to policy and evaluations of their provision.

Participants

A total of eight teachers from the nine schools included in the sample were interviewed, comprising of three male and five female (see table 1) All teachers were White and of British nationality. All were full time Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) co-ordinators and their experience of teaching SRE varied between 2 and 15 years. While some teachers had received no formal training related to SRE, others had held nationally recognised qualifications; training related to SRE or an external role related to PSHE (see table 1 for a breakdown). The names featured in this paper are all pseudonyms.

[Insert table 1 here]

Analytic Framework

A discourse analytical approach was applied to the data informed by Discursive Psychology (DP: Potter and Edwards, 2001). Within this broadly constructionist framework, focus is placed on examining talk and texts as social practices based on a view of language as action-oriented, specific to its occasion and performative in nature (Edwards, 2006). The way talk is organised, in addition to the way accounts, description and attitudes that people use in talk to constitute their worlds, are conceptualised as resources people draw on in talk to perform actions (Potter, 1998).

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The way people organise their talk reveals its function, such as the way they seek to defend or justify a particular argument or manage certain interests within a specific context (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and rhetorical demands of the moment (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Wetherell and Potter 1992).

Selection of a Discursive psychological underpinning allows for examination of what teachers are trying to accomplish in a particular interaction (in line with a view of discourse as social action). Whilst overlap between the different discourse traditions (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001) is acknowledged, DP differs from others such as Conversation Analysis, which focuses on interaction in order to identify its organisation; and Critical Discourse Analysis, where focus based on the relationship between language and other elements of social processes.

This study utilised DP to focus on how teachers ascribe meaning and prioritise certain imperatives over others through examination of their formulations and underlying assumptions regarding their SRE provision. It complements a similar previous study (Sundaram & Stauntson, 2015) that used Critical Discourse Analysis (in combination with Corpus linguistics) on focus groups with young women and the SRE guidance document respectively. This allowed for examination of language and text as a reflection of the social context(s) of SRE at both the pupil and overarching political level. Whilst the present study will also place emphasis on language within a specific context, DP is more applicable to examine how teachers formulate and prioritise and justify their provision in light of the competing (health promotion and comprehensive) ideologies. DP will similarly be useful given teachers' pivotal roles in the shaping of such a contested topic as sex education, where they will almost certainly have to manage issues of stake (see Billig, 1991), in contrast to the young women in Sundaram & Staunton (2015) who are not subject to such motives. To the authors knowledge, this research is therefore unique in its examination of exactly *how* teachers conceptualise and justify their provision in this way.

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Analysis

This analysis examines the ways in which teachers formulate their SRE provision and subsequently provide justification for that provision.

Formulating provision as part of an overall 'ethos' and in terms of 'core tenets' of SRE

In response to inquiries from the interviewer about the content and approach of their programmes, teachers sought to conceptualise their provision in terms of an overarching philosophy or as part of a wider 'ethos'. In these instances, this appeared to be a strategy utilised to account for their provision as having an established underpinning. Teachers also formulated their provision in relation to the broader SRE approaches (i.e. abstinence or health promotion) and as a number of discrete and complementary topics. These descriptions functioned as a means through which they could locate their provision within the wider (national) context, and present their SRE as comprehensive in nature.

The following excerpt illustrates the way in which a teacher accounts for her provision as a number of distinct topics that make up the overall SRE approach. Judy formulates her provision as that which consists of two overarching elements relating to wider approaches.

Excerpt 1 [Judy]

206 Judy: so you could say yes that is the we we're not saying abstinence but in the sex
207 education we try to teach the abstinence bit

208 Interviewer: right

209 Judy: we try to make the kids aware of the risks of sex you know so I think we're
210 smack bang in the middle

From line 206 (“*we're not saying abstinence*”) in which her sexual health provision is presented as incompatible with an abstinence approach, it is clear that abstinence and a more health oriented approach, are measures against which Judy can position her

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own. More evidence for this comes from her acknowledgement of elements of health provision representing information around 'risk' (Line 209). Whilst Judy struggles to articulate the specific nature of her approach, she utilises the two broad SRE approaches (abstinence and health oriented) as reference points in her attempts to do so. Judy asserts that this approach can't be classified as an abstinence approach per se, but fails to dismiss it completely, as she acknowledges its inclusion in her provision. Here Judy is making a distinction between what is taught and the overall message. Her acknowledgment of both approaches functions to position her provision between the two approaches, as highlighted in the idiomatic phrase "*smack bang in the middle*" (Lines 209-210). Judy is therefore deliberately not aligning hers with either approach. Instead, she is more effectively positioning (and evaluating) her provision in a more desirable place. This works to build credibility for the provision, locating it within the legitimacy of two widely advocated approaches, a position that is considered as desirable despite their incompatible nature (as safe sex messages are thought to undermine abstinence messages). This particular position can be seen as a strategy for dealing with SRE talk that, as it centres around establishing values around SRE, is both ideological and dilemmatic (Billig 1988).

This concern with presenting a balanced and comprehensive picture of provision was also emphasised across Judy's account where she refers to her provision as residing around the fundamental and opposing elements of safety and love. Although Judy describes her SRE philosophy, like two other teachers (Carl and Heather), this is not the only aspect of her provision she wishes to promote as this is often followed by talk emphasising the significance also afforded to sexual health. This formulation (in addition to a focus on love), ensures that the safety is also heard as a significant focus in her provision. By placing emphasis on both elements, Judy is presenting a picture of her provision that is desirable as it covers all the 'core tenets' of SRE. Attempts to formulate provision in a balanced manner were also evident in Carl and Bob's descriptions of their SRE. Similarly to Judy, they described their provision as consisting of a number of distinct topics that make up the overall SRE approach.

Formulating Provision as Part of the Wider Sexual Health Initiatives

In addition to presenting their provision as part of an established approach, teachers' provision is formulated as part of a larger health strategy, related to local teenage pregnancy and STI rates. As such, they consider their SRE as part of the wider government driven endeavour to reduce negative outcomes of young people's sexual activity. As portrayed in the following account, this works to build an important justification for their SRE approach through its focus on improving young people's sexual health (although sexual health is rather narrowly conceived in relation to STIs and unwanted pregnancy).

Excerpt 2 [Steven]

155 Steven: erm its a lot of the focus that we have particularly at this school is about
156 teenage pregnancy because we do have teen a high teenage pregnancy rate which
157 seems to be continually getting higher or staying at the same peak erm but but I think
158 it's difficult actually for a very very different reason and I think that's to do with
159 people's confidence in being able to deal with the situations that that can sometimes
160 bring up

By illustrating their provision as part of a wider strategy, these accounts highlight a responsibility to tailor provision accordingly. Similarly, sexual health statistics are used to justify "*teenage pregnancy*" (Line 155-156). Steven suggests that this may not be the same everywhere (stipulating "*particularly at this school*": Line 155), setting this up as something specific to his school, and its local context.

By aligning provision in relation to these initiatives, we can see that this teacher conceives his SRE as having a significant role in pregnancy prevention. The following account reflects another instance in which the wider sexual health context is used to account for choice of approach:

Excerpt 3 [Carl]

174 Interviewer: why erm why APAUSE how come you've chosen APAUSE?

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175 Carl: we didn't choose them they chose us

176 Interviewer: right

177 Carl: erm (*name of town given*) at one point was a teenage capital teenage

178 pregnancy capital of the country according to the Daily Mail

179 Interviewer: (*laughs*)

180 Carl: two page spread and as a result of that there was a bit of a moral panic about

181 the place about teenage pregnancies and so on so therefore funding was made

182 available to reduce teenage pregnancy and those at authority level made the decision

183 that we'd go with this APAUSE project

184 Interviewer: umm

185 Carl: we were chosen because we were really ↑fortunate to have two girls who were

186 excluded from (*name of school given*) school who were pregnant at the time

In his response to a question regarding his choice of the APAUSE (Added Power And Understanding in Sex Education- An external pre-packaged SRE programme developed for teachers to use within secondary schools) programme as part of his provision, Carl attends to the issue by highlighting the distinction between the school *choosing* the material and the school being *chosen for* it (Line 175). This reformulation (and rebuttal of the interviewer's inference) suggests that this distinction is important for Carl, namely for the more favourable implication of being 'chosen', which is potentially more significant for the way it imbues credibility. This is evident in Line 185 where Carl conceives being 'chosen' as a positive (and promotional) position, based on his reference to their selection as based on "*fortunate*" incidents. Although these incidents (two young women getting pregnant and expelled from their schools) are not typically considered as 'fortunate', they are constructed favourably within this context for the resultant funding allocated to their respective schools.

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As part of this excerpt, Carl refers to the local pregnancy rates, implicating the area as one of the worst in the UK (Lines 177-178). Following this with “*according to the daily mail*”¹, works to shift the footing (Goffman 1979) of this statement so that authorship becomes attributed to a newspaper report. This accomplishes what (Wetherell 2001) terms ‘attributional distance’. While it is often utilised by speakers in attempts to manage potentially controversial talk, it features here to induce some level of scepticism about this particular article. This is underscored first by reference to the amount of space afforded the article (“*two page spread*”, Line 180) and second by reference to the reaction (“*moral panic*”, Line 180). This also works to establish the school and its surrounding area as particularly exceptional (as it is portrayed in the media), as it is implicated as a high-risk area for teenage pregnancy. It also functions to establish the school as in need of ‘special’ funding and therefore in a ‘privileged’ position by virtue of that funding. Furthermore, by invoking the category “*authority*”, Carl seeks to further align his provision with those who grant legitimisation to SRE’s aims, which in turn, grants additional credibility for this school’s SRE provision.

Building Justification

The above accounts highlight the ways teachers set about formulating their individual SRE approaches. In building justification for their approaches, teachers frequently and consistently constructed young people in ways that principally upheld and validated their SRE approach. This involved making assertions about pupils and their SRE needs, positioned within the local contexts. n teachers were able to justify approaches that could be characterised as health promotion.

Constructing young people as vulnerable

Across all teachers’ accounts, young people were constructed as vulnerable both in general and as a result of their sexual behaviour. This most commonly featured in talk around young women, who were considered particularly vulnerable based on their levels of sexual knowledge and experience (Steven, Carl and Heather). This is evident in Heather’s talk, where we can she is voicing concerns over the knowledge of

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students at each end of the spectrum; those that are too “*informed*” (Line 307) and those that are too “*sheltered*” (Line 308).

Excerpt 4 [Heather]

305 Heather: you know in year eleven I think there’s lots of girls that probably are not as
306 well informed as you’d like to think they are and I think some are you know very well
307 informed they could tell us a few things but I think there are some who are still very
308 sheltered and don’t ac- you know you’ve still got quite a wide cross section of
309 experience and you always have to take that into account of course in all year

The implication here is that ‘sexualised’ pupils considered too informed have gained this knowledge outside of SRE and ‘uninformed’ pupils that are too sheltered haven’t supplemented their SRE with information from outside of it. This doesn’t necessarily relate to sexual experience however, instead appearing to implicate the information gained from their peers. In highlighting both extremes of pupils’ knowledge, Heather positions both types of pupils as vulnerable within both their current and future sexual experiences. Particular emphasis on young women’s vulnerability appeared throughout teachers’ descriptions of their provision. While we can see that these constructions worked to warrant additional provision for these young women, such as work around self-esteem and assertiveness. Moreover, these accounts created a sexual health imperative, and thus an SRE imperative, especially *for* young women:

Excerpt 5 [Bridget]

238 Bridget: we have in past done some erm like rolling programmes erm raising self
239 esteem that have include have included some sexual health and stuff and that were
240 targeted erm delivered at girls but could be delivered at boys as well you know that
241 were either vulnerable because they were very sexually active or vulnerable because
242 they were very naive and that was erm a five week programme where we looked at
243 what self esteem was erm how they felt about erm you know compliments and

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- 244 giving compliments and then how they felt about saying no and we would sort of
245 give em some tips on saying no you know being a bit assertive

Similarly to the previous excerpts, Bridget is positioning pupils as vulnerable based on their sexual activity (Line 240), their limited knowledge and lack of judgement (Lines 241-242). The extent to which Bridget presents their vulnerability is emphasised with the extreme term “*very*”, establishing these young women as extraordinary cases and reinforcing claims of vulnerability. Young women that are “*very sexually active*” and “*very naïve*” become stronger claims. While Bridget stipulates that the services could also be used for men, her descriptions of the programmes are more relevant and thus designed to “*target*” women specifically. They are therefore largely based on her views of young women’s sexual vulnerability. This discourse of danger and victimisation is reflective of the pressures placed on young women and the emphasis placed on female sexuality in society. We can see this where Bridget outlines her work around assertiveness skill training (Line 245).

Constructing young people as vulnerable within their localised communities: family and community as poor role models

Teachers’ claims about young people’s vulnerability were also attributed to their more personal and localised contexts. While these claims worked to present provision as tailored to the individual pupil needs, they were often based on assumptions regarding the types of issues that affect young people and presented as affecting the majority. Again, these claims formed the basis and rationale for much of the provision, serving to uphold elements deemed to be of particular importance and in keeping with the overall approach. This is evident where one teacher makes a number of exaggerated inferences about young people and their parents in a way that reinforces the strong sexual health focus found within her provision. In particular, this teacher is seen to be passing judgements on young people's aspirations based on claims regarding their localised contexts.

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Excerpt 6 [Rachel] [responding to a question about what she considers to be the most important elements within her provision]

105 Rachel: erm I've got two things really it's the relationship side because we've got
106 erm quite a large ethnic minority erm our kids struggle with things like erm
107 arranged marriages and things like that

108 Interviewer: [right]

109 Rachel: erm and parents pushing them into marriages that they don't want to be in in
110 erm my main point is putting across that actually in this country that is illegal and
111 there is help out there if these kids need it cos they run away and all sorts

112 Interviewer: gosh

113 Rachel: erm and its getting them to realise as well we have a lot of families where
114 there's quite a lot of domestic abuse and it's trying to get particularly the girls to
115 realise that you know there is help out there (.) cos they don't they don't know where
116 to
117 turn

Within this excerpt there are numerous instances where Rachel makes claims about the localised context, particularly pupils' local communities and parents. She identifies two important aspects of her provision, "*the relationship side*" (Line 105) and the "*protection*" aspect (Line not shown here). She justifies the importance of the relationship side by referencing the community that the school serves, particularly the ethnic minority pupils (Lines 105-106). Her use of the subordinating conjunction "*because*" (Line 105) provides direct evidence for this; Rachel is directly attributing the "relationship" aspect of provision to this demographic. Specifically, Rachel presents arranged marriages as a significant issue (Lines 106-107), with her use of the phrase "*things like*", suggesting further issues. Rachel further implicates her pupils as having problematic circumstances using an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz 1986) to underscore risk, with many of her pupils facing abuse at home (Line 113-114). Specifically, use of the phrase "*a lot*", not only presents domestic abuse as an issue applicable to many of the pupils within the local area. By presenting these issues

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as common problems, Rachel is building strong justification for the aspects of provision that deal with young people's 'relationships'. Bob mobilised similar arguments to justify his very different approach; abstinence. Like Rachel, he makes a number of claims regarding corresponding wider communities in order to justify his approach. This further highlights the rhetorical nature of these accounts and their discursive function. As we can see, teachers build justification for particular aspects of their provision in a way that validates their place as central to their programmes; they appear as issues that create the greatest need for the provision rather than those that affect the majority of pupils. This is evident as Rachel continues her account, constructing young people in a way that fits the rhetorical demands of the moment.

Excerpt 7 [Rachel]

132 Rachel: yeah definitely we have to try and get that message across I mean a lot of
133 the children in this school have got parents that don't work and don't have any
134 aspirations erm and have children at a very young age and because our kids don't see
135 any different they think that's all there is for them you know that how their life is
136 meant to be

137 Interviewer: umm mmm

138 Rachel: that they're meant to go out and have sex because it's a lot of its attention as
139 well there's not much attention from parents so it's attention off somebody) you
140 know I- that they actually got attention you know they're having sex

141 Interviewer: yeah

142 Rachel: to

143 Interviewer: you were saying about the parents they don't have very many
144 aspirations

145 Rachel: yeah they're following the parent's footpath and it's trying to make them
146 realise that there is a life out there other than having a child at fifteen sixteen

147 Interviewer: umm

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148 Rachel: I mean we often have children that think if I get pregnant then I'm gonna get
149 more money from Government you know so I'm gonna get pregnant cos I'll get me
150 rent paid for and cos that's what the parent's are like

Rachel makes a series of claims about both the pupils and their parents in a way that further reinforces the focus placed on sexual health within her provision. Specifically, she makes a number of exaggerated inferences about their sexual decision-making. In doing this, Rachel is articulating very discriminatory statements that (through her use of discursive devices) are presented as accurate accounts. Rachel presents a negative picture of local parents through inferences of their low aspirations and poor decision making (Lines 132-134). She also uses extreme case formulations to emphasise this as common amongst her pupils, in addition to a three-part list (Jefferson 1990) to reinforce her claims: *"don't work and don't have any aspirations erm and have children at a very young age"*. The use of three-part lists is a resource used in many everyday interactions for a number of functions, one of which is to substantiate arguments (Potter 1996; Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008). This persuasive rhetorical device appears to increase the severity of the issues these pupils face. Additionally, the inferences about the parents' dispositions substantiates Rachel's framing of the pupils' sexual behaviours and aspirations, by attributing them directly to the parents (Lines 134-136). Within this talk, Rachel also makes a number of assertions regarding pupils' motivations for sex and having children, again implicating their parents. Young women's sexual behaviour is attributed to their need for attention, which they fail to receive from their parents (*"so it's attention off somebody"* Line 139). By asserting that these pupils are merely following in their parent's footsteps, these young people are also alleged to only have aspirations of pregnancy, again based on their parents' circumstances and a desire to secure financial security from the government (Lines 148-149).

As previously specified, Rachel's use of discursive devices throughout this passage presents these claims as being based on fact rather than of personal opinion or more problematically, prejudice. Nowhere in this passage does Rachel appear to orient to the fact that she is expressing what may be construed as strong opinions. Her talk doesn't include any features that typically characterise strong opinion giving, such as the use of disclaimers, concessions, hedging or stake inoculation (Billig 1991; Potter

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and Wetherell 1987; Wetherell and Potter 1992). What does feature in Rachel's talk however, almost immediately after this passage, is the admission that she had her own children at a relatively young age and found this difficult. By adopting the subject position of a 'mother', she can make such assertions effectively *without* the need for the aforementioned features.

Where teachers did express strong claims about young people and their parents, it almost invariably involved a shift in their subject position. This particular device allowed them to make stronger claims as part of their justification, despite arguably being at odds with the neutral position of an SRE teacher.

Excerpt 8 [Judy]

451 Judy: yeah we've got a lack of family values

452 Interviewer: right

453 Judy: so I'm big on that I'm a single parent well I was a single parent I brought
454 my children up so I know what these kids are to expect

455 Interviewer: yeah

456 Judy: I'm quite Oh My I did my degree after my children and everything and I
457 know what it's like it's a tough life and I don't want that for them so I've got a real
458 drive

459 Interviewer: umm mmm

460 Judy: to er lecture them almost and I do lecture them

461 Interviewer: yeah

462 Judy: er "well you don't want to be doin this" and "you don't want to be doing that
463 because "how are you gonna feed your baby" "if you have a baby" "what about being
464 livin' in a top floor flat"

465 Interviewer: yeah

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- 466 Judy: with a baby and your husband smacks yer or you're not married your
467 boyfriend smack's you you've got no money what you gunna do
- 485 Judy: they're a lot of single parents around here a lot

In this excerpt Judy refers to the local community as lacking in family values a number of times. Although this use of the term 'family values' is rather vague, it is associated with social beliefs, typically being used to represent the traditional nuclear structure. Its meaning becomes clear however, where after stating she is "*big on*" family values, she declares that she was a single parent (Lines 453-454). This firstly implies that one-parent families lack family values and secondly, serves to attribute this lack of values to the single parents in the area, which is further evidenced in another segment of talk (Line 485). Implicit in this talk is a negative evaluation of single motherhood. Notably, the change in subject position allows Rachel to make this evaluation and qualifies her to make a number of stronger claims regarding the life of single parents. Judy's concern is also heard as more authentic given that it appears to focus on the pupils' best interests (Line 457). While this overtly proscriptive (Line 460) style of teaching is not considered appropriate within SRE, it becomes more acceptable from Judy's subject position as a 'single mother'. This membership categorisation (Sacks and Jefferson 1992) is therefore being used as a form of stake inoculation (Potter 1996), to claim authority on the single parent issue and to protect Judy from being heard as prejudiced. Judy continues by making a series of over-formulated assessments of teenage motherhood (Lines 462-467), which also does important work. Positioning young people (particularly young women) as vulnerable within their communities is based on the risk of becoming a victim to certain perceived cultural norms, such as motherhood. As a perceived defining characteristic of this community, this lack of family values is therefore presented as a cause for concern and thus in need of reactive provision.

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Discussion

This analysis examined the way that SRE is constructed at the level of the individual teacher, specifically the way they sought to formulate and justify their provision. Teachers' constructions functioned as a means of accounting for the nature of that provision. In formulating their overall 'approach', they constructed what they considered to be fundamental aspects of their provision. We can see this most clearly where teachers formulated their provision around elements of provision (i.e. 'safety'/'love'), which invariably determines focal aspects of provision. Making reference to these elements appeared as a means by which teachers could present a comprehensive account of their provision and reconcile the issue of only focusing on one element over other more health oriented elements. Furthermore, justification of the nature of their provision appeared to create certain SRE imperatives in line with the focal elements of it. While issues of teenage pregnancy remain a central aspect of health oriented provision, these aspects of provision were justified by constructing young people in various (often crude) ways that functioned to position them as at risk.

In addition to emphasising young people's vulnerability within their more localised contexts, teachers referred to the sexual health context (i.e. rates of pregnancy and STIs) to justify these elements. For example, where provision was predominantly health-oriented, pupils' local communities were emphasised as particularly problematic due to their high rates of pregnancy, STIs and single parent families. Emphasis on the latter often assertions regarding the parents' ability to be adequate role models for their children.

Importantly, this analysis provides important context through which the current SRE provision and practice can be understood at the level of the individual teacher. Specifically, it provides the foundation for understanding how teachers construct their own SRE concerns and how they understand young people's SRE needs under guidance that is contradictory in its aims (DfEE 2000). Their accounts reflect more personal or localised concerns within their provision i.e. the wider school ethos, sexual health statistics or more individual assumptions. These problem-based concerns that teachers believe are faced by young people contrast significantly to those that young people actually mobilise around curiosity, experimentation and pleasure (Allen 2005, 2008; Measor, Tiffin, and Miller 2000). Moreover, problem-

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focused provision works to determine the nature and scope of provision as heavily gendered, heteronormative and reductionist.

Teachers' formulations of provision in this instance are almost exclusively biased towards biological and health related facets of provision, presenting another potential barrier in delivering comprehensive provision. In the absence of statutory status, the SRE guidance (and thus UK policy) only recommends what should be covered in SRE, thus enabling space for these individual and problematic forms of provision. Whilst policy can certainly provide the foundation for establishing comprehensive provision, teachers' formative role in its delivery ensures they play an important role in ensuring its efficacy. All aspects of teachers' SRE practice and discourse, including the nature of their assumptions contribute towards this end.

Through its identification of the more subtle discursive barriers that exist within teachers' accounts, this paper highlights the need for teachers to critically reflect and evaluate all aspects of their SRE provision regularly. This approach will enable them to detect the more limiting discourses and assumptions that, in some instances, have been constructed as taken-for-granted meanings. Similarly, it will help teachers to measure effectiveness of their provision more adequately and provide examples of how SRE knowledge is constructed in line with understandings that delimit the nature and scope of provision.

Notes:

1. . The Daily Mail is the second largest selling British national daily newspaper and has become renowned for its controversial and sensationalised style.

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Table 1: Teachers' school and PSHE training

Teacher	Training	Length of teaching
Carl	AST status	8 years
Steven	PSHE qualification ¹	3 years
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Sarah	Lead Professional	9 years
Heather	SRE Peer Education	6 years
Bridget	PSHE qualification ¹	15 years
Bob	None	6 years
Judy	None	2 years
Rachel	None	5 years

¹Authority lead and nationally recognised